Running Special

FRANK L. PACKARD

Title: Running Special
Date of first publication: 1925
Author: Frank L. Packard (1877-1942)
Date first posted: August 12, 2022
Date last updated: August 12, 2022
Faded Page eBook #20220820

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BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

Doubleday, Doran and Company (Canada) Ltd.
215 Victoria Street, Toronto 2, Canada

RUNNING SPECIAL

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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—I—

THE BUILDER

THERE are two sides to every story—which is a proverb so old that it is in the running with Father Time himself. It is repeated here because there must be *some* truth in it—anything that can stand the wear and tear of the ages, and the cynics, and the wise old philosophical owls without getting any knockout dints punched in its vital spots must have some sort of merit fundamentally, what? Anyway, the company had their side, and the men's version differed—of course. Maybe each, in a way, was more or less right, and, equally, in a way, more or less wrong. Maybe, too, both sides lost their tempers and got their crown-sheets burned out before the arbitration pow-wow had a chance to get the line clear and give anybody rights, schedule or otherwise. However, be that as it may, whoever was right or whoever was wrong, one or the other, or both, it is the strike, not the ethics of it, that has to do with—but just a moment, we're over-running our holding orders.

From the time the last rail was spiked home and bridging the Rockies was a reality, not a dream—from then to the present day, there isn't any very much better way of describing the Hill Division than to call it rough and ready. Coming right down to cases, the history of that piece of track, the history of the men who gave the last that was in them to make it, and the history of those who have operated it since isn't far from being a pretty typical and comprehensive example of the pulsing, dominating, dogged, go-forward spirit of a continent whose strides and progress are the marvel of the world; and, withal, it is an example so compact and concrete that through it one may see and view the larger picture in all its angles and in all its shades. Heroism and fame and death and failure—it has known them all—but ever, and above all else, it has known the indomitable patience and determination against which no obstacles can prevail.

Building a road through the Rockies and tapping the Sierras to give zest to the finish wasn't an infant's performance; and operating it, single-track, on crazy-wild cuts and fills and tangents and curves and tunnels and trestles with nature to battle and fight against, isn't any infant's performance, either. The Hill Division was rough and ready. It always was, and it is now—just naturally so. And Big Cloud, the divisional point, snuggling amongst the buttes in the eastern foothills, is even more so. It boasts about every

nationality on earth, and, to top that, has an extra anomaly or two left over and up its sleeve for good measure; but, mostly, it is, or rather was—it has changed some with the years—composed of Indians, bad Americans, a scattering of Chinese, and an indescribable medley of humans from the four quarters of Europe, the Cockney, the Polack, the Swede, the Russian and the Italian—laborers on the construction gangs. Big Cloud was a little more than rough and ready—it wasn't exactly what you'd call a health resort for finicky nerves.

So, take it by and large, the Hill Division, from one end to the other, wasn't the quietest or most peaceful locality on the map even before the trouble came. After that—well, mention the Big Strike to any of the old-timers, and they'll talk fast enough and hard enough and say enough in a minute to set you wondering if the biographers hadn't got mixed on dates and if Dante hadn't got his material for that little hair-stiffener of his no farther away than the Rockies, and no longer back than a few years ago. But no matter——

The story hinges on the strike—*not* the ethics of it. There's some hard feeling yet—too much of it to take sides one way or the other. But then, apart from that, this is not the story of a strike, it is the story of men—a story that the boys tell at night in the darkened roundhouses in the shadow of the big ten-wheelers on the pits, while the steam purrs softly at the gauges and sometimes a pop-valve lifts with a catchy sob. They tell it, too, across the tracks at headquarters, or on the road and in construction camps; but they tell it better, somehow, in the roundhouse, though it is not an engineer's tale—and Clarihue, the turner, tells it best of all. Set forth as it is here it takes no rank with him—but all are not so fortunate as to have listened while Clarihue talked.

Just one word more to make sure that the red isn't against us anywhere and we'll get to Keating and Spirlaw—just a word to say that Carleton, "Royal" Carleton, was superintendent then, and gruff, big-hearted, big-paunched Tommy Regan was master mechanic, and Harvey was division engineer, and Spence was chief dispatcher, and Riley was trainmaster. Pretty good men that little group, pretty good railroaders—there have never been better. Some of them are bigger now in the world's eyes, heads of systems instead of departments; and some of them will never railroad any more, and—but there's our clearance now, and we're off with "rights" through.

It was a question of straightening the approach to the hybrid trestle of wood and steel where the right of way shot out at a perilous angle from the towering rock walls of Old Baldy to cross the Coyote River at the mouth of

the “cut.” The plans called for the shaving down of the mountain-side; the barbering, mostly, to be done with dynamite, for the beard of the Rockies is not the down of a youth. So Spirlaw, with a gang of some thirty Polacks, moved into construction camp, and set himself to the task in hand. A little later, Keating joined him.

Spirlaw was a construction boss, and the roughest of his kind. Physically he was a giant; and which of the three was the hardest, his face, his fist, or his tongue, would afford the sporting fraternity a most excellent opportunity to indulge in a little book-making with the odds about even all around. His hair was a coarse mop of tawny brown that straggled over his eyes; and his eyes were all black, every bit of them—there didn’t seem to be any pupil at all, which gave them a glint that was harder than a cold chisel. Take him summed up, Spirlaw looked a pretty tough proposition, and in some way, most ways, perhaps, he was—he never denied it.

“What the blue blinding blazes, d’ye think, h’m?” he would remark, as he swept a forceful arm comprehensively over the particular crowd of sweating foreigners that happened to be under his particular jurisdiction at the time. “What d’ye think! You can’t run cuts an’ fills with an outfit like this on soft soap an’ candy sticks, can you? Well then—h’m?”

That last “h’m” was more or less conclusive—very few cared to pursue the argument any farther. At a safe distance, the Big Fellows on the division, as a salve to their consciences when humanitarian ideas were in the ascendancy, would bombard Spirlaw with telegrams which were forceful in tone and direful in threat—but that’s all it ever amounted to. Spirlaw’s work report for a day on anything, from bridging a cañon to punching a hole in the bitter hard rock of the mountain-side, was a report that no one else on the division had ever approached, let alone duplicated—and figures count perhaps just a little bit more in the operating department of a railroad than they do anywhere else in the world. Spirlaw used the telegrams as spills to light a pipe as hard-looking as himself, whose bowl was down at the heels on one side from much scraping, and on such occasions it was more than ordinarily unfortunate for the sour-visaged Polack who should chance to arouse his ire.

Some men possess the love of a fight and their natures are tempestuous by virtue of their nationality, because some nationalities are addicted that way. This may have been the case with Spirlaw—or it may not. There’s no saying, for Spirlaw’s nationality was a question mark. He never delivered himself on the subject, and, certainly, there was no figuring it out from the

derivation of his name—*that* could have been anything, and could have come from almost anywhere.

To say that "opposites attract" isn't any more original, any less gray-bearded, than the words at the head of these pages. Generally, that sort of thing is figured in the worn-out, stale, familiarity-breeds-contempt realm of platitude, and at its unctuous repetition one comes to turn up one's nose; but, once in a while, life has a habit of getting in a kink or a twist that gives you a jolt and a different side-light, and then, somehow, a thing like that rings as fresh and virile as though you had just heard it for the first time. As far as any one ever knew, Keating was the only one that ever got inside of Spirlaw's shell, the only one that the construction boss ever showed the slightest symptoms of caring a hang about—and yet, on the surface, between the two there was nothing in common. Where one was polished the other was rough; where one was weak the other was strong. Keating was small, thin, pale-faced, and he had a cough—a cough that had sent him West in a hurry without waiting for the other year that would have given him his engineer's diploma from the college in the East.

When the boy, he wasn't much more than a boy, dropped off at Big Cloud, and Carleton read the letter he brought from one of the big Eastern operators, the super raised his eyebrows a little, looked Keating over and sent him out to Spirlaw. Afterwards, he spoke to Regan about him.

"I didn't know what to do with him, Tommy; but I had to do something, what? Any one with half an eye could tell that he had to be kept out of doors. Thought he might be able to help Spirlaw out a little as assistant, h'm? Guess he'll pick up the work quick enough. He don't look strong."

"Mabbe it's just as well," grinned the master mechanic. "He won't be able to batter the gang any. One man doing that is enough—when it's Spirlaw."

Spirlaw heard about it before he saw Keating, and he swore fervently.

"What the hell!" he growled. "Think I'm runnin' a nursery or an outdoor sanatorium? I guess I've got enough to do without lookin' after sick kids, I guess I have. Fat lot of help he'll be—help my eye! I don't need no help."

But for all that, somehow, from the first minute after Keating got off the local freight, that stopped for him at the camp, and shoved out his hand to Spirlaw it was different—after that it was *all* Keating so far as the construction boss was concerned.

Queer the way things go! Keating looked about the last man on earth you would expect to find rubbing elbows with an iron-fisted foreman whose tongue was rougher than a barbed-wire fence; the last man to hold his own with a slave-driven gang of ugly Polacks. He seemed too quiet, too shy, too utterly unfit, physically, for that sort of thing. The blood was all out of the boy—he got rid of it faster than he could make it. But his training stood him in good stead, and, within his limitations, he took hold like an old hand. That was what caught Spirlaw. Keating did what he was told, and he did what he could—did a little more than he could at times, which would lay him up for a bad two or three days of it.

"Good man," Spirlaw scribbled across the bottom of a report one day—a day that was about equally divided between barking his knuckles on a Polack's head and feeding cracked ice to Keating in his bunk. Cracked ice? No, it wasn't on the regular camp bill of fare—but the company supplied it for all that. Spirlaw, with supreme contempt for the dispatchers and their schedules and their train-sheets, held up Number Twelve and the porter of the Pullman for a goodly share of the commodity possessed by that coloured gentleman. That's what Spirlaw thought of Keating.

For the first few weeks after he struck the camp Keating didn't have very much to say about himself, or anything else for that matter; but after he got a little nearer to Spirlaw and the mutual liking grew stronger, he began to open up at nights when he and Spirlaw sat outside the door of the construction shanty and watched the sun lose itself behind the mighty peaks, creep again with a wondrous golden-tinted glow between a rift in the range, and finally sink with ensuing twilight out of sight. Keating could talk then.

"Don't see what you ever took up engineerin' for," remarked Spirlaw one evening. "It's about the roughest kind of a life I know of, an' you——"

"I know, I know," Keating smiled. "You think I'm not strong enough for it. Why, another year out here in the West and I'll be like a horse."

"Sure, you will," agreed Spirlaw, hastily. "I didn't mean just that." Then he sucked his brier hard. Spirlaw wasn't much up on therapeutics, he knew more about blasting rock, but down in his heart there wasn't much doubt about another year in the West for the boy, and another and another, *all of them*—only they would be over the Great Divide that one only crosses once when it is crossed for ever. Six months, four, three—just months, not years, was what he read in Keating's face. "What I meant," he amended, "was that you don't have to. From what you've said, I figur' your folks back there would be willin' to stake you in most any line you picked out, h'm?"

"No, I don't have to," Keating answered, and his face lighted up as he leaned over and touched the construction boss on the sleeve. "But, Spirlaw, it's the greatest thing in all the world. Don't you see? A man does something. *He builds.* I'm going to be a builder—a builder of bridges and roads and things like that. I want to do something some day—something that will be worth while. That's why I'm going to be an engineer; because, all over the world from the beginning, the engineers have led the way, and—and they've left something behind them. I think that's the biggest thing they can say of any man when he dies—that he was a builder, that he left something behind him. I'd like to have them say that about me. Well, after I put in another year out here—I'm a heap better even now than when I came—I'm going back to finish my course, and then—well, you understand what I want to do, don't you?"

There were lots of talks like that, evening after evening, and they all of them ended in the same way—Spirlaw would knock out his pipe against a stone or his boot heel, and "figur' he'd stroll up the camp a bit an' make sure all was right for the night."

A pretty hard man Spirlaw was, but under the rough and the brutal, the horny, thick-shelled exterior was another self, a strange side of self that he had never known until he had known Keating. It got into him pretty deep and pretty hard, the boy and his ambitions; and the irony of it, grim and bitter, deepened his pity and roused, too, a sense of fierce, hot resentment against the fate that mocked in its pitiless might so defenceless and puny a victim. To himself he came to call Keating "The Builder," and one day when Harvey came down on an inspection trip, he told the division engineer about it—that's how it got around.

Carleton, when he heard it, didn't say anything—just crammed down the dottle in his pipe with his forefinger and stared out at the switches in the yards. They were used to seeing the surface of things plowed up and the corners turned back in the mountains, and there weren't many days went by when something that showed the raw didn't happen in one way or another, but it never brought callousness or indifference, only, perhaps, a truer sense of values.

They had been blasting in the "cut" for a matter of two months when the first signs of trouble began to show themselves, and the beginning was when the shop hands at Big Cloud went out—the boiler-makers and the blacksmiths, the painters, the carpenters and the fitters. The construction camp, that is Spirlaw, didn't worry very much about this for the very simple reason that there didn't appear to be any reason why it, or he, should—that

was Regan's hunt. But when the train crews followed suit and stray rumours of a fight or two at Big Cloud began to come in, with the likelihood of more hard on the heels of the first, it put a different complexion on things; for the rioting, what there had been of it, lay, not at the door of the railroad boys, but with the town's loafers and hangers-on, these and the foreign element—particularly the foreign element—the brothers and the cousins of the Polacks who were swinging the picks and the shovels under the iron hand of Spirlaw, their temporary lord and master—the Polacks, as innately ungentle, when amuck, as starved pumas.

Then the Brotherhood said "quit," and the engine crews followed the trainmen. Things began to look black, and headquarters began to find it pretty hard to move anything. The train schedule past the "cut" was no more than a ghost of its former self, and the faces of the men in the cabs and the cabooses were new faces to those in camp—the faces of the men the company were bringing in on hurry calls from wherever they could get them, from the plains East or the coast West.

Every day brought reports of trouble from one end of the line to the other, more rioting, more disorder at Big Cloud; and, in an effort to nip as much of it in the bud as possible, Carleton issued a general order to all construction foremen—the gist of it being that on no pretext whatever were any of the foreign element to be permitted to leave their respective camps and so drift into Big Cloud to swell the ranks of the rioters already there.

Spirlaw read the order, and his face set like a thunder cloud. He handed it to Keating.

Keating read it—and looked serious.

"I guess things aren't any too rosy down there," he commented; then slowly: "I've noticed our men seemed a bit sullen lately. They don't care anything much about the strike; it must be a sort of sympathetic movement with the rest of their crowd that's running wild at Big Cloud—only I don't just figure how they can know very much about what's going on. We don't ourselves, for that matter."

Spirlaw smiled grimly.

"I'll tell you how," he said. "I caught a Polack in the camp last night that didn't belong here—and I broke his head for the second time, see? He used to work for me about a year ago—that's when I broke it the first time. He's one of their influential citizens—name's Kuryla. Sneaked in here to stir up trouble—guess he's sorry for it, I guess he is."

“That’s the first I’ve heard of it,” said Keating, his eyes opening a little wider in surprise.

“You was asleep,” explained Spirlaw tersely.

Keating stared curiously at the construction boss for a minute, then he glanced again at the super’s order which he still held in his hand.

“Carleton says he is also depending on every construction foreman to put his work through if it’s a possible thing. But you don’t really think we’d have any serious trouble here in any case, do you?”

Spirlaw laughed gruffly as he answered.

“Yes, son; I do,” he said. “And there’s a good reason for it, too. Once start ’em goin’ an’ there’s no worse hellions on earth than the breed we’re livin’ next door to. Furthermore they don’t *love* me—they’re just afraid of me, as, by the holy razoo, I mean ’em to be! Let ’em once get a smell of the upper hand an’ it would be all day *an’* good-by. Let ’em get goin’ good at Big Cloud an’ they’ll get goin’ good here—they’ll kind of figur’ then that there ain’t any law to bother ’em—an’, unless I miss my guess, and in spite of Carleton, Big Cloud’s in for the hottest celebration in its history, which will be goin’ some for it’s had a few before that weren’t tame by a damn sight.”

“Well,” inquired Keating, “what do you intend to do?”

“H’m-m,” drawled Spirlaw reflectively, and there was a speculative look in his eyes as they roved over his assistant. “That’s what I’ve been chewin’ over since I caught that skunk Kuryla last night. As far as I can figur’ it, trouble here depends on how far those cusses go at Big Cloud. If I knew that, I’d know what to expect, h’m? I thought I’d send you up to headquarters for a day. You could have a talk with the super, tell him just where we stand here, an’ size things up there generally. What do you say?”

“Why, of course. All right, if you want me to,” agreed Keating readily.

“That’s the boy,” said Spirlaw, heartily. “Number Twelve ought to be along pretty soon. I’ll flag her, an’ you can go an’ get ready now. I’ll give you a letter to take along to Carleton.”

As Keating, with a nod of assent, turned briskly away, Spirlaw watched him out of sight—and the hint of a smile played over the lips of the construction boss. He pulled a report sheet from his pocket, and on the back of it scrawled laboriously a letter to the superintendent of the Hill Division.

It wasn't a very long letter even with the P. S. included. His smile hardened as he read it over.

"Supt., Big Cloud," it ran. "Dear Sir:—Replying to yours 8th inst., please send a couple of good .45s, and *plenty of stuffing*. ('Plenty of stuffing' was heavily underscored.) Yrs. Resp. H. Spirlaw. P.S. *Keep the boy up there out of this.*" (The P.S. was even more heavily underscored than the other.)

Wise and learned in the ways of men—and Polacks—was Spirlaw. Spirlaw was not dealing with the *possibility* of trouble—it was simply a question of how long it would be before it started. He folded the letter, sealed it in one of the company's manilas, and, as, in due course, he watched Number Twelve disappear around the bend steaming east for Big Cloud with Keating aboard her and the epistle reposing in Keating's pocket, he stretched out his arms that were big as derrick booms and drew in a long breath like a man from whose shoulders has dropped a heavy load.

That day Spirlaw talked from his heart to the men, and they listened in sullen, stupid silence, leaning on their picks and shovels.

"You know me," he snapped, and his eyes starting at the right of the group rested for a bare second on each individual face as they swept down the line. "You know *me*. You've been actin' like sulky dogs lately—don't think I haven't spotted it. You saw what happened to that skunk friend of yours that sneaked in here last night. I meant it as a lesson for the bunch of you as well as him. The yarns he was fillin' you full of are mostly lies, an' if they ain't it's none of your business, anyhow. It won't pay you to look for trouble, I promise you that. You can take it from me that I'll bash the first man to pulp that tries it. Get that? Well, then, wiggle them picks a bit an' get busy!"

"The man that hits first," said Spirlaw to himself, as he walked away, "is the man that usually comes out on top. I guess them there few kind words of mine'll give 'em a little something to chew on till Carleton sends that hardware down, I guess they will, h'm?"

The camp was pretty quiet that night—quieter than usual. The cook-house and the three bunk-houses, that lay a few hundred yards east of the trestle, might have been occupied by dead men for all the sounds that came from them. Occasionally, Spirlaw, sitting out as usual in front of his own shanty, that was between the trestle and the gang's quarters, saw a Polack or two skulk from one of the bunk-houses to the other—and he scowled savagely as he divided his glances between them and the sky. It looked like a

storm in the mountains, and a storm in the mountains is never by any possibility to be desired—least of all was it to be desired just then. The men at work was one thing; the men cooped up for a day, or two days, of enforced idleness with the temper they were in was another—Spirlaw turned in that night with the low, ominous roll of distant thunder for a lullaby.

Once in the night he woke suddenly at the sound of a splitting crash, and once, twice, and again, like a fierce, winking stream of flame, the lightning filled the shack bright as day, while on the roof the rain beat steadily like the tattoo of a corps of snare drums. Spirlaw smiled grimly as the darkness shut down on him again.

"Got the little builder out just about the right time, h'm?" he remarked to himself; and, turning over in his bunk, went to sleep again—but even in his sleep the grim smile lingered on his lips.

The morning broke with the steady downpour unabated. Everything ran water, and work was out of the question. Spirlaw ate his breakfast, that the dripping camp cook brought him, and then, putting on his rubber boots and coat, started over for the track. Number Eleven was due at the "cut" at seven-thirty, and she would have the package of "hardware" he had asked Carleton for.

But though seven-thirty came, Number Eleven did not—neither did any other train, east or west. The hours passed from a long morning to drag through a longer afternoon. Something was wrong somewhere—and badly wrong at that. Spirlaw's face was blacker than the storm. Twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon, he started down the track in the direction of Keefer's Siding, which was just what its name proclaimed it to be—a siding, no more, no less, only there was an operator there. Each time, however, he changed his mind after getting no farther than a few yards. The Polacks could be no less alive to the fact than himself that something out of the ordinary was in the air, and second considerations swung strongly to the advisability of sticking close to the camp, so that his presence might have the effect of dampening the ardour of any mischief that might be brewing.

It was not until well on toward eight o'clock in the evening and the last of the twilight that the hoarse screech of a whistle sounded through the "cut"—a long blast and three short ones. It was belated Number Eleven whistling for the camp—she wouldn't stop, just slow down to transact her business. Spirlaw, who was in his shanty at the time, snatched up his hat, dashed out of the door, and headed for the bend of the track. As he did so,

out of the tail of his eye, he caught sight of the Polacks clustered with outpoked heads from the open doors of the bunk-houses.

As he reached the line, Number Eleven came round the curve, and the door of the express car swung back. The messenger dropped a package into his hand that the construction boss received with a grim smile, and a word into his ear that caused Spirlaw's jaw to drop; nor was that all that dropped, for, from the rear end, as the train rolled by—dropped Keating.

White-faced and shaky the boy looked—more so than usual. Spirlaw started as though he had seen an apparition, stared for a minute in silence before he could lay tongue to words—then they came like the out-spout of a volcano.

"What the hell's the meanin' of this?" he roared. "Who in the double-blanked blazes let you out of Big Cloud, h'm? I'll——"

"Let's get in out of the wet," broke in Keating, smiling through a spell of coughing that racked him at that moment. "You can growl your head off then, if you like"—and he started on a run for the shack.

Once inside, Spirlaw rounded on the boy again, and he stopped only when he was out of breath.

"Didn't Carleton tell you to stay where you was?" he finished bitterly.

"Oh yes," said Keating, "that's about the first thing he *did* say after he had read your letter, when I gave it to him yesterday. Then I tumbled to why you had sent me out of camp. You're about as square as they make them, Spirlaw. You needn't blame Carleton; *he* had about all he could do without paying any attention to me, or any one else. Had any news in here?"

Spirlaw shook his head.

"No; but I knew something was up, because Number Eleven is the first train in or out to-day. The express messenger just said they'd cut loose in Big Cloud and wrecked about everything in sight, but I guess he was puttin' it on a bit."

"He didn't put on anything," said Keating slowly. "My God, Spirlaw, it was an awful night! The freight house and the shops and the roundhouse were all attacked. They cut all the wires and then they cut loose themselves —the Polacks and that crowd, you know. Yes, they wrecked everything in sight, and there's a dozen lives gone out to pay for it." Keating stopped suddenly, and again began to cough.

Spirlaw looked at the boy uneasily, and mechanically fumbled with the cords of the package he had laid upon the table. By the time he had removed the wrappers and disclosed two ugly, businesslike looking .45s and a half-dozen boxes of cartridges, Keating's paroxysm had passed.

"I guess it was exciting enough for *me*, anyhow"—Keating tried hard to make his laugh ring true. "I'm a little weak from it yet."

"If you weren't sick," Spirlaw burst out, "I'd make you sick for comin' back here. You know well enough we'll get it next—you knew so well you came back to help——"

"Look here," Keating interrupted hastily, "Carleton isn't holding you or any other man to that order now. The situation has got past all that. He said so himself last night; and even when he was already half-mad with the ruin of things he mentioned you especially. He said: 'I hope Spirlaw will yank up his stakes and pull out if it gets looking bad with him.' "

"Pull out!" shouted Spirlaw, in a sudden roar. "Pull out! *Me!* Not for all the cross-eyed, hamstrung Polacks on the system!"

"I think you'd better," said Keating quietly. "After what I saw last night, I think you'd better. There was no holding them—they were like savages, and the farther they went the worse they got. They were backed up by whiskey and the worst element in town. I was in the station with Carleton, Regan, Harvey, Riley and Spence and some of the other dispatchers. It was a regular pitched battle, and in spite of their revolvers the station would have gone with the rest if, along toward morning, the striking trainmen and the Brotherhood hadn't taken a hand and helped us out. I don't know that it's over yet, that it won't break out again to-night; though I heard Carleton say there'd be a detachment of the police in town by four o'clock. I wish you would pull out, Spirlaw. You said yourself that all these fellows here needed to start them sticking their claws into you was a little encouragement from the other end. They've been afraid of you, but they hate you like poison. Once started, they'll be worse than the crowd at Big Cloud for hate is a harder driver than whiskey. Then, besides, I really think you'd be of more use in Big Cloud. You could do some good there no matter what the end was, while here you're alone and you stand to lose everything and gain nothing. I wish you would pull out, Spirlaw, won't you?"

Spirlaw reached out his hand and laid it on Keating's shoulder, as he shook his head.

"I've got a whole *lot* to lose," he answered, his hard face softening a little. "A whole lot. I can't say things the way you do, but I guess you'll understand. You got something that means a whole lot to you, that you'd risk anything for—what you want to do, and what you want to leave behind you when it comes along time to cash in. Well, I guess most of us have in one way or another, though mabbe it don't rank anywhere up to that. I reckon, too, a whole lot of us don't never think to put it in words, an' a whole lot of us couldn't if we tried to, but it's there with any man that's any good. I'd rather go out for keeps than pull out—I'd rather they'd plant me. D'ye think I'd want to live an' have to cross the street because I couldn't look *even a Polack* in the eyes—a man would be better dead, what?"

For a moment Keating did not answer, he seemed to be weighing the possibility of still shaking the determination of the construction boss before accepting it as irrevocable; then, evidently coming to the conclusion that it was useless to argue further, he pointed to the revolvers.

"Then the sooner you load those the better," he jerked out.

Spirlaw looked at him curiously, questioningly.

"Because," went on Keating, answering the unspoken interrogation, "when I dropped off the train I saw that fellow Kuryla—he was pointed out to me in Big Cloud yesterday—and three or four more drop off on the other side. I didn't know they were on the train until then, of course, or I would have had them put off. There isn't much doubt about what they are here for, is there?"

"So that's it, is it?" Spirlaw ripped out with an oath. "No, there ain't much doubt!"

He snatched up a cartridge-box, slit the paper band with his thumb nail, and, breaking the revolvers, began to cram the cartridges into the cylinders. His face was twitching, and the red that flushed it shaded to a deep purple. Not another word came from him—just a deadly quiet. He thrust the weapons into his pockets, strode to the door, opened it, stepped over the threshold—and stopped. An instant he hung there in indecision, then he came back, shut the door behind him, sat down on the edge of his bunk, and looked at Keating grimly.

"There's been one train along, there'll be another," he snapped. "An' the first one that comes you'll get aboard of. I hate to keep those whinin' coyotes waitin', but——"

"I'll take no train," Keating cut in coolly; "but I'll take a revolver."

Spirlaw growled and shook his head.

"Why didn't you tell me about Kuryla at first?" he demanded abruptly.

"You know why as well as I do," smiled Keating. "I wanted to get you away from here if I could. There wouldn't have been any use trying at all if I'd begun by telling you that. Wild horses wouldn't have budged you then. As for a train, what's the use of talking about it? There probably won't be another one along for hours. In the meantime, give me one of the guns."

"Not by a——"

Spirlaw's refusal died half uttered on his lips, as he sprang suddenly to his feet; then he whipped out the revolvers and shoved one quickly into Keating's hands.

Carried down with the sweep of the wind came the sound of many voices raised in shouts and discordant song. It grew louder, swelled, and broke into a high-pitched, defiant yell.

"Whiskey!" gritted Spirlaw between his teeth. "That devil Kuryla and the swine that came with him knew the best an' quickest way to start the ball rollin'. Well, son, I reckon we're in for it. The only thing I'm sorry about is that you're here; but that can't be helped now. You were white clean through to come—Holy Mother, listen to that!"—another yell broke louder, fiercer than before over the roar of the storm.

Spirlaw stepped to the door and peered out. It was already getting dark. The rain still poured in sheets, and the wind howled down the gorge in wild, furious, spasmodic gusts. Thin streaks of light strayed out from the doors of the bunk-houses, and around the doors were gathered shadowy groups. A moment more and the shadowy groups welded into a single dark mass. Came a mad, exultant yell from a single throat. It was caught up, flung back, echoed and re-echoed by a score of voices—and the dark mass began to move.

"Guess you'd better put out that light, son," said Spirlaw coolly from the doorway. "There's no use making targets of our——"

Before he ended, before Keating had more than taken a step forward, a lump of rock shivered the little window and crashed into the lamp—it was out for keeps. A howl followed this exhibition of marksmanship, and, following that, a volley of stones smashed against the side of the shack thick and fast as hail—then the onrush of feet.

Spirlaw's revolver cut the black with a long, blinding flash, then another, and another. Screams and shrieks answered him, but it did not halt the Polacks. In a mob they rushed the door. Spirlaw sprang back, trying to close it after him; instead, a dozen hands grasped and half wrenched it from its hinges.

"Lie down on the floor, Spirlaw, *quick*!"—it was Keating's voice, punctuated with a cough. The next instant his gun barked, playing through the doorway like a gatling.

From the floor the construction boss joined in. The mob wavered, pitched swaying this way and that, then broke and ran, struggling with each other to get out of the line of fire.

"Hurrah!" cried Keating. "I guess that will hold them."

" 'Tain't begun," was Spirlaw's grim response. "Where's them cartridges?"

"On the table—got them?"

"Yes," said Spirlaw, after a minute's groping. "Here, put a box in your pocket."

"What are they up to now?" asked Keating as, in the silence that had fallen, they reloaded and listened.

"God knows," growled Spirlaw; "but I guess we'll find out quick enough."

As he spoke, from a little distance away, came the crash of splintering woodwork—then silence again.

"That's the storehouse," Spirlaw snarled. "They're after the crowbars an' anything else they can lay their hands on that'll do for weapons. Guess they weren't countin' on our havin' anything more than our fists to fight with, guess they weren't."

Keating's only reply was a cough; he was coughing a lot more than usual that night—the twenty-four hours of travail he had just been through hadn't helped him any!

The minutes passed, two, three, five of them. Once outside sounded what might have been the stealthy scuffle of feet—or only a storm-sound so construed by the imagination. Then, from the direction of the river-bed, sudden, sharp, came a terrific roar.

“My God!” yelled Spirlaw. “There’s the trestle gone—they’ve blown it up! They’re sure to have laid a fuse here, too. Get out of here quick! Fool that I was, I might have known it was the *dynamite* they were after.”

Both men were scrambling for the door as he spoke. They reached it not an instant too soon. The ground behind them lifted, heaved; the walls, the roof of the shack rose, cracked like eggshells, and scattered in flying pieces—and the mighty, deafening detonation of the explosion echoed up and down the gorge, echoed again—and died away.

The mob caught sight of them as they ran and, foiled for the moment, sent up a yell of rage—then started in pursuit.

“Make back along the ‘cut’—we can hold ’em off there behind the rocks,” shouted Spirlaw.

Keating had no breath for words. Already sick, he had been struck by a piece of the flying débris from the shack, and panting, his head swimming, a fleck of blood upon his lips, he struggled after the construction boss; while, behind, coming ever closer, ringing in his ears, were the cries of the maddened Polacks. The footing was treacherous, uneven. On and on he forced himself to run. The Polacks were gaining. It became a matter of yards. And then suddenly Spirlaw slipped on some loose rock and pitched headlong—and Keating, close behind, stumbled and fell over the other before he could recover himself.

Like wild beasts the Polacks surged upon them. Keating tried to regain his feet—but he got no farther than his knees as a swinging blow from a pick-handle caught him on his head. Half-stunned, he sank back and, as consciousness left him, he heard Spirlaw’s great voice roar out like the maddened bellow of a bull, saw the giant form rise with, it seemed, a dozen Polacks clinging to neck and shoulders, legs and body, saw him shake them off and the massive arms rise and fall—and all was a blur, all darkness.

The construction boss lay stretched out a yard away from him when Keating opened his eyes. He was very weak. He raised himself on his elbow. From the camp down the line he could see the lights in the bunk-houses, hear drunken, chorused shouts. He crept to Spirlaw, called him, shook him—the big construction boss never moved. The Polacks had evidently left both of them for dead—and one, it seemed, was. He slid his hand inside the other’s vest for the heart beat. So faint it was at first he could not feel it; then he got it, and, realizing that Spirlaw was still alive, he straightened up and looked helplessly around—and, in a flash, like the knell of doom, Spirlaw’s words came back to him: “*There’s the trestle gone!*”

Sick the boy was with his clotting lungs, deathly sick, weak from the blow on his head, dizzy, and his brain swam.

"*There's the trestle gone!*"—he coughed it out between blue lips.

Keefer's Siding was two miles away. Somehow he must reach it, must get the word along the line that the *trestle was gone*, get the word along before the stalled traffic moved, before the first train, east or west, crashed through to death, before more wreck and ruin was added to the tale that had gone before. He bent to Spirlaw's ear and three times called him frantically:

"Spirlaw! Spirlaw! *Spirlaw!*"

There was no response. He tried to lift the other, tried to drag the man—the great bulk was far beyond his strength. And the minutes were flying by, each marking the one perhaps when it would be too late, too late to warn any one that the trestle was out.

Just opposite him, a bare twenty yards away where the leads to the temporary track swung into the straight of the main line, was the platform handcar they had used for carrying tools and the odds and ends of supplies between the storehouse and the work—if he could only get Spirlaw there!

He called Spirlaw again, shook the man, breathing a prayer for help. The construction boss stirred, raised himself a little, and sank down again with a moan.

"Spirlaw, *Spirlaw*, for God's sake, man, try to get up! I'll help you. You must, do you hear, *you must*!"—he was dragging at the construction boss's collar.

Keating's voice seemed to reach the other's consciousness, for, weakly, dazed, without sense, blindly, Spirlaw got upon his knees, then to his feet, and, staggering, reeling like a drunken man, his arm around Keating's neck, his weight almost crushing to the ground the one sicker than himself, the two stumbled, pitched, and, at the end, *crawled* those twenty yards.

"The handcar, Spirlaw, the handcar!" gasped Keating. "Get on it. You must! Try! Try!"

Spirlaw straightened, lurched forward, and fell half across the car with out-flung arms—unconscious again.

The rest Keating managed somehow, enough so that the dangling legs freed the ground by a few inches; then, with bursting lungs, far spent, he unblocked the wheels, pushed the car down the little spur, swung the switch,

dragged himself aboard, and began to pump his way east toward Keefer's Siding.

No man may tell the details of those two miles, every inch of which was wrung from blood that oozed from parted, quivering lips; no man may question from Whom came the strength to the frail body, where strength was not; the reprieve to the broken lungs, that long since should have done their worst—only Keating knew that the years were ended forever, that with every stroke of the pump-handle the time was shorter. The few minutes to win through—that was the last stake!

At the end he choked with the rush of blood—fighting for his consciousness, as, like dancing points, switch lights swam before him. He checked with the brake, reeled from the car, fell, tried to rise, and fell back again. Then, on his hands and knees, he crept toward the station door, reached it, and with his last strength beat upon it. It opened, a lantern was flashed upon him, and he fell inside.

"The trestle's gone at the 'cut'—hold trains both ways—Polacks—Spirlaw on—handcar—I——"

That was all. Keating never spoke again.

"I dunno as you'd call him a builder," says Clarihue, the turner, when *he* tells the story in the darkened roundhouse in the shadow of the big ten-wheelers on the pits, while the steam purrs softly at the gauges and sometimes a pop-valve lifts with a catchy sob, "I dunno as you would. It depends on the way you look at it. Accordin' to him, he was. He left something behind him, what?"

—II—

THE GUARDIAN OF THE DEVIL'S SLIDE

THERE is one bad piece of track on the Hill Division, particularly bad, which is the same as saying that it is the worst piece of track, bar none, on the American Continent. Not that the engineers were to blame—they weren't. It was Dame Nature in the shape of the Rockies—Dame Nature and the directors.

The consulting engineers, when the road was building, advised a double-loop tunnel that, according to their sketch, looked something like the figure 8 canted over sideways. The directors poised their glasses and examined the sketch with interest until they caught sight of the pencilled estimate in the corner. That settled it. They did not even take the trouble to vote. They asked for an alternative—and they got it. They got the Devil's Slide.

First and last, it has euchred more money out of the treasury of the Transcontinental than it would have taken to carry out the original idea; and it has taken some years, a good many of them, for the directors to learn their lesson. The old Board never did, for that matter; but, thanks perhaps to younger blood, they've begun now to build as they should have built in the first place. It isn't finished yet, that double-looped tunnel, it won't be for years, but, no matter, it's begun, and some day a good many more than a few men will sleep the easier because of it.

From Carleton, the super, to the last section hand and track-walker, the Devil's Slide was a nightmare. The dispatchers, under their green-shaded lamps, cursed it in the gray hours of dawn; the traffic department cursed it spasmodically, but at such times so whole-heartedly and with such genuine fervor and abandon that its occasional lapses into silence were overlooked; the motive power department in the shape of Regan, the master mechanic, cursed it all the time, and did it breathlessly. It had only one friend—the passenger agent's department. The passenger agent's department swore *by* it—on account of the scenery.

"Scenery!" gulped the dispatchers, and the white showed under their nail tips as their fingers tightened on their keys.

"Scenery!" howled the traffic department, and reached for the claim file.

“Scenery!” Regan didn’t say it—he choked. Just choked, and spat the exclamation point in a stream of black-strap.

“Scenery!” murmured Mr. General Passenger Agent esthetically, waving a soft and diamond bedecked hand from the platform of Carleton’s private car. “Wonderful! Grand! Magnificent! We’ve got them all beaten into a coma. No other road has anything like it anywhere in the world.”

“They have not,” agreed Carleton, and the bitterness of his soul was in his words.

Everybody was right.

The general passenger agent was right—the scenic grandeur was beyond compare, and he made the most of it in booklets, in leaflets, in pamphlets, and in a score of pages in a score of different magazines.

The others were right—the Devil’s Slide was everything that the ethics of engineering said it shouldn’t be. It was neither level nor straight. In its marvelous two miles from the summit of the pass to the cañon below, its nearest approach to the ethical was a three per cent drop. There wasn’t much of that—most of it was a straight five! It twisted, it turned, it slid, it slithered, and it dove around projecting mountain-sides at scandalous angles and with indecent abruptness.

Chick Coogan swore, with a grin, that he could see his own headlight coming at him about half the time every trip he made up or down. That, of course, is exaggerating a little—but not much! Coogan sized up the Devil’s Slide pretty well when he said that, all things considered, pretty well—there wasn’t much chance to mistake what he meant, or what the Devil’s Slide was, or what he thought of it. Anyway, be that as it may, Coogan’s description gave the division the only chance they ever had to crack a smile when the Devil’s Slide was in question.

They smiled then, those railroaders of the Rockies, but they’ll look at you queerly now if you mention the two together—Coogan and the Devil’s Slide. Fate is a pretty grim player sometimes.

Any one on the Hill Division can tell you the story—they’ve reason to know it, and they do—to the last man. If you’d rather get it first hand in a roundhouse, or between trains from the operator at some lone station that’s no more than a siding, or in the caboose of a way freight—if you are a big enough man to ride there, and that means being bigger than most men—or anywhere your choice or circumstance leads you from the super’s office to a track-walker’s shanty; if you’d rather get it that way, and you’ll get it better,

far better, than you will here, don't try any jolly business to make the boys talk—just say a good word for Coogan, Chick Coogan. That's the "open sesame"—and the only one.

There's no use talking about the logical or the illogical, the rational or the irrational, when it comes to Coogan's story. Coogan's story is just Coogan's story, that's all there is to it. What one man does another doesn't. You can't cancel the human equation, because there's nothing to cancel it with; it's there all the time, swaying, compelling, dominating every act in a man's life. The higher branches of mathematics go far, and to some men three dimensions are but elemental, but there is one problem even they have never solved and never will solve—the human equation. What Coogan did, you might not do—or you might.

Coogan didn't come to the Transcontinental a full-blown engineer from some other road as a good many of the boys have, though that's nothing against them; Coogan was a product of the Hill Division pure and simple. He began as a kid almost before the steel was spiked home, and certainly before the right of way was shaken down enough to begin to look like business. He started at the bottom and he went up. Call-boy, sweeper, wiper, fireman—one after the other. Promotion came fast in the early days, for, the Rockies once bridged, business came fast, too; and Coogan had his engine at twenty-four, and at twenty-six he was pulling the Imperial Limited.

"Good goods," said Regan. "That's what he is. The best ever."

Nobody questioned that; not only because there was no one on the division who could put anything over Coogan in a cab, but also because, and perhaps even more pertinent a reason, every one liked Coogan—some of them did more than that.

Straight as a string, clean as a whistle was Coogan, six feet in his stockings with a body that played up to every inch of his height, black hair, jet black, black eyes that laughed with you, never *at* you, a smile and a cheery nod always—the kind of a man that makes you feel every time you see him that the world isn't such an eternal dismal grind after all. That was Chick Coogan. Popular? Yes, of course! But it went deeper than that, a whole lot deeper than mere popularity. Coogan just naturally staked out a claim for himself in everybody's heart—and nobody kicked!

Queer how things go!

It was the day Coogan got married that Regan gave him the 505 and the Limited run as a sort of wedding present; and that night Big Cloud turned

itself completely inside out doing honor and justice to the occasion.

Big Cloud has had other celebrations, before and since, but none quite so unanimous as that one. Restraint never did run an overwhelmingly strong favorite with the town, but that night it was hung up higher than the arms on the telegraph poles. Men that the community used to hide behind and push forward as hostages for righteousness, when it was on its good behaviour and wanted to put on a front, cut loose and outshone the best—or the worst, if you like that better—of the crowd that never made any bones about being on the other side of the fence. They burned red flares, very many of them, that Carleton neglected to imagine had any connection with the storekeeper and the supply account; they committed indiscretions, mostly of a liquid nature, that any one but the trainmaster, who was temporarily blind in both eyes, could have seen; and, as a result, the Hill Division the next day was an eminently paralytic and feeble affair. This is a very general description of the event, because sometimes it is not wise to particularise—this is a case in point.

Coogan's send-off was a send-off no other man, be he king, prince, president, sho-gun, or high mucky-muck of whatever degree, could have got—except Coogan. Coogan got it because he was Coogan, just Coogan—and the night was a night to wonder at.

Regan summarized it the next evening over his usual game of pedro with Carleton, upstairs over the station in the super's office.

"Apart from Coogan and me," said the master mechanic, in a voice that was still suspiciously husky, "apart from Coogan and me, and *mabbe* the minister, everybody was—" The rest was a wave of his hand. Regan could wave his hand with a wealth of eloquence that was astounding.

"Quite so," agreed Carleton, with a grin. "Too bad to drag *them* into it, though. Both 'peds' to me, Tommy. It's a good thing for the discipline of the division that bigamy is against the law, what?"

"They'll be talking of it," said Regan reminiscently, "when you and me are on the scrap heap, Carleton."

"I guess that's right," admitted the super. "Play on, Tommy."

But it wasn't. They only talked of Coogan's wedding for about a year—no, they don't talk about it now. We'll get to that presently.

The Imperial Limited was the star run on the division—Regan gave Coogan the thirty-third degree when he gave him that—that and the 505, which was the last word in machine design. And Coogan took them, took

them and the schedule rights that pertained thereto, which were a clear and a clean-swept track, and day after day, up hill and down, Number One or Number Two, as the case might be, pulled into division on the dot. Coogan's stock soared—if that were possible; but not Coogan. The youngest engineer on the road and top of them all, would have been excuse enough for him to show his oats, and, within decent limits, no one would have thought the worse of him for it—Coogan never turned a hair. He was still the same Coogan that he had always been, still the same Coogan that had been no more than a wiper in the roundhouse; and yet, perhaps, not quite the same, for two new loves had come into his life—his love for Annie Coogan, and his love, the love of the master craftsman, for the 505. In the little house at home he talked to Annie of the big mountain racer, and Annie, being an engineer's daughter as well as an engineer's wife, listened with understanding and a smile, and in the smile was pride and love; in the cab Coogan talked of Annie, always Annie, and one day he told his fireman a secret that made big Jim Dahleen grin sheepishly and stick out a grimy paw.

Fate is a pretty grim player sometimes—and always, it seems, the cards are stacked.

The days and the weeks and the months went by, and then there came a morning when a sober-, serious-faced group of men stood gathered in the super's office, as Number Two's whistle, in from the eastbound run, sounded across the buttes. They looked at Regan. Slowly, the master mechanic turned, went out of the room and down the stairs to the platform, as the 505 shot round the bend and rolled into the station. For a moment Regan stood irresolute, then he started for the front-end. He went no farther than the colonist coach, that was coupled behind the mail car. Here he stopped, made a step forward, changed his mind, climbed over the colonist's platform, dropped down on the other side of the track, and began to walk toward the roundhouse—they changed engines at Big Cloud, and the 505, already uncoupled, was scooting up for the spur to back down for the 'table.

The soles of Regan's boots seemed like plates of lead as he went along, and he mopped his forehead nervously. There was a general air of desertion about the roundhouse. The 'table was set and ready for the 505, but there wasn't a soul in sight. Regan nodded to himself in sympathetic understanding. He crossed the turntable, walked around the half circle, and entered the roundhouse through the engine doors by the far pit—the one next to that which belonged to the 505. Here, just inside, he waited, as the big mogul came slowly down the track, took the 'table with a slight jolt, and

stopped. He saw Coogan, big, brawny, swing out of the cab like an athlete, and then he heard the engineer speak to his fireman.

"Looks like a graveyard around here, Jim. Wonder where the boys are? I won't wait to swing the 'table, they'll be around in a minute, I guess. I want to get up to the little woman."

"All right," Dahleen answered. "Leave her to me, I'll run her in. Good luck to you, Chick."

Coogan was starting across the yards with a stride that was almost a run. Regan opened his mouth to shout—and swallowed a lump in his throat instead. Twice he made as though to follow the engineer, and twice something stronger than himself held him back; and then, as though he had been a thief, the master mechanic stole out from behind the doors, went back across the tracks, climbed the stairs to Carleton's room with lagging steps, and entered.

The rest were still there: Carleton in his swivel chair, Harvey, the division engineer, Spence, the chief dispatcher, and Riley, the trainmaster. Regan shook his head and dropped into a seat.

"I couldn't," he said in a husky voice. "My God, I *couldn't*," he repeated, and swept out his arms.

A bitter oath sprang from Carleton's lips, lips that were not often profane, and his teeth snapped through the amber of his brier. The others just looked out of the window.

MacVicar, a spare man, took the Limited out that night, and it was three days before Coogan reported again. Maybe it was the fit of the black store-clothes and perhaps the coat didn't hang just right, but as he entered the roundhouse he didn't look as straight as he used to look, and there was a queer inward slope to his shoulders, and he walked like a man who didn't see anything. The springy swing through the gangway was gone. He climbed to the cab as an old man climbs—painfully. The boys hung back and didn't say anything, just swore under their breaths with full hearts as men do. There wasn't anything *to* say—nothing that would do any good.

Coogan took the 505 and the Limited out that night, took it out the night after and the nights that followed, only he didn't talk any more, and the slope of the shoulders got a little more pronounced, a little more noticeable, a little beyond the cut of any coat. And on the afternoons of the lay-overs at Big Cloud, Coogan walked out behind the town to where on the slope of the butte were two fresh mounds—one larger than the other. That was all.

Regan, short, paunchy, big-hearted Regan, tackled Jim Dahleen, Coogan's fireman.

"What's he say on the run, Jim, h'm?"

"He ain't talkative," Dahleen answered shortly.

"What the hell!" growled the master mechanic deep in his throat, to conceal his emotion. " 'Tain't doing him any good going up there afternoons. God knows it's natural enough, but 'tain't doing him any good, not a mite—nor them neither, as far as I can see, h'm? You got to *make* him talk, Jim. Wake him up."

"Why don't *you* talk to him?" demanded the fireman.

"H'm, yes. So I will. I sure will," Regan answered.

And he meant to, meant to honestly. But, somehow, Coogan's eyes and Coogan's face said "no" to him as they did to every other man, and as the days passed, almost a month of them, Regan shook his head, perplexed and troubled, for he was fond of Coogan.

Then, one night, it happened.

Regan and Carleton were alone over their pedro at headquarters, except for Spence, the dispatcher, in the next room. It was getting close on to eleven-thirty. The Imperial Limited, westbound, with Coogan in the cab, had pulled out on time an hour and a half before. The game was lagging, and, as usual, the conversation had got around to the engineer, introduced, as it always was, by the master mechanic.

"I sure don't know what to do for the boy," said he. "I'd like to do something. Talking don't amount to anything, does it, h'm—even if you *can* talk. I can't talk to him, what?"

"A man's got to work a thing like that out for himself, Tommy," Carleton answered, "and it takes time. That's the only thing that will ever help him—time. I know you're pretty fond of Coogan, even more than the rest of us, and that's saying a good deal, but you're thinking too much about it yourself."

Regan shook his head.

"I can't help it, Carleton. It's got *me*. Time, and that sort of thing, may be all right, but it ain't very promising when a man broods the way he does. I ain't superstitious or anything like that, but I've a feeling I can't just explain that somehow something's going to break. Kind of premonition. Ever have

anything like that? It gets on your mind and you can't shake it off. It's on me to-night worse than it's ever been."

"Nonsense," Carleton laughed. "Premonitions are out of date, because they've been traced back to their origin. Out here, I should say it was a case of too much of Dutchy's lunch-counter pie. You ought to diet anyway, Tommy, you're getting too fat. Hand over that fine-cut of yours, I——"

He stopped as a sharp cry came from the dispatcher's room, followed by an instant's silence; then the crash of a chair sounded as, hastily pushed back, it fell to the floor. Quick steps echoed across the room, and the next moment Spence, with a white face and holding a sheet of tissue in his hand, burst in upon them.

Carleton sprang to his feet.

"What's the matter, Spence?" he demanded sharply.

"Number One," the dispatcher jerked out, and extended the sheet on which he had scribbled the message as it came in off the sounder.

Carleton snatched the paper, and Regan, leaping from his chair, looked over the super's shoulder.

"Number One, engine 505, jumped track east of switch-back number two on Devil's Slide. Report three known to be killed, others missing. Engineer Coogan and fireman Dahleen both hurt," they read.

Carleton was ever the man of action, and his voice rang hard as chilled steel.

"Clear the line, Spence. Get your relief and wrecker out at once. Wire Dreamer Butte for their wrecker as well, so they can work from both ends. Now then, Tommy—my God, what's the matter with you, are you crazy?"

Regan was leaning over the back of his chair, his face strained, his arm outstretched, finger pointing to the wall.

"I knew it," he muttered hoarsely. "I knew it. That's what it is."

Carleton's eyes travelled from the master mechanic to the wall and back again in amazed bewilderment, then he shook Regan by the shoulder.

"That's what, what is?" he questioned brusquely. "Are you mad, man?"

"The date," whispered Regan, still pointing to where a large single-day calendar with big figures on it hung behind the super's desk. "It's the twenty-eighth."

"I don't know what you mean, Tommy." Carleton's voice was quiet, restrained.

"Mean!" Regan burst out, with a hard laugh. "I don't mean anything, do I? 'Tain't anything to do with it, it's just coincidence, mabbe—and mabbe it's not. *It's a year ago to-night Coogan was married.*"

For a moment Carleton did not speak; like Regan, he stared at the wall.

"You think that——"

"No, I don't"—Regan caught him up roughly—"I don't think anything at all. I only know it's queer, ghastly queer."

Carleton nodded his head slowly. Steps were coming up the stairs. The voice of Flannagan, the wrecking boss, reached them; other voices, excited and loud, joined in. He slapped the master mechanic on the back.

"I don't wonder it caught you, Tommy," he said. "It's almost creepy. But there's no time for that now. Come on."

Regan laughed, the same hard laugh, as he followed the chief into the dispatcher's room.

"East of number two switch-back, eh?" he swore. "If there's any choice for hellishness anywhere on that cursed stretch of track, that's it. My God, it's come, and it's come good and hard—good and hard."

It had. It was a bad mess, a nasty mess—but, like everything else, it might have been worse. Instead of plunging to the right and dropping to the cañon eighteen hundred feet below, the 505 chose the inward side and rammed her nose into the gray mass of rock that made the mountain wall. The wreckers from Dreamer Butte and the wreckers from Big Cloud tell of it to this day. For twenty-four hours they worked and then they dropped—and fresh men took their places. There was no room to work—just the narrow ledge of the right of way on a circular sweep with the jutting cliff of Old Piebald Mountain sticking in between, hiding one of the gangs from the other, and around which the big wrecking cranes groped dangling arms and chains like fishers angling for a bite. It was a mauled and tangled snarl, and the worst of it went over the cañon's edge in pieces, as axes, sledges, wedges, bars and cranes ripped and tore their way to the heart of it. And as they worked, those hard-faced, grimy, sweating men of the wrecking crews, they wondered—wondered that any one had come out of it alive.

Back at headquarters in Big Cloud they wondered at it, too—and they wondered also at the cause. Every one that by any possible chance could

throw any light upon it went on the carpet in the super's office. Everybody testified—everybody except Dahleen, the fireman, and Coogan, the engineer; and they didn't testify because they couldn't. Coogan was in bed with queer, inconsequent words upon his tongue, and a welt across his forehead that had laid bare the bone from eye to the hair-line of his skull; and Dahleen was there also, not so bad, just generally jellied up, but still too bad to talk. And the testimony was of little use.

The tender of switch-back number one reported that the Limited had passed him at perhaps a little greater speed than usual—which was the speed of a man's walk, for trains crawl down the Devil's Slide with fear and caution—but not fast enough to cause him to think anything about it.

Hardy, the conductor, testified. Hardy said it was the "air;" that the train began to slide faster and faster after the first switch-back was passed and that her speed kept on increasing up to the moment that the crash came. He figured that it couldn't be anything else—just the "air"—it wouldn't work and the control of the train was lost. That was all he knew.

And while Regan swore and fumed, Carleton's face set grim and hard—and he waited for Dahleen.

It was a week before the fireman faced Carleton across the super's desk, but when that time came Carleton opened on the other straight from the shoulder; not even a word of sympathy, not so much as "glad to see you're out again," just straight to the point, hard and quick.

"Dahleen," he snapped, "I want to know what happened in the cab that night, and I want a straight story. No other kind of talking will do you any good."

Dahleen's face, white with the pallor of his illness, flushed suddenly red.

"You're jumping a man pretty hard, aren't you, Mr. Carleton?" he said resentfully.

"Maybe I've reason to," replied Carleton. "Well, I'm waiting for that story."

"There is no story that I know of," said Dahleen evenly. "After we passed switch-back number one we lost control of the train—the 'air' wouldn't work."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

"You don't seem to," retorted Dahleen, with a set jaw.

"What did you do to stop her?"

"What I could," said Dahleen, with terse finality.

Carleton sprang to his feet, and his fist crashed down upon the desk.

"You are lying!" he thundered. "That wreck and the lives that are lost are at your door, and if I could prove it—!" He shook his fist at the fireman. "As it is I can only fire you for violation of the rules. I thought at first it was Coogan and that he'd gone off his head a bit; and you are cur enough to let the blame go there if you could, to let me and every other man think so!"

Dahleen's fists clenched, and he took a step forward.

"That's enough!" he cried hoarsely. "Enough from you or any other man!"

Carleton rounded on him more furiously than before.

"I've given you a chance to tell a straight story and you wouldn't. God knows what you did that night. I believe you were fighting drunk. I believe that gash in Coogan's head wasn't from the wreck. If I knew, I'd fix you." He wrenched open a drawer of his desk, whipped out a metal whiskey flask, and shook it before Dahleen's eyes. "*When you were picked up this was in the pocket of your jumper!*"

The color fled from Dahleen's face leaving it whiter than when he had entered the room. He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. All the bluster, all the fight was gone. He stared mutely, a startled, frightened look in his eyes, at the damning evidence in the super's hand.

"Forgotten about it, had you?" Carleton flung out grimly. "Well, have you anything to say?"

Dahleen shook his head.

"Ain't anything *to* say, is there?" His voice was low with just a hint of the former defiance. "It's mine, but you can't *prove* anything. You can't prove I drank it. D'ye think I'd be fool enough to do anything but keep my mouth shut?"

"No; I can't *prove* it." Carleton's voice was deadly cold. "You're out! I'll give you twelve hours to get out of the mountains. The boys, for Coogan's sake alone, if for no other, would tear you to pieces if they knew the story. No one knows it yet but the man who found this in your pocket and myself. I'm not going to tell you again what I think of you—*get out!*"

Dahleen, without a word, swung slowly on his heel and started for the door.

"Wait!" said Carleton suddenly. "Here's a pass East for you. I don't want your blood on my hands, as I would have if Coogan's friends, and that's every last soul out here, got hold of you. You've got twelve hours—after that they'll know—to set Coogan straight."

Dahleen hesitated, came back, took the slip of paper with a mirthless, half-choked laugh, turned again, and the door closed behind him.

Dahleen was out.

Carleton kept his word—twelve hours—and then from the division rose a cry like the cry of savage beasts; but Regan was like a madman.

"Curse him!" he swore bitterly, breaking into a seething torrent of oaths. "What did you let him go for, Carleton? You'd no business to. You should have held him until Coogan could talk, and then we'd have had him."

"Tommy"—Carleton laid his hand quietly on the master mechanic's shoulder—"we're too young out in this country for much law. I don't think Coogan knows, or ever will know again, what happened in the cab that night. The doctors don't seem quite able to call the turn on him themselves, so they've said to you and said to me. But whether he does or not, it doesn't make any difference so far as Dahleen goes. It would have been murder to keep him here. And if Coogan ever can talk he'll never put a mate in bad no matter what the consequences to himself. There's nothing against Dahleen except that he had liquor in his possession while on duty. That's what I fired him for—that's the only story that's gone out of this office. You and I and the rest are free to put the construction on it that suits us best, and there it ends. If I was wrong to let him go, I was wrong. I did what I thought was right—that's all I can ever do."

"Mabbe," growled Regan, "mabbe; but, damn him, he *ought* to be murdered. I'd like to have had 'em done it! It's that smash on the head put Coogan to the bad. You're right about one thing, I guess, he'll never be the same Coogan again."

And in a way this was so; in another it wasn't. It was not the wound that was to blame, the doctors were positive about that; but Coogan, it was pitifully evident, was not the same. Physically, at the end of a month, he was on his feet and apparently as well as he had ever been in his life; but mentally, somewhere, a cog had slipped. His brain seemed warped and weakened, simple as a child's in its workings; his memory fogged and

dazed, full of indefinite, intangible snatches, vague, indeterminate glimpses of his life before. One thing seemed to cling to him, to predominate, to sway him—the Devil's Slide.

Regan and Carleton talked to him one day in the super's office, trying to guide his thoughts and stimulate his memory.

"You remember you used to drive an engine, don't you, Chick?" asked Carleton.

"Engine?" Coogan nodded. "Yes; on the Devil's Slide."

"The 505," said Regan quickly. "You know the old 505?"

Coogan shook his head.

Carleton tried another tack.

"You were in a bad accident, Coogan, one night. You were in the cab of the engine when she went to smash. Do you remember that?"

"The smash was on the Devil's Slide," said Coogan.

"That's it," cried Carleton. "I knew you'd remember."

"They're always there," said Coogan simply, "always there. It is a bad track. I'm a railroad man and I know. It's not properly guarded. I'm going to work there and take care of it."

"Work there?" said Regan, the tears almost in his eyes. "What kind of work? What do you want to do, Chick?"

"Just work there," said Coogan. "Take care of the Devil's Slide."

The super and the master mechanic looked at each other—and averted their eyes. Then they walked back with Coogan up to his mother's, where he had gone to live again after Annie and the little one died.

"He'll never put his finger on a throttle again," said Regan with a choke in his voice, as they came out. "The best man that ever pulled a latch, the best man that ever drew a pay check on the Hill Division. It's hell, Carleton, that's what it is. I don't think he really knew you or me. He don't seem to remember much of anything, though he's natural enough and able enough to take care of himself in all other ways. Just kind of simple-like. It's queer the way that Devil's Slide has got him, what? We can't let him go out there."

"I wonder if he remembers Annie," said Carleton. "I was afraid to ask him. I didn't know what effect it might have. No; we can't let him go out on the Devil's Slide."

But the doctors said yes. They went further and said it was about the only chance he had. The thing was on his mind. It was better to humour him, for that, with the outdoor mountain life, in time might bring him around again.

And so, while Regan growled and swore, and Carleton knitted his brows in perplexed protest, the doctors had their way—and Coogan, Chick Coogan, went to the Devil's Slide. Officially, he was on the pay-roll as a section hand; but Millrae, the section boss, had his own orders.

"Let Coogan alone. Let him do what he likes, only see that he doesn't come to any harm," warned the super.

And Coogan, when Millrae asked him what he wanted to do, answered simply:

"I'm going to take care of the Devil's Slide."

"All right, Chick," the section boss agreed cheerily. "It's up to you. Fire ahead."

At first no one understood, perhaps even at the end no one quite understood—possibly Coogan least of all. He may have done some good—or he may not. In time they came to call him the Guardian of the Devil's Slide—not slightingly, but as strong men talk, defiant of ridicule, with a gruff ring of assertion in their tones that brooked no question.

Up and down, down and up, two miles east, two miles west, Coogan patrolled the Devil's Slide, and never a weakened rail, a sunken tie, a loosened spike escaped him—he may have done some good, or he may not.

He slept here and there in one of the switch-back tender's shanties, moved and governed by no other consideration than fatigue—day and night were as things apart. He ate with them, too; and scrupulously he paid his footing. Twenty-five cents for a meal, twenty-five cents for a bunk, or a blanket on the floor. They took his money because he forced it upon them, furiously angry at a hint of refusal; but mostly the coin would be slipped back unnoticed into the pocket of Coogan's coat—poor men and rough they were, nothing of veneer, nothing of polish, grimy, overalled, horny-fisted toilers, their hearts were big if their purses weren't.

At all hours, in the early dawn, at midday or late afternoon, the train crews and the engine crews on passengers, specials and freights, passed Coogan up and down, always walking with his head bent forward, his eyes fastened on the right of way—passed with a cheery hail and the flirt of a hand from cab, caboose, or the ornate tail of a garish Pullman. And to the

tourists he came to be more of an attraction than the scenic grandeur of the Rockies themselves; they stared from the observation car and listened, with a running fire of wondering comment, as the brass-buttoned, swelled-with-importance, colored porters told the story, until at last to have done the Rockies and have missed the Guardian of the Devil's Slide was to have done them not at all. It was natural enough; anything out of the ordinary ministers to and arouses the public's curiosity. Not very nice, perhaps; no—but natural. The railroad men didn't like it, and that was natural, too; but their feelings or opinions, in the very nature of things, had little effect one way or the other.

Coogan grew neither better nor worse. The months passed, and he grew neither better nor worse. Winter came, and, with the trestle that went out in the big storm that year, Coogan went into Division for the last time, went over the Great Divide, the same simple, broken-minded Coogan that had begun his self-appointed task in the spring—he may have done some good, or he may not. They found him after two or three days, and sent him back to Big Cloud.

"He'd have chosen that himself if he could have chosen," said Carleton soberly. "God knows what the end would have been. The years would have been all alike; he'd never have got his mind back. It's all for the best, what?"

Regan did not answer. Philosophy and the master mechanic's heart did not always measure things alike.

The Brotherhood took charge of the arrangements, and Coogan's funeral was the biggest funeral Big Cloud ever had. Everybody wanted to march, so they held the service late in the afternoon and closed down the shops at half-past four; and the shop hands, from the boss fitter to the water boy, turned out to the last man—and so did everyone else in town.

It was getting dark and already supper time when it was over, but Carleton, who had left some unfinished work on his desk, went back to his office instead of going home. He lighted the lamp, put on the chimney—but the match was still burning between his fingers when the door opened, and a man, with his hat pulled far down over his face, stepped in and closed the door again behind him.

Carleton whirled around, the match dropped to the floor, and he leaned forward over his desk, a hard look settling on his face. The man had pushed back his hat. It was Dahleen, Coogan's fireman, Jim Dahleen.

For a moment neither man spoke. Bitter words rose to Carleton's tongue, but something in the other's face checked and held them back. It was Dahleen who spoke first.

"I heard about Chick—that he'd gone out," he said quietly. "I don't suppose it did him any good, but I kind of had to chip in on the good-by—Chick and me used to be pretty thick. I saw you come down here and I followed you. Don't stare at me like that, you'd have done the same. Have you got that flask yet?"

"Yes," Carleton answered mechanically, and as mechanically produced it from the drawer of his desk.

"Ever examine it particularly?"

"Examine it?"

"I guess that answers my question. I was afraid you might, and I wanted to ask you for it that day only I thought you'd think it mighty funny, refuse, and well—well, get to looking it over on your own hook. Will you give it here for a minute?"

Carleton handed it over silently.

Dahleen took it, pulled off the lower half that served as drinking cup, laid his finger on the inside rim, and returned it to the super.

Carleton moved nearer to the light—then his face paled. *It was Coogan's flask!* The inscription, a little dulled, in fine engraving, was still plain enough. "To Chick from Jim, on the occasion of his wedding." Carleton's hand was trembling as he set it down.

"My God!" he said hoarsely. "It was Coogan who was drunk that night—not you."

"I figured that's the way you'd read it, you or any other railroad man," said Dahleen. "It was him or me; and one of us drunk, in the eyes of any of the boys on the road, from the minute that flask showed up. There was only one thing would have made you believe different, and I couldn't tell you—then. I'd have taken the same stand you did. But you're wrong. Coogan wasn't drunk that night—he never touched a drop. I wouldn't be telling you this now, if he had, would I?"

"Sit down," said Carleton.

Dahleen took the chair beside the desk, and resting his feet on the window-sill stared out at the switch lights twinkling below him.

"Yes, I gave him the flask," he said slowly, as though picking up the thread of a story, "for a wedding present. The day he came back to his run after the little woman and the baby died he had it in his pocket, and he handed it to me. '*I'm afraid of it, Jimmy*,' he said. That was all, just that—only he *looked* at me. Then he got down out of the cab to oil round, me still holding it in my hand for the words kind of hit me—they meant a whole lot. Well, before he came back, I lifted up my seat and chucked it down in the box underneath. I don't want to make a long story of this. You know how he took to brooding. Sometimes he wouldn't say a word from one end of the run to the other. And once in a while he seemed to act a little queer. I didn't think much of it and I didn't say anything to anybody, figuring it would wear off. When we pulled out of Big Cloud the night of the wreck I didn't see anything out of the ordinary about him; I'd kind of got used to him by then, and if there was any difference I didn't notice it. He never said a word all the way out until we hit the summit of the Devil's Slide and started down. I had the fire-box door open and was throwing coal when he says so sudden as almost to make me drop my shovel:

" 'Jimmy, do you know what night this is?'

" 'Sure,' says I, never thinking, 'it's Thursday.'

"He laughed kind of softlike to himself.

" 'It's my wedding night, Jimmy,' he says. 'My wedding night, and we're going to celebrate.'

"The light from the fire-box was full on his face, and he had the queerest look you ever saw on a man. He was white and his eyes were staring, and he was pushing his hand through his hair and rocking in his seat. I was scart. I thought for a minute he was going to faint. And then I remembered that whiskey and jumped for my side of the cab, opened the seat and snatched it up. I went back to him with it in my hand. I don't think he ever saw it—I know he didn't. He was laughing that soft laugh again, kind of as though he was crooning, and he reached out his hand and pushed me away.

" 'We're going to celebrate, Jimmy,' says he again. 'We're going to celebrate. It's my wedding night.'

"I felt the speed quicken a bit; we were on the Slide then, you know, and I saw his fingers tightening on the throttle. Then it got me, and my heart went into my mouth—Chick was clean off his head. I slipped the flask into my pocket, and tried to coax his hands away from the throttle.

“ ‘Let me take her a spell, Chick,’ says I, thinking my best chance was to humour him.

“He threw me off like I was a plaything. Then I tried to pull him away, and he smashed me one between the eyes and sent me to the floor. All the time we was going faster and faster. I tackled him again, but I might as well have been a baby, and then—then—well, that wound in his head came from a long-handled union-wrench I grabbed out of the tool box. He went down like a felled ox—but it was too late. Before I could reach a lever we were in splinters.”

Dahleen stopped. Carleton never stirred; he was leaning forward, his elbows on his desk, his chin in his hands, his face strained, eyes intently fastened on the other.

Dahleen fumbled a second with his watch chain, twisting it around his fingers, then he went on:

“While I was laid up, I turned the thing over in my mind pretty often, long before the doctors thought I knew my own name again, and I figured that, if it was ever known, Coogan was down and out for fair, no matter even if when he got better his head turned out all right again, because he wouldn’t be ever trusted in a cab under any circumstances, you understand? If he didn’t come out straight, why that ended it, of course; but I had it in my mind that it was only what they call a temporary aberration. I couldn’t queer him if that was all, could I? So I said to myself, ‘Jimmy, all you know is that the “air” wouldn’t work.’ That’s what I told you that day; and then you sprang that flask on me. You were right, I *had* forgotten it. Whiskey in the cab on the night of an accident is pretty near an open and shut game. It was him or me; and I couldn’t tell you the story then without doing Coogan cold, but Coogan’s gone now and it can’t hurt him. That’s all.”

The tick of the clock on the wall, the click of the sounder from the dispatcher’s room next door were the only sounds for a long minute, then Carleton’s chair scraped, and he stood up and put out his hand.

“Dahleen,” he said huskily, “I’d give a good deal to be as white a man as you are.”

Dahleen shook his head.

“Any one would have done it for Coogan,” he said.

—III—

CORRIGAN'S BEST

THERE'S a man who sits up on a high stool behind the wicket in the Big Cloud shops and hands out the brass time-checks to the men as they file by, and he hasn't got any legs below the knees. He has kind of light, thinnish hair of no particular color, a round perky face, guileless blue eyes, and he can lie like the devil. His name is Corrigan.

No; he wasn't always like that—that is, as to the legs. He had one sound one and one wooden one when he came to the Hill Division from somewhere down East. But that never handicapped him any with his tongue. The men of the West had something of a reputation when it came to throwing a bluff or two themselves, and, to be confidentially frank, they rather prided themselves on their proficiency in that regard; but Corrigan, from the start, was so magnificently and immeasurably their superior that they labelled him, ignoring art, just a plain double-jawed liar.

"Bluff?" said Tommy Regan to Carleton one day soon after Corrigan's advent. "Bluff? He'd bluff the wooden smokes out of the wooden hand of a wooden cigar store Indian, if he could; and if he were dead he'd try to bluff you into believing he was only asleep."

"And he bluffed you into giving him an engine," said the super, with a grin.

"He had a Brotherhood 'card' and only one leg," said the fat little master mechanic reminiscently. "He didn't bluff me! He knows an engine; and Gleason says he never had anything like the yard work he's getting now. I'd kind of like to know where he came from, though—what? He don't talk much about that."

That was just it—Regan had expressed the feelings of the yard crews and the roundhouse crowd and Big Cloud generally. The "card" that Corrigan carried showed he'd pulled a throttle back East on the K. & T.—but apart from the K. & T. what?

Corrigan didn't say—concretely. In an elusive sort of a way he conveyed the impression that he had seen a good deal of the country from the cab glass; but when it came to definite locations there was a baffling mistiness

about his descriptions, and he side-stepped the personal equation with a neatness that was little less than suspicious.

Now it is human nature the world over that no man, or aggregation of men, take kindly to the belittling of personal ideals, and it is equally true that nothing will pique the curiosity more than a hint of the mysterious; combined, the two account for the way Corrigan fitted at first—or didn't fit, if you like that better—into the general scheme of things at Big Cloud. Corrigan, as occasions presented themselves, with a calm and arrogant plausibility that made them writhe, pointing his remarks with his wooden leg, which he unstrapped and took off because he said the blamed thing had rheumatism in it, regaled his new mates with experiences that caused the young traditions of the Hill Division to become poverty-stricken by way of contrast, made railroading in the Rockies look like a disqualified training school for the real goods in the Alleghanies, their loosened glaciers and ensuing snow-slides puerile compared with the tornadoes of the Desert Country, and their mountain floods and washouts but pitiful counterfeits of the genuine brand. All this and very much more, Corrigan did in his first two weeks; and, in those two weeks he got himself in bad. After that, though they continued to discuss him hard enough amongst themselves all the time, they let him more or less alone for a while, then they switched around a bit, and then they switched back, and then—but that's over-running the siding against "holding" orders.

Regan stuck up for him because the joy of Regan's heart was a good engineer—and Corrigan, one leg and all, was the best man that had ever shot the foreshortened little switcher up and down the yard spurs.

"He's a wizard on the latch," said Regan, with a scowl at Clarihue, the turner, who sided with the men. "If you let him pull your leg and then get sore about it, that's your own lookout. You act like kids."

"Mabbe we do," retorted Clarihue, none too graciously; "but you look out he don't pull yours. You mark my words, there's more behind him than appears on the surface. You'll see. When a man has something to hide he either shuts up like a clam, or overdoes it the other way. You'll see."

And Regan saw—a little bit—about a month later. And the way of it was this:

Down East they had begun to sit up and take notice of the Hill Division—that is, the big operators and the officials of other roads had. Cutting the Rockies, from an experiment, as they had pityingly regarded it with their tongues in their cheeks, and their hands in their pockets ready to snap up the

Transcontinental from a sure-thing receivership, was now, instead, looming large in the eyes of the effete East as an object lesson in real railroading, and one that was not only a triumph of genius over obstacles appalling, but was likewise a triumph of economical operating. The directors of the Transcontinental, wise in the ways of men, and looking to tide-water connections and through freight contracts, seized the psychological moment to send out a carefully selected list of invitations for an observation run through the Rockies.

It was accepted greedily; the Hill Division was brushed up and house-cleaned till it fairly shone, and the morning the Special pulled into Big Cloud there wasn't so much as a fly speck on a semaphore arm.

Of course, headquarters went in head down doing the honors, for the Special was to lay off there for a couple of hours and be "shown 'round." And Regan, for his share, with a group of the Big Fellows in tow, some with tall hats and a generous section of the California gold fields decorating their waistcoats, others with any old kind of a hat and mighty little side, started across the yards from the platform, heading for the roundhouse and shops. They got about halfway across when they stopped, while a string of flats, boxes and gondolas, little respecters of persons, rolled impudently by; and, bringing up the rear, pushing them along, coughing hard and spitting viciously, followed the stumpy 403, with Corrigan, peg-leg to the front, hanging in the gangway. As Corrigan's guileless blue eyes swept the group, Regan caught a sudden blank look streak across the engineer's face; but by the time he got around to wondering about it the track was clear and the brood under his wing, crowding forward and firing questions at him at the average rate of five simultaneously, drove everything else temporarily out of his head.

They made an inspection, of the roundhouse and a tour of the shops—and they did it without missing anything. Regan was proud of what he had to show and he showed it all—from the new automatic forges in the blacksmiths' shop to where they were putting gold-leaf numbers on the big passenger fliers. The silk-hatted personages said nice things, and the others made a practical note or two; and by the time the inspection was completed Regan's fat little paunch was swelling with justifiable pride—and his thoughts were far from Corrigan.

As they emerged through the big engine doors onto the upper end of the yards, a hawk-faced member of the party, in slouch hat and an absence of dollar signs about him, fished out a couple of Havanas from his vest pocket and handed one to the master mechanic.

“Great country you’ve got out here,” said he, as they fell behind to light up. “And I guess you fellows are getting into it right. That new-type compound looks good to me.” He blew out a slow and casual curl of blue smoke. “I see you’ve got Corrigan out here to help you,” he remarked.

“H’m?” said Regan faintly, and with the sudden shock of surprise he swallowed an uncomfortable quantity of juice from the slab of black-strap he had tucked away at the back of his mouth to make room for the cigar.

“The chap with one leg you’ve got on the yard switcher,” amplified the other.

“Yes; I know who you mean,” said the master mechanic. “Yes; that’s Corrigan. Yes.”

“Had any trouble with him?” queried he of the hawk-face.

Regan squinted. He was over his surprise now.

“Trouble? No; I haven’t had any trouble with him.”

“Maybe he’s sworn off,” said the other; “if he hasn’t, look out for him when he gets to drinking. I haven’t seen him for over a year now. He used to crook his elbow pretty hard periodically; that’s the way he lost his leg in the Pittsburg yards—fell out of the cab one night, and a flat amputated it as neatly, and a whole lot quicker than a high class surgeon could have done it.”

Regan froze suddenly hard. Whatever curiosity he might have had anent Corrigan, taking away a man’s reputation from under his feet with cool nonchalance wasn’t the way they did things in the mountains. A man made good or he didn’t on his own hand, and the discards weren’t pawed over and faced up.

“Out here,” said Regan curtly, “Corrigan’s record so far as an engineer is good.”

The hawk-faced man, one of the biggest of the Eastern superintendents, and a close second to being the idol in the eyes of his men that “Royal” Carleton was in the eyes of the Hill Division, looked sharply at Regan, then took the cigar slowly from his mouth.

“Of course,” said he, and a quizzical smile flickered for an instant on his lips. “Of course. Er—yes—of course. About that new-type compound now, we’d——”

And there wasn’t anything more said about Corrigan.

The brass-railed, solid mahogany string of Pullmans—the Easterners were getting all the hospitality that the West knew, which was some—departed in due course. Regan, from the platform, with a light in his eyes in which there still lingered a hint of resentment, watched the green markers flutter out of sight up the track; then he looked over at the 403 snorting up and down the choked yards—and then he scratched his head.

"Blast him!" he muttered savagely. "I wish he'd kept his mouth shut! I got enough to do without going around every day smelling Corrigan's breath and making sure his other leg's safe—what?"

That night Regan didn't play his usual game of pedro with the super—Carleton, continuing to do the honors, had gone on with the Special. Regan, in his accustomed chair in the super's office, played solitaire instead. Big Cloud hadn't much to offer in the line of attractions in those days, and so Regan played solitaire. It was about eight o'clock, and he sucked on his brier and growled at a refractory seven-spot that was blocking an otherwise most promising layout, when the door swung open suddenly and Clarihue, bursting in and trailed by a white-faced call-boy who looked scared from the soles of his feet up, sent all thoughts of seven-spot and stalled sequences flying to the winds. Things happen in railroading, and they happen quick—Regan, every inch of him and before anything else, was a railroad man. He spoke first.

"What's wrong?" he demanded sharply.

"Corrigan," said Clarihue shortly. "Didn't I tell you so? He's pickled to the ears and his secret's out—murder."

"What!" gasped Regan, starting to his feet.

"*That's* what," said Clarihue. "MacGonigle got his hand hurt about half an hour ago and had to quit. Forty-three was waiting to be made up and the yard crew yelling for some one to run the switcher, as if we weren't shorter of men than double eagles on a church collection plate. I sent Blubber here to get Corrigan in for a double shift, and he found Corrigan in the Blazing Star Saloon, corned as a lord and turning State's evidence against himself about a row in New York where he'd killed a man and run for it. There's a crowd in there bigger than Sundays, and he's got 'em scared."

Regan mopped at his brow. "Look out for him if he gets to drinking"—he remembered the words of the Eastern superintendent that morning, and he remembered them now very clearly. Then he looked at the call-boy. The Blubber's face still bore eloquent testimony to the fact that something

serious was in the wind; for the Blubber, deeply versed in nickel thrillers and thereby calloused like the rest of his monkey-mates who rode rough-shod in their importance over the engine crews and trainmen in Big Cloud, was not like to be easily moved.

Regan's hat was already on his head. He simply tilted it a little farther over his nose and started for the door.

"We'll see about this," said he brusquely.

He went down the stairs and out on the platform as fast as his stumpy little legs could carry him, Clarihue pacing him; while the disconsolate Blubber, frequently halting and looking after them, picked his way back across the tracks much after the fashion of a wistful puppy that has been sent home by his master—for Clarihue, with a jerk at the youngster's collar accompanied by a significant shove, had pointed the lad's nose roundhousewards.

Up Main Street tore the master mechanic. There was already an overflow meeting on the sidewalk in front of the Blazing Star when he reached it, but into this Regan puffed without ceremony. It was mostly a railroad crowd, for Big Cloud was mostly a railroad town, and the men made a lane for the master mechanic, though they engulfed Clarihue—Clarihue wasn't an official. They simply grinned at Clarihue while he cursed them.

But Regan was little concerned with Clarihue. He got to the swinging doors—swinging no longer, for they were now held back by a thick-packed jam of men, who stood on tiptoes craning their necks into the interior—and here they couldn't make a lane for him any more. But, wriggling, squirming, grunting, Regan wormed his way through. When he got to the far end of the room and into the very restricted space that was clear, his collar was awry, his hat was gone—and so was his temper; which latter wasn't in any sense restored by the sight that confronted him.

Corrigan, crouched forward a little, his face flushed, sat on a chair before one of the small tables, and his eyes, bloodshot now, wild, with a wicked light in them, were far from being the guileless eyes that Regan knew; his leg was unshipped and rested on the table, while his right hand grasped the small end of it bludgeon fashion. Across the table, Smithers, the town marshal, held a bead on Corrigan with a levelled revolver.

Regan scowled fiercely. The railroad men and the civic authority, which was Smithers, had never had their pictures taken together with their arms

affectionately twined about each other's necks, and the prospect of their ever doing so was extremely remote—the marshal, officially, was a legalised necessary evil; personally, he was a lizard, so they called him a lizard —"Lizard" Smithers.

Regan's ire, rising as he had forced his way through the jam, that had had Corrigan for its objective, now promptly switched to Smithers. Corrigan was a railroad man, and a railroad man at the wrong end of a revolver, no matter what the cause when the Lizard held the other end, didn't look good to the master mechanic. Regan never minced his words on any occasion—he didn't mince them now.

"You're a hot sport, Smithers," he flung out, "holding up a one-legged man with a revolver when he's drunk—a hot sport! What's the matter here, h'm? What in the double-barrelled blazes is the matter, h'm?"

Smithers half turned, but kept one wary eye on Corrigan.

"Nothing that calls for any interference from you," he rapped back. "I want this man—for murder."

"Murder! Murder! Rubbish!" roared Regan. "He never murdered a cat."

A hard smile settled on Smither's lips.

"I've got a pretty fair assortment of the facts, the murdered man's name and the rest of it."

"Which you dragged out of him while he was full!" foamed Regan, too hot to notice the trifling inconsistency of this fling with his previous assertion.

"I did," admitted Lizard Smithers complacently; "and he's under arrest. Anything to say about it? He's tried to slam me twice already with that leg of his; and now out he comes and into the jug pronto, a whole skin on him if he knows what's good for him, a hole *in it* if he gets gay. Come on, now!"—this to Corrigan. "Get up, you; and no more monkey shines!"

Regan glanced at the engineer sharply. Corrigan, beyond the question of a doubt, was magnificently primed, and there was a sullen, unlovely look in his eyes that bore corroborative evidence to murder or anything else. Regan swabbed at his brow—the air in the packed saloon was anything but rarefied, and glistening drops stood out on his forehead—then he stepped nearer Smithers. The master mechanic at times was given to mulishness.

"Rubbish!" said he again, but now his voice lacked much of its former ring of conviction. "Rubbish! You're a fool, Smithers; he never murdered a

_____”

“Just like this,” murmured Corrigan, in a slow, dull monotone. “I scrunched in his skull, I did, just like—*this*!” And quick as a lightning stroke Corrigan’s hardwood leg, wielded by both hands, swung an arc over his head and came down with a terrific crash that shattered the somewhat flimsy table-top to pieces—and rose again with a side swing, quite as sudden, that landed full on Lizard Smithers’ wrist.

There was the roar of the exploding gun as it sailed high in air; a wild, chaotic rush of the railroad men for the door; a snarl and a curse from Smithers, as he leaped savagely for the one-legged man; a yell from Regan, as he tried to step between them—and then Corrigan, Smithers, Regan and the table, what there was left of it, rolled in an indiscriminate heap on the floor.

Pete MacGuire, the proprietor, and some of the cooler-headed ones got the human tangle unsnarled after a few minutes’ hard work; and a few minutes after that again, Regan, spluttering mad, watched Corrigan—a wonderful man was Corrigan, for he was no longer belligerent, he was *snoring*—being carried like a limp sack of meal in the direction of the fire-hall, which was likewise the town “jug,” under the escort of Lizard Smithers.

Regan went back to headquarters to his interrupted solitaire.

“Now, who’d have thought that of Corrigan?” he demanded of the seven-spot that still reposed on the top of the pack. “H’m? Who’d have thought it—h’m?”

Regan swept the cards into a pile, picked them up, shuffled them, and began a new game. Halfway through he was again interrupted. Smithers stood in the doorway.

“Well,” growled Regan ungraciously, “what do *you* want?”

Smithers held a slip of paper in his hand.

“I want to send a message,” he said.

“Office closes for private business at six,” announced Regan tersely—he carefully dealt off three cards. “No one here but the night dispatcher.”

“This isn’t private business,” snapped Smithers. “It’s official—and it goes. That’s the law over your lines or any one else’s. And look here, Regan, you may be master mechanic out here, but *I’m* the marshal—let that sink in.

First thing you know, a too lively interest in Corrigan'll end up by you getting yourself into trouble."

The fat little master mechanic pushed back his chair and eyed the other coolly.

"Do you know, Smithers," he drawled at the conclusion of his survey, "I don't like you. I hope you'll never settle down and rear a *family* in Big Cloud. Let's see the message."

Smithers advanced into the room and slapped it down on the table.

Regan picked it up.

"H'm!" said he, and he read it twice.

> Police Headquarters, New York:—Have man in custody, thin hair, blue eyes, wooden leg, name is Corrigan, who confesses to murder of Patrick Murphy on December sixteenth last year in Spiedel's Saloon, East Houston Street. Wire disposition of prisoner.
>
> Smithers Marshal.

"Well?" demanded Smithers.

"Well?" countered Regan.

"Does it go?"

Regan pushed the paper back to Smithers.

"I can't prevent it, can I? It's official and the law—you said it yourself. Donkin'll send it for you."

Regan returned to his cards, and Smithers, with an irritating grunt of triumph that flickered the master mechanic though he pretended not to notice it, swaggered into the dispatchers' room to send his message, and, incidentally, ensconce himself pending a reply.

It was nine o'clock by that time, and about the hour Regan usually had thoughts of bed—but just now Regan had thoughts of Corrigan. It was a bad business. Any railroad man in trouble had the big-hearted master mechanic's sympathy—a one-legged man with a Brotherhood "card" and, moreover, one of his own crew had a double portion of it. So Regan stayed and squirted black-strap juice viciously at the cuspidor, and scowled over the cards, and kept his ear cocked toward the dispatchers' room.

The sending of a message from the Rockies to New York and the receiving of a reply thereto, even a peremptory "rush" message with all the weight and impetus of the majesty of the law behind it that Smithers had importantly insisted upon, is not a matter of minutes, human impatience to the contrary—Smithers kicked his heels for considerably over two hours in the dispatchers' room. In fact, the clock on the super's desk in front of Regan showed 11.43, as the master mechanic, a card poised in air, suddenly sat up and swerved around in his chair. The door of the dispatchers' room giving on the hallway opened and shut softly, and a step, decidedly stealthy, passed in front of his own closed door, and cautiously began to descend the stairs. Regan's under lip shot out, he made two steps of it across the room, jerked his door open and peered out. A bracket lamp at the top of the landing, just over his head, supplied a dim and modest light to the stairway. In this light Regan obtained a single glance of Smithers' back, as the marshal disappeared through the door at the bottom leading to the station platform.

"Lizard!" muttered Regan. "Lizard he is by nature, the sneaking cuss. I suppose he's got his answer, and now Corrigan——"

A choking sound, as of a man struggling for his breath, came suddenly from the room behind him.

Regan whirled around. Bob Donkin, the night dispatcher, his face purple and contorted, holding in his hand a carboned-tissue, swayed in the connecting doorway of the dispatchers' room. Regan sprang for him.

"For Heaven's sake Donkin, what's——"

"Haw!" Donkin exploded in a yell. "Haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" he screamed; and, pushing the tissue weakly into Regan's hand, collapsed on a chair, rolling with laughter.

Regan snatched at the wire, planked it on the table and read it.

> "Smithers, Marshal, Big Cloud:—Congratulations on important capture. Corrigan undoubtedly most blood-thirsty and vindictive man in the country. This is the fifth murder he has committed—on Patrick Murphy. The drinks are on you.
>
> MacHinney, Deputy Commissioner Police."

"Haw!" announced Regan suddenly. "Haw! Haw, haw!"—and his eyes puckered up into little slits and his paunch began to shake. "Haw!" he roared, and the tears began to flow. "Haw!" He grabbed at his sides. "Haw!

Haw, haw! Oh, Lord! Did you see Smithers sneak out? I—here, you Donkin, bang me on the back or I'll choke—*fifth murder*—ouch!"—the bang had proved effective.

Clarihue got the news a few minutes later, as Bob Donkin, at Regan's orders, plugged in on the roundhouse and told the turner to send a couple of men on the jump to the fire-hall and take Corrigan home to bed.

"I'll have no man of mine in the hands of that skunk—what?" enquired Regan of the universe in general.

Clarihue, the turner, got the news—and he told some one else. That "some one else," when he got over the paroxysm it excited, must have passed it on; and, likewise, Bob Donkin, in the odd moments when he wasn't wrestling with meeting points and holding orders, *may* have—but what's the use? Anyway, the division got it, even to the Special that was steaming west deep in the Sierras—and by morning Regan got a telegram.

It was from the hawk-faced, down-East superintendent, and it brought enlightenment to the master mechanic. It was identically what the other had said before—"if Corrigan gets to drinking look out for him"—but it brought enlightenment to the master mechanic.

"He *was* drunk," communed Regan to himself. "There's no doubt about that—*too* drunk to have had his senses about him. He wasn't putting *that* on. It must be just naturally born in him to lie—just naturally born in him, and he can't help it, drunk, sober or asleep."

Regan tilted back his hat, held it with thumb and two fingers, and scratched at the crown of his head with the other two; then he grinned, and then the grin died away and he started for Corrigan—mightily pleased and chuckling inwardly with delight at the one that had been put over on Lizard Smithers though he was, there was still the discipline of the motive power department to be considered.

He found the 403 taking a momentary rest up at the west end of the yards, with Corrigan, to all appearances as fresh as a child from a night of untroubled sleep, leaning from the cab window.

"Corrigan," said he sharply, "come down here!" Regan never believed in rating a man before an audience, in this case Corrigan's fireman. "Come down here. I want to talk to you."

Corrigan stumped through the gangway and hopped to the cinders.

“What I want to talk to you about,” began Regan curtly, “is last night. You were drunk.”

“Well,” said Corrigan guilelessly, “it was in my own time. I came on this morning at seven, same as usual; and I’m here now, ain’t I?”

“H’m-m”—Regan cleared his throat, a little set back by Corrigan’s unexpected defense. “H’m-m—maybe it was; but a man who drinks in his own time, as far as my experience goes, is likely to drink in the company’s—and we haven’t got much use for that kind out here. Get that? This is your first offense—next break you get your time. What started you off?”

“Well,” said Corrigan, “I saw Mr. H. P. Cleever, of the K. & T. with you yesterday, and——”

“Oh!” said Regan. “I see. You figured the showdown might as well be one to a finish, eh? I suppose *he* fired you for drinking.”

“No; he didn’t,” asserted Corrigan. “He never fired me for anything; and if you don’t believe it you can ask him. I got into a little trouble with the authorities about something they called ‘contempt’ and—” Corrigan stopped and blinked.

Regan’s features, in spite of himself, began to expand into a grin.

Corrigan continued to blink.

“I’ve an idea,” supplied Regan, “that the cause of the trouble was one of the Patrick Murphy murders in Spiedel’s Saloon on East Houston Street—what? Well, you’re shaping up for more of it. What the blazes did you do it for?”

“Self defense,” said Corrigan, with impassive face. “I never really meant to kill the man.”

Regan gasped.

“Corrigan,” said he grimly, when he got his breath, “you’re raising my hopes. You’ve done fairly well since you’ve been here, but it comes so natural to you that I’m looking forward to you telling a really *good* one some day. In the meantime, I’m going to tell *you* something. The trouble you got into with the authorities back East is nothing to the trouble you’ve fixed up for yourself out here. You’ve got a different brand of authority to reckon with in Smithers.”

“Smithers?” enquired Corrigan interestedly. “Who is Smithers?”

"Smithers," explained Regan, "is a—h'm! Smithers," he amended, "is the majesty of the law who swallowed your infernal lies last night"—Regan considerately refrained from mentioning that he had swallowed any of them himself—"and wired the New York police for instructions concerning you."

"Oh, him!" said Corrigan. "That's his name, is it?"

"Yes; that's Smithers," said Regan. "Look out for him. He'll be the sorest man in the West before the boys get through with him on account of this, and he'll do you if he can."

Corrigan described a series of aimless circles with his peg-leg in the cinders.

"I used to be pretty good in the ring before I lost my leg," said he reminiscently. "I was thinking of taking it up professionally. I guess I'm pretty fair yet. I ain't afraid of Smithers."

Regan inspected his engineer through puckered eyes.

"I don't doubt you, Corrigan," he announced bluntly. "Anything *you* say goes. And that being the case, and having a fondness for Smithers, I'll have to keep him out of your reach. While MacGonigle's laid up you take the night shift, and I'll put a spare on daytime, understand?"

"Sure," said Corrigan, imperturbably.

"And when MacGonigle gets better," continued Regan, as he turned on his heel, "you keep right along—on the night shift."

Regan picked his way back across the tracks to the station.

"Smithers'd do it," he said to himself. "He's skunk enough to claw a blind man on crutches, let alone a man with a wooden leg, if he got the chance—it's the only kind the white-livered pup *would* tackle without a gun in his hand. Well, I reckon that'll clear the line of all meeting points, anyway."

But therein Regan was wrong.

During the two weeks that followed, Smithers, as cordially regarded by the rest of the railroad men as by the master mechanic, lived a life that was not enviable—the gibes of rough-tongued men are like to be neither delicate nor sparse—they laid themselves out for Smithers. And Smithers, at all times sullen, morose, ugly and moody, grew more so in direct ratio to the gibes. The train crews and the engine crews, the roundhouse men, the shophands and yard gangs, collectively and individually, rubbed it in every

chance they got—and their chances were not a few. Maybe they went too far, farther than they would have gone if they had known what the result would be, for it was only the fun of the thing then; afterwards—but just a minute, the cautionary signals are up.

Corrigan was no longer a mystery to the division—not in any sense. Corrigan's stock went way up. They crowned him then without envy, acknowledging his inborn talent, the genius that was in him and would out. Corrigan could no more refrain from lying than he could stop breathing and live. He was an awe-inspiring, breath-talking liar, nothing else—they had Corrigan right at last!

During those two weeks, thanks to Regan, Corrigan and Smithers did not meet—but the railroad men obligingly acted as a connecting link. They warned Corrigan seriously enough at first, because he was a railroad man, to keep out of Smithers' way, just as Regan had done; and, receiving the same reply that Regan had, for the sake of rubbing it in a little harder, reported Corrigan's claim to pugilistic ability to Smithers, and backed their remarks by offering facetiously to put a pay check or two on the one-legged man. They kept the ball rolling by reporting to Corrigan that Smithers would "fix" him at the first opportunity.

"I used to be pretty good," was Corrigan's invariable response. "I've stood up to most of the big fellows. Of course, my footwork wouldn't be up to what it was then, but I guess I'm pretty good yet—good enough for Smithers."

They winked at one another—they knew Corrigan now; he was just an ornate, classical liar of ability—and proceeded to draw Corrigan out. Corrigan drew—very readily. By the end of a week they stopped winking and looked at each other—they weren't so sure they had Corrigan right after all. Corrigan, pointing his remarks as usual with his unstrapped wooden member whenever he could get an audience, talked pretty straight pugilism—and talked pretty familiarly of every man worth talking about who had been in the game when he was, five years before; before, of course, he had lost his leg. Battles of ring history lived over again before them in minutest detail. Corrigan, too, had an intimate knowledge of the men he talked about—their weight, their reach, their chest expansion, even down to their little personal peculiarities. Corrigan knew them to the last one—and had had the gloves on with most of them.

Not quite so sure of Corrigan, but still suspicious, the men tried to trip him up.

"You fellows make me tired," Corrigan would remark on such occasions. "You think you're a bright lot because you think I don't know you think I'm lying. Well, think once more! If any one of you within ten pounds of my weight wants to put on the mitts for a ten-round go, all you've got to do is to say so and I'll be glad to accommodate you anytime. Do I hear anything?"

Corrigan did not. To fight a man with only one leg was not ethics in the West—even Smithers, for all of Regan's opinion of him, and their own opinions of him, and the jolly business they were trying to throw into him, they didn't hold low enough to do that. They looked at each other, then they looked at Corrigan—who regarded them with bland complacency. But Corrigan was no longer a mystery—he was just a smooth liar; so, to get him on the hip, they sent down East to a sporting journal of reputation to get the inside dope on a selected few of Corrigan's statements. The answer they got dazed them some and jolted them more—*Corrigan had delivered the goods*. After that—there was no disputing facts—even Clarihue, the most skeptical of the lot, conceded that Corrigan was an authority on ring matters. They didn't try to trip Corrigan up any more, but they kept him talking pugilism—which is an interesting subject to the majority of men anyhow—because what he had to say was the real thing and worth listening to.

As for Smithers, in view of what happened, perhaps there are extenuating circumstances. An unlovely disposition he had, there is no doubt about that—but he was never given a chance to forget Patrick Murphy and Spiedel's Saloon and the New York Deputy Commissioner of Police or Corrigan. However—

The shops at Big Cloud at this time weren't the shops they were afterwards—they lacked capacity, and lacked it sadly. A little extra pressure on the motive power department was more than they were able to cope with in a ten-hour stretch; and as, according to Regan, there was always some blamed pressure somewhere, the shops for about six months out of every year did twenty-hour stunts instead of ten—they worked nights. They were working nights when Corrigan, due to the master mechanic's solicitude on his behalf, took the night shift on the yard switcher.

As a matter of fact, that is where Corrigan's audience came from, or, to be more accurate, where he found his audience. Under ordinary traffic conditions in those days, everything would be pretty well cleaned up by 11.30, and there was a lull in the yard work for an hour or so around that time, waiting for Number Sixty-nine, the early morning westbound fast freight, due at 12.25 to pull in for "sorting." So at 11.30, or thereabouts, Corrigan would run the 403 up the spur by the fitting-shop, take his grub

pail, go into the shops and eat his midnight supper. It worked out so as to suit Corrigan just right—he ate while the men worked; by the time he was through it was generally twelve o'clock and the men ate while he had a half-hour on his hands.

It was a little earlier than usual, about ten minutes to twelve, on the Friday night, two nights after the two weeks since that night in the Blazing Star Saloon, when Corrigan, having finished his meal on one of the fitter's benches, strolled down into the machine shop where the boys, as usual, would congregate as soon as the midnight whistle blew. He passed the little iron turntable that intersected the handcar tracks where they led out to the side doors, and stopped just beyond by the big, high-powered, many-geared lathe, upon which a huge driver was revolving slowly, for a preliminary chat with Meegan, the lathe machinist. Meegan, however, had evidently left his machine for the moment, as he wasn't in sight. Corrigan sat down on an axle-box that happened to be handy, and mechanically, preparing to point his remarks as usual, started to loosen the straps of his wooden appendage as he glanced about him, and waited.

Up the shops, jacked high toward the ceiling, black and shadowy in the light from oil lamps that did not light the shops any too well, loomed the shapes of the monster mountain racers, stripped now to bare boiler shells, and from which echoed the incessant clang, clang of hammers; immediately around him was the whir of shafting, the dull roar of flying machinery, the forms of men dotted here and there, bending over shapers, millers, planers, lathes.

The side door opened and banged shut again. Corrigan slewed around on the axle-box for a casual glance—and the glance became fixed. A figure, with a suspicious, wavering, unsteady stride, came toward him. By the time Corrigan was on his feet, the figure's face wasn't more than a quarter of an inch from Corrigan's nose.

It was Smithers. Smithers—just tipsy enough to unload the accumulated rancour of two weeks on the cause of it in any old way, and just tipsy enough to have his mind set on that and nothing else. Some of the boys saw Smithers, too, and saw trouble coming; but they hung back for a minute to see a little scientific exhibition from Corrigan. Not that they meant to let the two fight—science or no science, it was too uneven a thing for that; and rather than see Corrigan mauled they would have dumped Lizard Smithers in an engine pit and turned the live steam on him. But to hold back just for a minute to see Corrigan handle his fists—the temptation was too great. They held back—too long.

Corrigan's practical grasp and knowledge of the manly art was amazing—in a negative sense. He was game enough, but that was the only fundamental of ring craftsmanship that he possessed. He received a wallop on the right eye that was not a gentle tap, and a swipe on the left jaw that sent his head back; and the while his arms flew around with the erratic motion of a main-rod amuck, and he wobbled much after the fashion of a chicken with its head cut off. Corrigan, beyond all peradventure of dispute, was not a boxer—Corrigan's stock as an eloquent liar soared again.

It happened quick. Smithers was snarling mad. He wasn't scientific, either—just vicious. His first blow landed on Corrigan's right eye, his second on Corrigan's left jaw, and his third on Corrigan's peg-leg—he kicked at it, and the kick was effective. Corrigan had been fiddling with the straps. The peg-leg sailed five yards up the shop before it touched the ground as it flew from under Corrigan, ricochetted another ten—and rolled into an engine pit in the fitting shop.

Corrigan lurched forward like a cannon ball, and his arms locked wildly around Lizard Smithers' neck. Smithers was none too steady on his own feet—he reeled from the sudden impact. For a half-second the two, close hugged together, tottered and swayed; then Smithers heaved Corrigan off, and they both went down, breaking apart—Smithers sliding to the ground with his back against the big lathe—Corrigan at Smithers' feet flat on his back on the floor.

It happened quick—quick as the winking of an eye. Smithers' coat caught near the collar; there was a rip of rending cloth, a horrid jerk of the man's shoulders, and Smithers' head was being drawn *down and inward*. A scream of terror rang from Smithers' lips. A second, a fraction of a second, and Smithers' head would be crushed like an eggshell between the ponderous driver on the chuck and the end base of the lathe. There wasn't time; there wasn't *any* time—the time it would take the nearest man, a few yards away, to jump forward and stop the machine spanned more than Smithers had to spare between himself and eternity.

There was one chance—just one—Corrigan. In a lightning flash Corrigan's brain sensed it all—and a cold hand seemed to clutch at his heart and stop its beat. It was a choice of death for Smithers, or almost worse than death for himself—*and the choice was up to him*. There was no other way. It was up to him. He closed his teeth—and jammed the only foot he had into the gears.

There was a sickening crunch; the screech of the slipping belt; a jar, a shudder that seemed almost human racked the big machine to stillness—and Corrigan, with pinioned, mangled foot, with white face and closed eyes, lay very quiet.

Whether Smithers was hurt or not, no one ever knew. Sometime between when the men were sending hurry calls for Doctor McTurk, the company surgeon, and applying what they knew themselves of "first aid" principles, Smithers disappeared—from Big Cloud.

They knocked a few boards together, and on this improvised stretcher, after the doctor and Regan reached the scene, they carried Corrigan across the yards and up Main Street to his boarding house. There, they hung around outside waiting for news. Regan, who had gone in with Doctor McTurk, came out after a little while.

"The doc's going to amputate—at the knee," he said curtly.

Clarihue voiced the sentiments of the men.

"The boys are feeling bad about it," he said. "Some of 'em say they saw Smithers come in and that they could have run him out before he got near Corrigan, only they wanted to see how good Corrigan really was."

Regan smiled grimly.

"He is the best ever," he said, and pulled a paper-covered book from his pocket which he handed to Clarihue. "We found it when we undressed him," he explained.

Clarihue took the book and looked at it—and passed it on. The men looked at it—and started silently back toward the shops. It was a recent issue from a well-known sporting-goods house, and entitled: *Ring Generals I Have Known*.

That night Doctor McTurk amputated, and for a few days it was touch and go with Corrigan. Then he began to mend; and as soon as he was convalescent enough to see any one Regan and Carleton dropped in to cheer him up.

"Corrigan," said the master mechanic with bluff heartiness, when they had shaken hands all around, "we just came in to tell you what we all think of you. Speaking for myself, I'm free to say I'd never have done what you did for Lizard Smithers, even if I'd had the nerve to do it for any man—which I know blamed well I haven't. You did a fine thing, Corrigan—one of the finest things I ever heard of."

Corrigan raised his head from the pillow, and fixed his guileless blue eyes on the master mechanic.

"No," he said soberly; "there's no medal coming to me for what I did, Regan."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Regan, a little hoarse with emotion. "I guess there is—about a bushel of 'em."

Corrigan shook his head.

"Look here, Regan," he said confidentially, "I might as well tell you something. I made a mistake."

"You made a what?" enquired Regan.

"A mistake," repeated Corrigan. "You see, it was like this. In the excitement and everything I must have got all muddled up, and lost my head, and forgot for the minute that my other leg was gone. Anyway, you can understand how it might happen. I had the idea in my nut that it was my *wooden* leg I was shoving into them gears—or I wouldn't have done it."

Corrigan laid his head gently back on the pillow.

Regan, with dropped jaw, stared for a moment, and then he kind of choked, and then he touched Carleton on the arm—and, with one accord, the two men in awed and reverent silence tiptoed from the room.

Outside the door, Carleton rammed a charge into his brier.

"Well, what do you think of that!" he ejaculated.

"Think?" said Regan gruffly. "I think it's the best he ever told, and that he's a finer liar and a bigger man than ever I did before; and I think he won't be able to drive an engine, or do much of any other blamed kind of a thing again."

"No," agreed Carleton absently. "No; he won't be able to drive an engine again."

"H'm-m," remarked Regan reflectively.

And so there's a man who sits up on a high stool behind the wicket in the Big Cloud shops and hands out the brass time-checks to the men as they file by, and he hasn't got any legs below the knees. He has kind of light, thinnish hair of no particular color, a round perky face, guileless blue eyes, and he can lie like the devil. His name is Corrigan.

—IV—

THE HOBO

The biggest thing about Budd Masters was his family; and the next biggest thing was his heart. Tommy Regan used to say that the only way you could figure out how Masters kept tabs on his brood would be by a sort of circulating-library, card-index system arrangement; and Regan wasn't exaggerating so much at that, either, for, to an outside, impartial observer, the kids all seemed to look alike, except in size. They started with Budd, junior, aged twelve, and worked down regularly; or, if you like it better, they started with Sadie Elizabeth Anne Masters, aged two months, and worked up regularly. About three inches difference in height all the way along. How many? Regan said about half the population of the United States; but Budd said eleven, and Budd ought to have known.

Nobody held Budd's family up against him; not even the tradesmen among whom Budd used to divide his pay check the best way he could, after sitting up for a night or two every time the pay car came along trying to make twice four equal nine so that it would go around and square everybody. Budd wasn't mathematician enough for that, though. It wouldn't go around. He always owed, but sooner or later he always paid. And he was always paying!—the mountain air at Big Cloud never seemed to spoil the appetites of any of the young, lusty tribe that swung on Masters' front gate, and mobbed the engineer with the enthusiasm of a football rush every time, in from a run, he came up the street toward his home swinging his dinner-pail.

Everybody liked Budd Masters—who wouldn't! Anybody in trouble? Budd Masters; that was the answer. A railroad man hurt and a paper going around for the wife? The man who sold Budd Masters his flour and dried peas had to go shy an extra dollar or two for an extra month or two—and the flour-and-pea chap never kicked.

Budd wasn't much to look at physically, but every way else on the Hill Division, officially and otherwise, he stood high. Budd, professionally, at the throttle, was like a dog with a bone in its teeth—there was nothing to it but the throttle. In every inch of his squat, short, stumpy little figure, that used to walk with a sort of rolling motion from long years in the cab, he was an engineer from the ground up.

That was Budd Masters. As for Scharff—Scharff was a black sheep. At least that's the way he was rated among the train crews. Joe Scharff was about as unpopular as Budd Masters wasn't—which is putting the whole thing in a nutshell. They never really had anything on Scharff—the big, cunning-faced, pig-eyed conductor was too cute for that—but he had the reputation of being a spotter, though there wasn't a man on the division who would have put it past Scharff to lift a fare or two himself; in fact, they put him down as a past master at the game. Joe Scharff wasn't popular—and that's putting it mildly! Take him at his best, he was a nasty-tempered brute, hard-tongued and heavy-fisted. And the trouble with Scharff was that he was big enough in bulk to be heavy-fisted without needing any courage for it in most instances—he stood just a shade over six feet without his boots on.

It seemed a sort of ironical, incongruous combination, Budd Masters and Joe Scharff on the Fast Mail, No. 14 or No. 15, whichever it happened to be, east or west! But the two got along fairly well, because Masters, outside of routine business on a run, wouldn't have anything to do with his conductor; and because Scharff knew well enough that any trouble with the engineer would bring him head on to more trouble by way of good measure with Regan, who held by Budd Masters as a matter of religion, and likewise because, on top of that, Budd Masters was a good man to run with, whose performances with the Fast Mail wouldn't hurt any conductor's chances when promotion was going around, and——

But there go the cautionaries down, and the block ahead is clear; over she goes to the forward notch of the segment, an easy pull on the throttle to feel her, another a little wider, then the purr of awakened steam, the quickening throb of the exhaust, the breath of the wind singing in through the cab glass—and we're off.

It was a pitch-black night in the late fall, no snow, but freezing hard, as Budd Masters slowed the Fast Mail, eastbound, for the water tank at the foot of the Devil's Slide. The big racers drink heavy on the mountain grades, and, here and there, where no other thing is, a water tank is strewn along the right of way for their refreshment—there was no other thing here but a water tank.

Pete Leroy was handling the shovel end of it that night in the cab, and he was back up on the tender and had the spout down almost before Budd Masters, with a nicety of precision, had his train stopped where the spout could do business from the word "go." The Fast Mail didn't have any time to throw away jockeying for position, and Budd Masters wasn't the man to throw it, anyhow, in that or any other kind of way. Almost as quick as his

fireman to the back of the tender, the engineer had swung through the gangway and jumped to the ground for an oil around.

With the torch in his hand winking like a gigantic firefly in the darkness as he jabbed it in and out of the entrails of the big machine, Masters poked here and there with his long-spouted oil can—and, disinterestedly, out of the corner of his eye, caught sight of Scharff's green lamp coming up along the track toward the forward cars. Budd felt the driver's axles solicitously with the back of his hand as he moved along; and then, leaning in over the rod, torch, oil can, and half his body disappeared from sight as he gave his attention to the motion gear—but all three came into sight again the next instant with a sudden jerk and he flung the torch up above his head to gaze back along the track, as a bull-like roar from the conductor followed by a sort of half-frightened, half-piteous cry in another voice reached him.

Scharff's voice rose again, in a steady stream of profanity now, intermingled with the sound of a scuffle from the direction of the front-end of the baggage car—but the only man Masters could see was his fireman in dark outline up on the rear of the tender.

Then he heard his fireman's voice in a contemptuous, threatening snarl:

"Aw, let him alone, you big stiff!"

Budd Masters started on the jump for the scene of the disturbance, though there wasn't much doubt in his mind as to the cause of it—Scharff had probably caught a hobo beating his way, that was all.

There was light enough to see without the aid of the conductor's lantern, which, hooked on Scharff's arm, was joggling crazily up and down with every movement of the man's body, for Masters' torch, between the tender and the front-end of the baggage car, made lurid daylight. Scharff was on the lower step, and under him, head and body sprawled back on the car platform, was another form. Masters caught a glimpse of the white, half-starved face of a young fellow, hardly more than a boy—not more than nineteen or twenty at the outside—and as he looked, before he could lift a finger, Scharff sprang off the step, snatched hold of the other by the ankles and yanked the boy viciously to the ground. It was a brutal act. There was a good two and a half feet to the ties, and the lad's head, striking the lower step, sort of ricochetted off, and the body huddled inertly almost at Budd Masters' feet.

Something seemed to shoot blood red, in a flash, before the little engineer's eyes; the torch and oil can dropped from his hands—and, with a

spring, he was on the conductor like an infuriated wild cat.

With the impact both men lost their balance. The roadbed was raised a little, and down into the hollow they rolled. Crash! went the lantern on Scharff's arm, shivered to splinters; but Masters was on top, and his fist drove smashing straight between the conductor's eyes. It was the only blow he got in. Scharff was twice his size, and Scharff, in a hell of fury now, flung Masters over, got the engineer down, got his knees on the engineer's chest—and began to batter a tattoo with his fists on Masters' face.

It wasn't genteel fighting, a long way from it, but it didn't last long—fortunately for the engineer. The first to interfere was the boy, who staggered weakly, or, rather, tried to stagger between the two—but he didn't count. He was swept incontinently and without ceremony out of the way—though not by either Scharff or Masters. With a yell, Pete Leroy leaped from the tender and into the game. Pete was a big man, and nursing the steam gauge on a fast run makes the muscles hard; Pete would have given his right hand for his engineer any time—he gave both hands to Scharff now, and he gave them with his whole heart in the work.

From the baggage and mail cars, attracted by the row, streamed the clerks, express messengers, the baggage man, the news agent, and Scharff's brakemen—but even they didn't succeed in tearing Leroy from the conductor—it was the sudden rush and swish of water gushing from the spout and overflowing in torrents from the tender that did that.

It was a queer sight on the trackside in the blackness, lighted only by the trainmen's lamps. Scharff, with raw, cut face, was bleeding badly and mouthing threats; the boy was sitting on the ground, and Masters, his own face bruised and bleeding, was bending over him; and everybody clustering around all talking at once, including the passengers who were now beginning to straggle out of the cars—while Leroy shut the water off, shot the spout back with a vicious bang, and returned to the scene on the run to renew the interrupted hostilities if provided with half a chance.

Masters tried to lift the boy to his feet, but the boy didn't seem able to walk—and for a moment it looked like another clash as the engineer spoke.

"Here!" he called. "Give me a hand, some of you, to put this fellow in the baggage car. I guess he's right bad, and mabbe a drop or two of something, if any of you have got it, wouldn't do any harm."

"No; you don't!" snapped Scharff sullenly, stepping forward. "You can cut that right out from the start! There's no tramps riding on my train—and

I'm conductor here, and don't you forget it!"

"The boy's sick," said Masters evenly. "H'm! What are you going to do with him—leave him out here all night in the mountains to freeze?"

"I guess it ain't the first time he's been out all night!" sneered Scharff.

"Mabbe not," Masters admitted—but there was a sort of cold uncompromise in the admission. "Only that don't signify what's to be done with him now—what?"

"I don't care what's done with him!" snarled Scharff. "His kind don't ride on my train! They're all alike, the low-lived, broken-down lot of whining curs—he ain't hurt, he's only putting it on." Then suddenly, with a rush of passion: "Blast you, Masters, you can take it from me, I'll teach you to mind your own business before I'm through with this! I'm in charge of this train! You get up there in your cab and go ahead! The tramp don't ride—not this trip!"

"Don't he?" enquired Masters slowly, as though kind of puzzling the matter out. "Don't he?" he repeated softly. Then, almost casually: "Look here, Scharff, I'm going to take this fellow's head, and Pete's going to take his feet, and we're going to put him in the baggage car—and if he ain't there when we get into Big Cloud, Pete and me will pound your face into everlasting pulp! I'll admit it don't sound good for two to pile onto one—but I guess you get the idea, h'm? Pete, take his feet!"

And Leroy took the boy's feet; and the boy, the tramp, the hobo, whatever you like best to call him, went into the baggage car—and stayed in the baggage car until Big Cloud was reached. And the while, MacNicoll, the baggage man, and the express messenger—Nulty was on the run that night—spreading their chair cushions on the floor, ministered to him; and once, when Scharff came into the car, they did a little more than that—they scared the big conductor till the bruises on his face, beginning to purple, went a sickly gray, by telling him that they thought the boy was going to die.

But MacNicoll and Nulty weren't more than half bluffing at that! The boy had got a nasty crack on his head, and wasn't saying much for himself. There wasn't any question but that he was pretty badly hurt, bad enough to give them both a scare or two for their own account without any monkey business about it, before they finally rattled in through the Big Cloud yards. The boy wasn't doing much of any talking, but he told them his name was Prouty—Bert Prouty. MacNicoll asked Prouty where his home was—and knew it was a foolish question when he asked it, but he had a kind of feeling

that it was a sort of last chance of asking any kind of question. Prouty said he hadn't any home—anywhere.

MacNicoll shoved his cap back on his head till the vizor took an acute angle upward from the plane of his forehead, and stared at Nulty.

"What's to be done with him when we get in, I don't know," said he heavily. Then, as though it were an afterthought: "Blamed if I know!"

There weren't any hospital accommodations in those days in the little mountain town that was headquarters, and Nulty sucked on his pipe for a moment, sucked on his pipe thoughtfully before he answered.

"I dunno," said Nulty.

But if there was doubt in the minds of others as to the disposition of Prouty, there was none in the mind of Budd Masters. If there was anybody in Big Cloud who couldn't afford space for a medical ward or the cash to endow it, it was Budd Masters; but MacNicoll, Nulty, and Big Cloud generally, when they came to think it over, told themselves that was exactly what Budd Masters would do—Prouty went up to the engineer's shanty where there wasn't room to walk around the sitting-room table without tripping over a kid or two.

Where did they put him? Leave it to a woman. Mrs. Masters was regal—not in style, not in dress—just regal. Just a woman, hard worked, with a tender light in her eyes that always kept trying to hide the weariness she couldn't keep nature from putting there. The boy was hurt, wasn't he? Well, that was enough for Mrs. Masters. Little Doctor McTurk took his hat off when Carleton and Regan spoke to him about it; took his hat off and scowled fiercely in that way of his he had of doing when emotion, especially of the gentler sort, a tendency to which he would admit not at all, threatened on occasions to get the better of him.

"God bless that woman!" said he fervently.

"Kind of got used to making room for one more after getting the habit for eleven years without a break, I guess," said Regan quietly.

Carleton, tilted back in his swivel chair, biting on the amber mouthpiece of his brier, smiled softly.

"How's the boy doing?" demanded Regan.

"No strength," said Doctor McTurk. "He's been half starved. Pull him around after a while—maybe."

"H'm!" observed Regan reflectively.

And that was all that was said about it in the super's office—not a word about Scharff.

No; the trouble that Scharff promised didn't come—not then. Whether it was that he was too thoroughly scared, or had wit enough not to go up against a tide of public opinion that would have swamped him, only Scharff knew; but there wasn't any official recognition taken of the episode—he didn't ask for any!

Scharff got the train master, to let him change runs with one of the Limited's conductors—and silently nursed the black blood in his heart. But, though he could keep his own mouth shut, he couldn't gag the division—and there was some pretty plain talk thrown his way by those rough and ready railroaders of the Rockies, who weren't in the habit of mincing words or the way they used them when it came to expressing their feelings; enough to have caused a man, built in a different mold from Scharff, to pull up stakes and apply for a punch on some other road, but with Scharff, outwardly, it didn't get under the skin.

"It's orders, ain't it!" he would growl at whoever came at him. "Well, then, what's the matter with you? I'll throw any hobo off I catch riding on my train. Forget it! It's orders, ain't it?"

Outwardly it didn't seem to affect him any more than that—but inwardly with the days, and there were some days when he ran into a good deal of that kind of talk, the black blood grew blacker, and Scharff began to live to even the score that, rankling, grew ever larger against Budd Masters and the boy. Everything comes to him who waits, they say—and Scharff hugged that old adage to his heart.

Thanks to Mrs. Masters' motherly care, Doctor McTurk's prescriptions, and Budd Masters, who did what he could when he was off duty, Prouty mended rapidly; and by the time their anxiety began to lull and the color began to come back to Prouty's face, curiosity took a hand and prompted them to get something of an idea of what the boy looked like. But not one of the jury, prejudiced in his favor though they were, put Prouty down in the handsome class—big ears, big mouth, big nose, kind of scraggly black hair that would stay anywhere except where you brushed it, and eyes that had a habit of drooping until you didn't know whether they were looking at you or not, was about the way Prouty sized up; and all this sort of topping a stunted growth—Prouty, to give him, perhaps, a shade more than his due, went about five feet five.

Prouty seemed a quiet, reticent sort of a chap, not much addicted to talk, even when he got around enough to where he was able to talk. But he told Budd Masters that he had beaten his way pretty nearly all over the United States and back again. He told Masters that much—and guessed that was probably what he'd do when he got on his feet again. Budd Masters thought it over a bit in the way Budd Masters always thought that sort of thing over, guessed a little differently from the way Prouty guessed, and, without saying anything to Prouty about it, put it up to the master mechanic.

"He's too young to get wrecked like that," said the engineer to Tommy Regan. "Ain't no more than his pony truck jumped the rails so far, but it won't take long for the rest to follow and spill him in the ditch—he needs jacking back onto the right of way, and a start off again with a clear permit. I dunno how long he's going to be sick, but he ain't going to be sick forever, and I'd like to tell him there's a job waiting for him when he gets around again—h'm! Think it'll chirp him up, too. What do you say, Regan?"

Regan would have said "Yes" under any circumstances to most anything Budd Masters asked for, but the "Yes" came more readily now than usual. Regan wanted men for jobs harder than men wanted jobs. Things were booming on the Hill Division. Extra freights, extra specials, and extra everything were the order of the day; men were scarce, spare men became regulars and got their systems full of it, firemen moved to the coveted throttles, and wipers went up to the left-hand side of the cabs—promotion was coming thick and fast. Everything was sizzling, and the motive power department which, concretely, was Tommy Regan, was getting more than its share of it.

"Sure—yes," Regan said. "Roundhouse—as soon as he gets out."

Budd Masters went home to tell the good news to Prouty, looking to see Prouty's face light up—and, instead, Budd Masters' own face dropped.

Prouty said: "No."

"Why?" asked Masters.

And Prouty gave a woman's reason.

"Because," he said.

Masters talked to him, talked to him for a long time, smiling while he talked, his hand on Prouty's arm; no high-flown sentiments or goody-goody business about it, nothing like that, just plain, homely words, the way the engineer felt—a steady job and a pay check every month, and friends around, and playing the game the best you knew how.

“That’s a blamed sight better than ’boing it, ain’t it?” submitted Masters.

“Yes,” said Prouty.

“Well, then,” demanded the engineer, thinking he had the argument clinched, “what do you say?”

Prouty was sitting up in a chair then, and his fingers sort of aimlessly traced out the patch Mrs. Masters had found time to darn in the knee of his trousers while he was in bed—he shook his head.

“But why?” insisted Masters.

Prouty looked up kind of quickly, kind of as though he were going to say something—then his eyes dropped to the patch again and held there.

“No,” was all he said, in a low, queer way. “ ’Tain’t no use—I can’t.”

Masters scratched his head uneasily, as he stared at Prouty; but Masters wasn’t the man to give up without a struggle—he tried again, a little more earnestly, if anything, than before—tried several times. He might as well have tried to make a graven image change its mind.

Prouty said “No” once or twice more, growing a little sullen as he said it, without lifting his eyes—and finally Prouty said nothing at all.

Budd Masters was disappointed—a little more than disappointed. In a way, it hurt the big-hearted engineer a good deal. Somehow, he had come to picture making a man of the boy, come to have a natural pride, as it were, in looking forward to seeing Prouty being able to dig his fingers into his vest pocket and find his self-respect there, in helping the lad to get away from the useless, vagrant, dog’s life he led. He had come to think a lot of the lad; he had thought the boy had it in him, and it hurt a good deal, this refusal of the other’s. But the refusal didn’t leave any question as to its finality; there was no shaking Prouty’s determination.

And yet, after all, in spite of that, it was Masters who made a railroad man out of Prouty; but it wasn’t Budd Masters’ tongue that did it—it was Budd Masters’ leg. A bit of ice on the gangway step of the 904 a few nights later, and Budd Masters fell on the ties with his leg under him, snapping the bone.

It’s queer the way things come about! A broken leg in some households wouldn’t be anything more than—a broken leg, as you might say. But up in the engineer’s shanty it was a whole lot more than that—it was a disaster. Budd Masters hadn’t laid anything by—except debts. And with Masters laid up for the length of time it would take for a bone to knit, it looked pretty

black for the family; any one in Big Cloud with half an eye could see that—barring Prouty, of course, who had not been there long enough, or been well enough while he had been there, to have gained much in the shape of intimate knowledge about the ragged edge of the financial precipice on which the Masters were everlastingly scrabbling hard to keep from losing their precarious balance.

Prouty didn't know anything about that end of it. How could he? But everybody else did. In less than no time after the accident had happened down in the yards, and they had got Masters home, and Mrs. Masters had got the children marshalled out in the front yard because there wasn't any other place where they wouldn't be in the way, and Doctor McTurk had got the call that brought him on the run, everybody in Big Cloud was talking about it and wondering what the Masters folks were going to do—all except Prouty.

You know a certain kind of woman—maybe there are a lot of them, maybe they're scarce and there's only a few; but there are *some*—the kind that gush out sympathy, and take pains while they're doing it to let you see the darkest side of everything, seeming to get a morbid pleasure out of it that is pungently unholy. Mrs. MacGonigal, the freight conductor's wife, who lived next door, was one of that kind. She came right in to *sympathise* with Mrs. Masters the moment the doctor left the house.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. MacGonigal to Mrs. Masters, in the latter's kitchen, "misfortunes don't never come singly, do they, now? An' you runnin' behind so with your bills account of that young fellow's sickness that Mr. Masters brought home! An' now here's your old man laid up an' earnin' nothin' for two months to come! Dear, dear, an' all those children's mouths to fill! Whatever will you do? But you must bear up an' make the best of it, Mrs. Masters."

Prouty, in the sitting room, heard her; but he didn't hear Mrs. Masters' reply—he didn't wait for that. He wasn't supposed, according to Doctor McTurk, to move about much for another day or two—but he got up then and walked outside into the yard, and down as far as the front gate. There the children clustered around him, asking him questions about their sick daddy, wanting him to play with them—and then fell back, pouting. They might as well not have been there for all the attention Prouty paid them.

A long time Prouty hung over the front gate, ousting the children from their prerogative, his face a little white, his lips set tightly; and even when he opened the front gate at last and walked out, he did it hesitantly, as though

what seemed like a mental battle going on within him wasn't quite decided —but there wasn't any hanging back once he was fairly started on the way downtown.

From the station, as an abortive starting point, he trailed Regan all over the yards, through the roundhouse and the storekeeper's office, finally running the master mechanic to earth in the fitting-shop.

"You're Mr. Regan, aren't you?" he asked.

"Sure—that's me!" said Regan.

"I'm Prouty," said Prouty quietly. "Budd Masters said you'd give me a job."

Regan, who hadn't heard of Prouty's previous refusal, looked Prouty up and down, nodded, and expectorated his black-strap juice pleasantly into the engine pit that happened to be conveniently at his side.

"All made over again—h'm?" he enquired.

"Yes," said Prouty. "Fine."

"All right, son," said the fat little master mechanic genially. "You can start in wiping in the roundhouse to-morrow morning—I'll let Clarihue know you're coming. Tell Budd I'm blamed sorry he's hurt, will you? I'll be up to smoke a pipe with him."

Prouty went to work in the morning, the next morning, and the mornings after that—and a month went by. They got to like him in the roundhouse, and they didn't guy him any for the strange figure he cut in a borrowed suit of Budd Masters' overalls that were a mile too big for him—why should they? His pay check went to Mrs. Masters.

Rough if you like, those grimy men, their hearts were never set very far "off center," and where they would have guyed another, they didn't guy Bert Prouty. He was quiet almost to the verge of shyness. All day in the roundhouse and straight back to the Masters' house at night, that was his routine—he never showed himself anywhere else. But he stuck to his work and did it well. He looked like a school-boy almost from his height, but as his convalescence merged into perfect health again his strength was the strength of a young bull—and they liked him for that, too.

Tommy Regan began to sit up and take notice of his new hostler. There wasn't anything the matter with Prouty's work, not a thing—Prouty around the roundhouse, grooming up a flyer, didn't get by the master mechanic, who had an eye like a hawk for anything, good, bad, or indifferent, where

his engines, that he loved more than he loved any other thing on earth, were concerned. Regan got to tugging complacently at his scraggly brown moustache every time he saw one of his pet mountain racers, as spick and span as though they were just out of the shops from an overhauling, coming out over the turntable. And when he heard about the pay check—Masters told him—Regan, so to speak, took Prouty right home to his heart.

"Steady as a clock," said the master mechanic to himself. "And takes to an engine like a baby to a rubber ring. I got an idea," said the master mechanic—and chuckled deep down in his throat.

The next morning Prouty went to firing on the day switcher in the yards.

"How's he getting along?" Regan used to ask Matty Sims, the switcher's engineer, every second day or so. "How's he's getting along, Matty?"

"None better," Matty would say ungrudgingly. "He'll do. Takes hold like an old-timer. All he wants is half a chance. It's like he was born to it."

"Guess he was," said the master mechanic heartily. "Guess that's just what he was—born to it. H'm! Give him a clear track, Matty—show him all there is to show. Give him the 'clear' all the way."

"Sure, I will," said Matty Sims earnestly. "Sure, I will!" And he did.

Prouty was making good—fast. But it didn't change his reticence or his routine, didn't change him at all; he never seemed to lose his head over it, or show any inclination to buy a larger-sized hat—and that didn't hurt him any with the Hill Division, either! They began to prophesy things for Prouty—that he'd go up pretty fast—make a record run of it to the top, as it were. And therein the Hill Division, paradoxical as it may sound, was both right and wrong—mostly right, though, according to the way the majority sized it up afterward. Scharff was the only one that disagreed.

Scharff? Scharff was carrying a punch on the Limited now, wasn't he? No; he and Prouty didn't meet—yard switching and a Limited run didn't have much in common. Prouty never said anything about him—sidetracked the conversation, for that matter, every time the conductor's name happened to come up. And Scharff didn't say much, either—it evidently wasn't a pleasant topic for him. He had carried marks on his face for too many days, and heard too much about the cause of them, to hanker about introducing the subject himself—and when the marks went, they went into the black blood in his heart.

Scharff, sullen, ugly, tricky, biding his time, didn't say much, either, even when the news got around to him of the little plan over which the

master mechanic was indulging in anticipatory chuckles, just as it got around to everybody else on the Hill Division, so far as that goes—except Budd Masters and young Prouty, the ones most concerned.

Regan offered it as a sort of consolation prize, so to speak, for the weeks Budd Masters had lain on his back. And the afternoon Budd Masters came back to his run—the Fast Mail, westbound, came in off the Prairie Division at five-forty—there was quite a little crowd around as Clarihue, the turner, ran the 904 out over the turntable, preparatory to backing down and coupling on for the mountain run.

Budd Masters looked around for Pete Leroy, his fireman, but everybody was in sight except Leroy. He blinked all around at the impromptu reception committee again, who were telling him how blamed glad they were to see him back on the job, but he couldn't see Leroy.

"Where's Leroy?" he demanded.

They grinned at him.

"Say," enquired Budd, "what's the joke? You look like a row of Cheshire cats."

From the switching engine, just across a spur, came Regan with the switcher's crew trailing along behind him—Matty Sims and Prouty.

"Hello, Budd!" the master mechanic called out. "What you looking for—lost anything?"

"I'm looking for a fireman," said Masters, a little crossly—it was getting close onto five-forty.

"H'm!" said Regan, kind of as though it were an inspiration on the spur of the moment—and not carrying it off very well. "That so? H'm? A fireman, eh? Well, here, Prouty, suppose you fire for him."

"What!" ejaculated Budd Masters, staring at the master mechanic as though he hadn't heard aright. "Prouty—fire the 904!"

"Well, what the blazes is the matter with Prouty?" grumbled Regan, while his eyes twinkled. "Ain't the cab big enough to hold you both?"

Budd Masters didn't say anything for a moment, then his face began to light up, and he shoved out his hand suddenly to the master mechanic.

"D'ye mean that, Regan—straight?" he asked. "Is that right—d'ye mean it?"

"Well," said Regan, taking Budd's hand with one of his own, and reaching into his hip pocket for his chewing with the other, "you seem so infernally fond of each other that——" And then the crowd laughed.

"By glory!" exclaimed Masters—which was as near to profanity as Masters ever came. "By glory, Regan, you're all right!"

But Bert Prouty hung back.

"Me?" he said. "I—I——"

"Get in there, you blamed idiot!" growled Matty Sims, giving him a friendly push toward the gangway. "Get in there; you've got the chance of your life—and if you don't give him two hundred and ten pounds all the way after the trouble I've taken with you, I'll make you wish you was good and dead when you get back!"

And so the Fast Mail, westbound, pulled out of Big Cloud that evening for the mountain run with Budd Masters and Bert Prouty in the cab. And Tommy Regan—fat, jolly, kindly, big-hearted Tommy Regan—went home chuckling to himself at having had a hand in modelling human destiny a little more along the line of what it ought to be, according to his way of thinking, than it sometimes, oftentimes, was. Well, perhaps he had! Who knows? Only—but we're coming to that in a moment.

There wasn't much said in the cab at first—not a great deal all told, so far as that goes.

For the first hour or so, Budd Masters watched the performances of his new fireman critically and kept his eye pretty constantly on the steam gauge—after that he didn't give it another thought. Prouty sprinkled his coal and nursed his fire as craftily as Pete Leroy or any other man had ever done—Matty Sims had known what he was talking about when he had told Regan that Prouty would do.

With long intervals between, when only the roar of the train and the whistling sweep of the wind held sway, Budd Masters spoke about Regan, told Prouty again what he thought of the way Prouty had acted when he, Masters, was laid up, told him as one man tells another when his heart is full, told him with no more words than were needed to convey his meaning—and spoke of the days to come and the chance Prouty had got for a pretty rosy-looking future.

Prouty was always quiet, and if he were more so than usual that night the engineer didn't notice it—monosyllables were about all Budd Masters in two months' intimacy had come to expect from Prouty, anyhow.

An hour, two hours passed, and they were pretty well in the thick of the mountains. Prouty was hanging out of the gangway, silent, drinking it all in, it seemed—the giant, towering snow-covered slopes with the moonlight beginning to glimmer upon them, now diverging away in a vast, endless, majestic sweep, now converging abruptly into a pitch-black cut where it seemed one could reach out a hand and touch the rock walls, and from which in the sudden darkness the sparks from the stack shot volleying skyward like a miniature volcano.

The Fast Mail ran *fast*—the bark of the exhaust echoed over hills and valleys like a single, long-drawn-out note of thunder; now, with a dizzy slew, the 904 swung a curve, Budd Masters easing grudgingly; now she struck the tangent again, and like a race horse reached along the stretch.

Prouty turned from the gangway, pulled the door for a look at his fire, fed it with a shovelful or so, flung the door shut, and went over and stood beside Masters in a kind of a strange, uncertain way.

Masters glanced at him, smiling genially with what he thought was understanding—all this was new to the boy, of course.

"Well, how's it strike you?" he shouted cheerily over the roar. "Some different from a yard switcher, eh? How do you like a fast run, son?"

It was a moment before Prouty spoke.

"I like it—I like it better than anything else I know of," he answered, and his voice, raised as it was to carry over the rush of wind, the pound of the big drivers, the thousand noises that filled the cab, lost none of the lingering, wistful note that was dominant in it. "I like it. But—but it's not for me."

Budd Masters screwed sharply around in his seat and looked at the other. Even in the faint yellow of the cab lamp, he could see a whiteness about the tight-closed lips, a kind of strained, hopeless look on the other's face. Prouty didn't meet his eyes—Prouty was staring out through the cab glass to where the headlight made glittering ribbons of the rails ahead.

"What d'ye mean?" demanded the engineer. "Not for you! Why, say, boy, with a start like this you'll be pulling a latch yourself in a couple of years."

"I was going to quit to-night—going to beat it out of Big Cloud," said Prouty monotonously, almost as though he were talking to himself. "I *am* going to quit to-night—some one else'll be firing for you on the run back—this looked like a good chance of getting a lift on the way, didn't it?"

“Going to quit!” repeated Masters, in a half-impatient, half-puzzled exclamation. “Going to quit! That don’t sound sense to me! You might as well have stuck to what you said along back there at the beginning, and not have gone to work at all. I had an idea you’d thought better of what you told me, and was going to cut out the old life, after all, when you took a job, but it looks like I was wrong if you’re going to quit now. What’d you start at all for if——” Masters stopped abruptly, glanced at Prouty—and swallowed hard as a sudden inspiration came to him. “Say, boy,” he said huskily, “was it that—account of me—account of me being laid up? And I never thought of it—I never thought of it like that.”

Prouty didn’t answer, didn’t turn his head—just stood there silently, swaying with the sway of the cab.

The big racer nosed a curve, and Budd Masters checked mechanically.

“I didn’t know,” said Masters heavily, as Prouty continued silent. “I just figured you’d thought better of it and changed your mind, and I ain’t saying now what I feel—couldn’t say it if I wanted to. But there’s something behind this, something more behind this, boy. You wouldn’t quit now with a start like this if there wasn’t something more. You’ve got to tell me, lad. You got to tell me now what it is.”

“I’m going to tell you,” said Prouty, in a dull, listless way. “ ’Twon’t take long. I’m no good to any one on earth. I never was from the time I was on the streets. I learned my trade early—when I was about eight. ’Tain’t healthy for me to hang around any one place too long. I’m ‘wanted’! There’s more’n one would like to get the nippers on me—there’s a good many of them, I guess! They were pushing me pretty hard that night you took me up.”

Budd Masters didn’t say anything. There weren’t any words that seemed to come, only a sort of queer tightness in his throat, and he couldn’t quite seem to grasp it all at once, anyway. Budd Masters didn’t say anything—but he reached up and laid his hand on the other’s sleeve.

Prouty still stared out through the cab glass, his eyes never shifting from the gleaming metal ahead of the pilot, his lips quivering a little.

“That’s what I am—you’ve got it all now—I’m only a *thief*!”

Budd Masters’ fingers closed in an eloquent pressure on Prouty’s arm—the engineer’s heart was full.

“Prouty, my lad, don’t go!” he choked. “Don’t go, boy—stay and live it down. Who’s to know but me? You’ve got the chance here now—stay and live it down. I’ll help you, lad, and there’s no one to know but me.”

“It’s too late for that,” said Prouty numbly. “They wouldn’t give me the chance. I’m ‘wanted,’ I tell you! If they get me they’ll send me up. I wouldn’t have a hope. They’re after me hard—all the time. For all I know, there’s one of them riding behind us now.” He reached around and in a kind of wistful, reluctant way lifted the engineer’s hand from his arm. “You and Mrs. Masters, you’ve been good to me—more’n anybody in my life ever was—I’ll never forget”—he turned quickly, and, slashing the back of his hand across his eyes, moved toward the tender to pick up his shovel.

And Budd Masters, with a lump in his throat and something before his eyes that dimmed the headlight’s glare, opened the 904 out again as the pony truck came clear of the curve—and the Fast Mail thundered on through the night.

A queer little bit of tragedy in the cab of a flying train, and about the last place on earth you’d look for it? One gets the impression that railroading is all steel and iron and time-tables, perhaps? And one forgets the other side, perhaps, where tears and laughter, smiles and sorrows are—the human side. But it’s in railroading more than anywhere else that they come quick and sharp those things, the tears and laughter, smiles and sorrows—it’s a stiff game sometimes—and mostly always it’s table stakes.

It has already been said that the Hill Division through the mountains was single-tracked, that dispatchers are not infallible, and that—but just a moment, there’s a slow order out, and Scharff has the right of way for a block or two. His green lamp is on the aisle beside the seat in the forward smoker of the eastbound Limited, and on the seat with him, feet up on the one in front, is a heavy-built, shrewd-faced man.

The conversation between the two, at first casual as between strangers, has become intimate.

“Thought maybe you might have seen him,” observed the man who had introduced himself to the conductor as Evans. “Thought I might as well mention it, anyway. He was last seen somewhere out here.”

“What’s he look like?” enquired Scharff.

“Oh, if you’d ever seen him,” said Evans, “you’d know him fast enough. Every feature on his face prominent—big everything, except his height—he’s so short he looks like a kid—he’s known as the ‘Midget.’ ” Evans stole a shrewd look at the conductor’s face. Evans was evidently a good reader of men—his business called for it. “Guess you’ve run across him—eh?” he submitted quietly.

“I don’t know as I have,” countered Scharff noncommittally. “Is he wanted—bad?”

“Pretty bad,” said the detective. “He’s about the slickest that’s loose. Five hundred dollars reward if he’s brought to trial.”

“Oh!” said Scharff—and looked at Evans.

“Two hundred and fifty for you, if you’ve got the information that’ll lead to his arrest,” said Evans, and shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth.

Scharff laughed suddenly, harshly—and shoved out his hand.

Evans took it.

“Good work!” said the detective coolly.

“Say,” said Scharff, and there was a twisted smile on his lips, “I guess we’re both in luck to-night, thanks to Regan, the mushy philanthropist.”

“Who’s he?” asked Evans.

“He’s the master mechanic—but never mind about him. The fellow you want is known as Prouty—Bert Prouty. He’s firing the Fast Mail to-night—we cross her at Elk River.”

“Good work!” said the detective again.

“I’ll give you a hand when the time comes,” volunteered Scharff, with a hard smile. “Prouty’s engineer may put up a fight. That two hundred and fifty goes, eh?”

“Just as good as in your pocket,” said Evans, “if Prouty’s the Midget and we get him.”

“All right,” said Scharff. “We’ll get him—I promise you that, and——” He rose and picked up his lantern as the train whistled. “I’ll see you again after this stop,” he called back over his shoulder, hurrying down the aisle.

The dispatcher’s blunder has nothing to do with this in a detailed way—it is the result alone that is vital. Miles away in that little room at headquarters under the green-shaded lamp, a man whose face was gray with fear hung desperately over his key, the sweat spurting in beads from his forehead, as a tattoo came incessantly from the working of the little round, black disc his fingers clutched. But does that make any difference? It was too late.

It was Budd Masters in the cab of the 904 who saw it first; saw it as Prouty turned from him to pick up his shovel, saw it as he swung from a

curve onto the tangent into the straight—it seemed to leap at him in a blinding flash through the cab glass into his brain. Down grade, out from a cut ahead, the long powerful rays of a headlight shot streaming into the night, blended with those of the 904—and left a dazzling haze between the two onrushing trains.

In the winking of an eye sometimes one lives eternity. Home, wife, and children, a long vista of years gone by, the lives of those in the swaying coaches behind him, the ruin, the horror and disaster all seared itself in lightning play through Budd Masters' mind. It was the Limited against him, against the Fast Mail—the two fastest trains on the mountain schedule—and he was running down grade.

But quicker almost than his thoughts was Budd Masters in his acts. With a cry, strange sounding over the thunder of the train, like the cry of a wounded animal in mortal hurt, the engineer was on his feet—and Prouty, who had jerked himself suddenly upright, was shot reeling backward into the tender with the shock, as Masters slammed the throttle shut, flung the 904 over into the reverse, his right hand closing on the air latch, while his left snatched at the throttle again.

Like vampires screaming in unholy glee came the piercing shrieks of the brake-shoes, as they locked on the racing drivers; from rail and tire, as from gigantic pin-wheels, flew the sparks—and like the bridge of a storm-tossed liner battling in an angry sea was the cab of the 904, rocking, reeling, swaying, staggering, pawing madly, it seemed, to hold the rails.

What man could do, Budd Masters had done—and he stood there now clinging to his levers, stood at his post—and waited.

She slowed fiercely, frantically, the 904, as though she were in a maddened terrified frenzy to escape herself. She slowed—but the distance between her and the Limited was sickeningly short, and it was down grade.

Prouty was on his feet again, and he moved to the engineer's back.

Masters turned his head quickly, and there was a strange, wistful smile on his set lips.

"Take your chance, boy!" he shouted. "*Jump!*"

"Jump yourself!" Prouty screamed in the engineer's ear. "You've got a wife and kids—jump yourself!"

Budd Masters shook his head. His fingers seemed to close a little tighter on the levers, his body seemed to lean a little forward, kind of mechanically,

kind of as though to brace himself—where bracing was but mockery—and he shook his head.

Strong as a young bull was Prouty. And sudden, quick, taking the engineer unawares, his hands locked on the other's shoulders, and with a single vicious pull he had Masters staggering back in the cab—and before the engineer fairly knew what was happening, before he could recover himself, Prouty had pushed him through the gangway, and sent him pitching and rolling to the ground.

And then before Prouty could follow, even as he sprang, the way was closed. There was a crash, a roar, the shriek of steam, the crunch of grinding steel, the smash of impact as the masses met, and the medley of wild noises went flinging weird, insistent, oft-repeated echoes far and near through the mountains—but Prouty never heard them.

It was a nasty spill—but it might have been worse. Thanks to the grade the Limited had stopped; and the Fast Mail had slowed, had almost stopped—another fifty yards would have been enough. Not much, fifty yards—but it cost Prouty his life—the only life that went out as the 904 crawled up the front-end of the Limited's engine, seemed to claw with its pony truck for a grip on the other's stack, and then doubled up like a jackknife.

Instinctively, Budd Masters found Prouty—between the tender and the cab—dead. Broken and shaken from the fall, crazed with pain, crawling the few yards along the right of way, in through the steam and fire, in the tangled cab, Budd Masters found Prouty—but couldn't move him. He backed out—his mind a blank. Crowds were streaming from both trains. And what was that? A lantern was thrust into his face, and two men stood before him. That was queer! One was Scharff—he didn't quite understand how Scharff came to be there.

"Where's Prouty?" rasped the conductor.

"Prouty?" Masters' head was swimming sickly, he couldn't seem to get the meaning much of anything. "Prouty? What do you want Prouty for?"

"What do I want him for!" snapped Scharff. "This man here is a detective. I want him for what he is—a thief!"

Masters stared at the other for a moment, then his hands wriggled to his head—and he laughed in a kind of foolish way.

"Well, go get him, then," laughed Masters, pointing to the hell of twisted steel and spurting steam. "He's in there—go get him, Scharff!" he laughed again—and slid unconscious to the ground.

A thief? Well, perhaps. But that wasn't the record the boys claimed that Bert Prouty carried with him when he went into Division to answer to the Great Trainmaster that night.

And Scharff? Scharff's railroading yet, so far as any one knows—but not on the Hill Division.

—V—

SHANLEY'S LUCK

GENERALLY speaking, Carleton, the super, was a pretty good judge of human nature, and he wasn't in the habit of making many breaks when it came to sizing up a man—not many. He did sometimes, but not often. However——

Shanley came out from the East, third class, colonist coach, billed through to Bubble Creek, B. C. Not that Shanley had any relatives or friends there, or, for that matter, any particular reason for wanting to go there—it was simply a question of how far his money would go in yards of pink-colored paper, about two and one-half inches wide, stamped, printed, counter-signed, and signed again to obviate any possible misunderstanding that might arise touching the company's liability for baggage, the act of God, dangers foreseen and unforeseen, personal effects or resultant personal defects whether due to negligence or not—it was all one. The colonist ticket was a bill of lading, and the "goods" went through "O.R.," owner's risk.

This possibly may not be strictly legal, but it was strictly safe—for the company. Furthermore, the directors didn't have to sit up very late at night to figure out that if they got the colonist's money first there would be none left for legal advice in case of eventualities, and that's the way it was with about nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand colonists. The company, of course, did take *some* risk—they took a chance on the one-thousandth man. The company had sporting blood.

If Shanley had only known what was going to happen, he could have saved some of his money on that ticket. As it stands now, he has still got transportation coming to him from Little Dance on the Hill Division to Bubble Creek, B. C. That may be an asset, or it may not—Shanley never asked for it.

Third class, colonist, no stop over allowed, red-haired, freckle-faced, an uptilt to the nose, a jaw as square as the side of a house, shoulders like a bull's, and a fist that would fell an ox—that was Shanley. That was Shanley until the sprung rail that ditched the train at Little Dance caused him the loss of two things—his erstwhile status in the general passenger agent's department, and a well-beloved and reeking brier.

Both were lost forever—his status partly on account of the reasons before mentioned, and partly because Shanley wasn't particularly interested in Bubble Creek; his brier because it became a part, an integral part of that memorable wreck, as Shanley, who was peacefully smoking in the front-end compartment of the colonist coach when the trouble happened, left the pipe behind while he catapulted through the open door—it was summer and sizzling hot—and landed, a very much dazed, bewildered, but not otherwise hurt Shanley, halfway up the embankment on the off side of a scene of most amazing disorder.

The potentialities that lie in a sprung rail are something to marvel at. Up ahead, the engine had promptly turned turtle, and, as promptly giving vent to its displeasure at the indignity heaped upon it, had incased itself in an angry, hissing cloud of steam; behind, the baggage and mail cars seemed to have vied with each other in affectionate regard for the tender. Only the brass-polished, nickel-plated Pullmans at the rear still held the rails; the rest was just a crazy, slewed-edgeways, up-canted, toppled-over string of cars, already beginning to smoke as the flames licked into them.

The shouts of those who had made their escape, the screams of those still imprisoned within the wreckage, the sight of others crawling through the doors and windows brought Shanley back to his senses. He rose to his feet, blinked furiously, as was his habit on all untoward occasions, and the next instant he was down the embankment and into the game—to begin his career as a railroad man. That's where he started—in the wreck at Little Dance.

In and out of the blazing pyre, after a woman or a child; the crash of his axe through splintering woodwork; the scorching heat; prising away some poor devil wedged down beneath the débris; tinkling glass as the heat cracked the windows or he beat through a pane with his fist—it was all hazy, all a dream to Shanley as, hours afterwards, a grim, gaunt figure with blackened, bleeding face, his clothes hanging in ribbons, he rode into the Big Cloud yards on the derrick car.

Some men would have hit up the claim agent for a stake; Shanley hit up Carleton for a job. But for modesty's sake, previous to presenting himself before the superintendent's desk, he borrowed from one of the wrecking crew the only available article of wearing apparel at hand—a very dirty and disreputable pair of overalls. Dirty and disreputable, but—whole.

"I want a job, Mr. Carleton," said he bluntly, when he had gained admittance to the super.

"You do, eh?" replied Carleton, looking him up and down. "You do, eh? You're a pretty hard-looking nut, h'm?"

Shanley blinked, but, being painfully aware that he undoubtedly did look all if not more than that, and being, too, not quite sure what to make of the super, he contented himself with the remark:

"I ain't a picture, I suppose."

"H'm!" said Carleton. "Been up at the wreck, I hear—what?"

"Yes," said Shanley shortly. No long story, no tale of what he'd done, no anything—just "Yes," and that was what caught Carleton.

"What can you do?" demanded the super.

"Anything, I'm not fussy," replied Shanley.

"H'm!" said Carleton. "You don't look it." And he favored Shanley with another prolonged stare.

Shanley, at first uncomfortable, shifted nervously from one foot to the other; then, as the stare continued, he began to get irritated.

"Look here," he flung out suddenly. "I ain't on exhibition. I came for a job. I ain't got any letters of recommendation from pastors of churches in the East. I ain't got anything. My name's Shanley, an' I haven't even got anything to prove *that*."

"You've got your nerve," said Carleton, leaning back in his swivel chair and tucking his thumb in the armhole of his vest. "Ever worked on a railroad?"

"No," answered Shanley, a little less assertively, as he saw his chances of a job vanishing into thin air, and already regretting his hasty speech—a few odd nickels wasn't a very big stake for a man starting out in a new country, and that represented the sum total of Shanley's worldly wealth. "No, I never worked on a railroad."

"H'm," continued Carleton. "Well, my friend, you can report to the trainmaster in the morning and tell him I said to put you on breaking. Get out!"

It came so suddenly and unexpectedly that it took Shanley's breath. Carleton's ways were not Shanley's ways, or ways that Shanley by any peradventure had been accustomed to. A moment before he wouldn't have exchanged one of his nickels for his chances of a job, therefore his reply resolved itself into a sheepish grin; moreover—but of this hereafter—

Shanley, back East, was decidedly more in the habit of having his applications refused with scant ceremony than he was to receiving favorable consideration, which was another reason for his failure to rise to the occasion with appropriate words of thanks.

Incidentally, Shanley, like a select few of his fellow creatures, had his failings; concretely, his particular strayings from the straight and narrow way, not having been hidden under a bushel, were responsible, with the advice and assistance of a distant relative or two—advice being always cheap, and assistance, in this case, a marked-down bargain—for his migration to the West, as far West as the funds in hand would take him—Bubble Creek, B. C.—the distant relatives saw to that. They bought the ticket.

Shanley, still smiling sheepishly and in obedience to the super's instruction to "get out," was halfway to the door when Carleton halted him.

"Shanley!"

"Yes, sir?" said Shanley, finding his voice and swinging around.

"Got any money?"

Shanley's hand mechanically dove through the overalls and rummaged in the pocket of his torn and rib-boned trousers—the pocket had not been spared—the nickels, every last one of them, were gone. The look on his face evidently needed no interpretation.

Carleton was holding out two bills—two tens.

"Cleaned out, eh? Well, I wouldn't blame anyone if they asked you for your board bill in advance. Here, I guess you'll need this. You can pay it back later on. There's a fellow keeps a clothing store up the street that it wouldn't do you any harm to visit—h'm?"

With gratitude in his heart and the best of resolutions exuding from every pore—he was always long on resolutions—Shanley being embarrassed, and therefore awkward, made a somewhat ungraceful exit from the super's presence.

But neither gratitude nor resolutions, even of steel-plate, double-riveted variety, are of much avail against circumstances and conditions over which one has absolutely, undeniably, and emphatically no control. If Dinkelman's clothing emporium had occupied a site between the station and MacGuire's Blazing Star Saloon, instead of the said Blazing Star Saloon occupying that altogether inappropriate position itself, and if Spider Kelly, the conductor of

the wrecked train, had not run into Shanley before he had fairly got ten yards from the super's office, things undoubtedly would have been very different. Shanley took that view of it afterward, and certainly he was justified. It is on record that he had no hand in the laying out of Big Cloud, nor in the control of its real estate, rentals, or leases.

Railroad men are by no stretch of the imagination to be regarded as hero worshippers, but if a man does a decent thing they are not averse to telling him so. Shanley had done several very decent things at the wreck. Spider Kelly invited him into the Blazing Star.

Shanley demurred.

"I've got to get some clothes," he explained.

"Get 'em afterward," said Kelly; "plenty of time. Come on; it's just supper time, and there'll be a lot of the boys in there. They'll be glad to meet you. If you're hungry you'll find the best free layout on the division. There's nothing small about MacGuire."

Shanley hesitated, and, proverbially, was lost.

An intimate and particular description of the events of that night are on no account to be written. They would not have shocked, surprised, or astonished Shanley's distant relatives—but everybody is not a distant relative. Shanley remembered it in spots—only in spots. He fought and whipped Spider Kelly, who was a much bigger man than himself, and thereby cemented an undying friendship; he partook of the hospitality showered upon him and returned it with a lavish hand—as long as Carleton's twenty lasted; he made speeches, many of them, touching wrecks and the nature of wrecks and his own particular participation therein—which was seemly, since at the end, about three o'clock in the morning, he slid with some dignity under the table, and, with the fond belief that he was once more clutching an axe and doing heroic and noble service, wound his arms grimly, remorselessly, tenaciously, like an octopus, around the table leg—and slept.

MacGuire before bolting the front door studied the situation carefully, and left him there—for the sake of the table.

The sunlight next morning was not charitable to Shanley. Where yesterday he had borne the marks of one wreck, he now bore the marks of two—his own on top of the company's. Up the street Dinkelman's clothing emporium flaunted a canvas sign announcing unusual bargains in men's apparel. This seemed to Shanley an unkindly act that could be expressed in

no better terms than “rubbing it in.” He gazed at the sign with an aggrieved expression on his face, blinked furiously, and started, with a step that lacked something of assurance, for the railroad yards and the trainmaster’s office.

He was by no means confident of the reception that awaited him. If there is one characteristic over and above any other that is common to human nature, it is the faculty, though that’s rather an imposing word, of worrying like sin over something that *may* happen—but never does. Shanley might just as well have saved himself the mental worry anent the trainmaster’s possible attitude. He did not report to the trainmaster that morning, never saw that gentleman until long, very long afterward. Instead, he reported to Carleton—at the latter’s urgent solicitation in the shape of a grinning call-boy, who intercepted his march of progress toward the station.

“Hi, you, there, cherub face!” bawled the urchin politely. “The super wants you—on the hop!”

Shanley stopped short, and resorting to his favourite habit, blinked.

“Carleton. Get it? Carleton,” repeated the messenger, evidently by no means sure that he was thoroughly understood; and then, for a parting shot as he sailed gaily up the street: “Gee, but you’re a holy sight!”

Carleton! Shanley had forgotten all about Carleton for the moment. His hand instinctively went into his pocket—and then he groaned. He remembered Carleton. But worst of all, he remembered Carleton’s twenty.

There were two courses open to him. He could sneak out of town with all possible modesty and dispatch, or he could face the music. Not that Shanley debated the question—the occasion had never yet arisen when he hadn’t faced the music—he simply experienced the temptation to “crawl,” that was all.

“It looks to me,” he ruminated ruefully, “as though I was up against it for fair. Just my luck, just my blasted luck, always the same kind of luck, that’s what. ’Tain’t my fault neither, is it? *I* ain’t responsible for that blasted wreck—if ’twasn’t for that I wouldn’t be here. An’ Kelly, Spider he said his name was, if ’twasn’t for him I wouldn’t be here neither. What the blazes did I have to do with it? I always have to stand for the other cuss. That’s me every time, I guess. An’ that’s logic.”

It was. Neither was there any flaw in it as at first sight might appear, for the last test of logic is its power of conviction. Shanley, from being a man with some reasonable cause for qualms of conscience, became, in his own

mind, one deeply sinned against, one injured and crushed down by the load of others he was forced to bear.

He explained this to Carleton while the thought of his burning wrongs was still at white heat, and before the super had a chance to get in a word. He began as he opened the office door, continued as he crossed the room, and finished as he stood before the super's desk.

The scowl that had settled on Carleton's face, as he looked up at the other's entrance, gradually gave way to a hint of humour lurking around the corners of his mouth, and he leaned back in his chair and listened with an exaggerated air of profound attention.

"Just so, just so," said he, when Shanley finally came to a breathless halt. "Now perhaps you will allow *me* to say a word. It may not have occurred to you that I sent for you in order that *I* might do the talking—h'm?"

This really seemed to require no answer, so Shanley made none.

"Yesterday," went on Carleton, "you came to me for a job, and I gave you one, didn't I?"

"Yes," admitted Shanley, licking his lips.

"Just so," said Carleton mildly. "I hired you then. I fire you now. Pretty quick work, what?"

"You're the doctor," said Shanley evenly enough. He had, for all his logic, expected no more nor less—he was too firm a believer in his own particular and exclusive brand of luck. "You're the doctor," he repeated. "There's a matter of twenty bucks——"

"I was coming to that," interrupted Carleton; "but I'm glad *you* mentioned it. I'll be honest enough to admit that I hardly expected you would. A man who acts as you've acted doesn't generally—h'm?"

"I told you 'twasn't my fault," said Shanley stubbornly.

Carleton reached for his pipe, and struck a match, surveying Shanley the while with a gaze that was half perplexed, half quizzical.

"You're a queer card," he remarked at last. "Why don't you cut out the booze?"

" 'Twasn't my fault, I tell you," persisted Shanley.

“You’re a pretty good hand with your fists, what?” said Carleton irrelevantly. “Kelly’s no slouch himself.”

Shanley blinked. It appeared that the super was as intimately posted on the events of the preceding evening as he was himself. The remark suggested an inspection of the fists in question. They were grimy and dirty, and most of the knuckles were barked; closed, they resembled a pair of miniature battering-rams.

“Pretty good,” he admitted modestly.

“H’m! About that twenty. You intend to pay it back, don’t you?”

“I’m not a thief, whatever else I am,” snapped Shanley. “Of course, I’ll pay it back. You needn’t worry.”

“When?” insisted Carleton coolly.

“When I get a job.”

“I’ll give you one,” said Carleton—“Royal” Carleton the boys called him, the squarest man that ever held down a division. “I’ll give you one where your fists will be kept out of mischief, and where you can’t hit the high joints quite as hard as you did last night. But I want you to understand this, Shanley, and understand it good and plenty and once for all, it’s your last chance. You made a fool of yourself last night, but you acted like a man yesterday—that’s why you’re getting a new deal. You’re going up to Glacier Cañon with McCann on the construction work. You won’t find it anyways luxurious, and maybe you’ll like McCann and maybe you won’t—he’s been squealing for a white man to live with. You can help him boss Italians at one seventy-five a day, and you can go up on Twenty-nine this morning; that’ll take care of your transportation. What do you say?”

Shanley couldn’t say anything. He looked at the super and blinked; then he looked at his fists speculatively—and blinked.

Carleton was scribbling on a piece of paper.

“All right, h’m?” he said, looking up and handing over the paper. “There’s an order on Dinkelman, only get some one else to show you the way this time, and take the other side of the street going up. Understand?”

“Mr. Carleton,” Shanley blurted out, “if ever I get full again, you——”

“I will!” said Carleton grimly. “I’ll fire you so hard and fast you’ll be out of breath for a month. Don’t make any mistake about that. No man gets

more than two chances with me. The next time you get drunk will finish your railroad career for keeps, I promise you that."

"Yes," said Shanley humbly; and then, after a moment's nervous hesitation: "About Kelly, Mr. Carleton. I don't want to get him in bad on this. You see, it was this way. He left early—that's what started the fight. I called him a—a—quitter—or something like that."

"H'm, yes; or something like that," repeated Carleton dryly. "So I believe. I've had a talk with Kelly. You needn't let the incomprehensible workings of that conscience of yours prick you any on his account. Kelly knows when to stop. His record is O. K. in this office. Kelly doesn't get drunk. If he did, he'd be fired just as fast as you will be if it ever happens again."

"If I'm never fired for anything but that," exclaimed Shanley in a burst of fervent emotion, "I've got a job for life. I'll prove it to you, Mr. Carleton. I'm going to make good. You see if I don't."

"Very well," said Carleton. "I hope you will. That's all, Shanley. I'll let McCann know you're coming."

Shanley's second exit from the super's presence was different from the first. He walked out with a firm tread and squared shoulders. He was rejuvenated and buoyant. He was on his mettle—quite another matter, entirely another matter, and distinctly apart from the paltry consideration of a mere job. He had told Carleton that he would make good. Well, he would!

And he did! Carleton himself said so, and Carleton wasn't in the habit of making many breaks when it came to sizing up a man—not many. He did sometimes, but not often.

Shanley did not take the other side of the street on the way to Dinkelman's—by no means. He deliberately passed as close to the Blazing Star Saloon as he could, passed with contemptuous disregard, passed boastfully in the knowledge of his own strength. A sixteen-hundred class engine with her four pairs of forty-six-inch drivers can pull countless cars up a mountain grade steep enough to make one dizzy, but Shanley would have backed himself to win against her in a tug of war over the scant few inches that separated him from MacGuire's dispensary as he brushed by. None of MacGuire's for him. Not at all. Red-headed, freckle-faced, barked-knuckled, bulwarked-and-armour-cased-against-temptation Shanley dealt that morning with Mr. Dinkelman, purveyor of bargains in men's apparel.

The dealings were liberal—on the part of both men. On Shanley's part because he needed much; on Mr. Dinkelman's part because it was Mr. Dinkelman's business, and his nature, to sell much—if he could—safely. This was eminently safe. Carleton's name in the mountains stood higher than guaranteed, gilt-edged gold bonds any time.

The business finally concluded, Shanley boarded Twenty-nine, local freight, west, and in due time, well on in the afternoon, righteously sober, straight as a string, cleaned, groomed, and resplendent in a new suit, swung off from the caboose at Glacier Cañon as the train considerately slackened speed enough to give him a fighting chance for life and limb.

He landed safely, however, in the midst of a jabbering Italian labor gang, who received his sudden advent with patience and some awe. A short, squint-faced man greeted him with a grin.

"Me name's McCann," said he of the squint face. "This is Glacier Cañon, fwhat yez see av ut. Them's the Eyetalians. Yon's fwhere I roost an' by the same token, fwhere yez'll roost, too, from now on. Above is the shack av the men. Are yez plased wid yer introduction? 'Tis wan hell av a hole yez've come to. Shanley's the name, eh? A good wan, an' I'm proud to make the acquaintance."

Shanley blinked as he stretched out his hand and made friends with his superior, and blinked again as he looked first one way and then another in an effort to follow and absorb the other's graphic description of the surroundings.

The road foreman's summary was not without justification. Glacier Cañon, to say the least of it, was a wild and desolate bit of nature. The right of way hugged the bald gray rock of the mountains that rose up at one side in a sheer sweep, and the trains crawled along for all the world like huge flies at the base of a wall. On the other side was the Glacier River with its treacherous sandy bed whose constant misbehaviour was—so the engineers claimed—the cause of most of their gray hairs. The construction camp lay just to the west of the Cañon, near the river level, and at the foot of a long, stiff, four per cent grade. That was the reason the camp was there—that grade.

Locking the stable door when the horse is gone is a procedure that is very old. It did not originate with the directors of the Transcontinental—they never claimed it did. But their fixed policy, if properly presented before a court of arbitration, would have gone a long way toward establishing a clear title to it. If they had built a switch-back at the foot of the grade in the first

place, Extra Number Eighty-three, when she lost control of herself near the bottom coming down some months before, would have demonstrated just as clearly the necessity for one being there as she demonstrated most forcibly what would happen when there wasn't. All of which is by way of saying that rock or no rock, expense or no expense, the door was now to be locked, and McCann and his men were there to lock it.

McCann explained this to Shanley as he walked him around, up the track to the men's shanties, over the work, and back again down the track to inspect the interior of the dwelling they were to share in common—a relic of deceased Extra Number Eighty-three in the shape of a truckless box-car with dinted and bulging sides—dinted one side and bulged the other, that is.

"But," said Shanley, "I dunno what a switch-back is."

"Who expected it av yez?" enquired McCann. "An' fwhat difference does ut make? Carleton sint word yez were green. Yez've no need to know. So's yez can do as yez are told an' make them geesers do as they are told, *an'* can play forty-foive at night—that's the point, the main point wid me, an' it's me yez av to get along wid—'twill be all right. Since Meegan, him that was helpin' me, tuk sick a week back, I've been alone. Begad, playin' solytare is——"

"I can play forty-five," said Shanley.

McCann's face brightened.

"The powers be praised!" he exclaimed. "I'll enlighten yez, then, on the matter av switchbacks, me son, so as yez'll have an intilligent conception av the work. A switch-back is a bit av a spur track that sticks out loike the quills av a porkypine at intervuls on a bad grade such as the wan forninst yez. 'Tis run off the main line, d'yez mind, an' up contrariwise to the dip av the grade. Whin a train comin' down gets beyond control an' so expresses herself by means av her whistle, she's switched off an' given a chance to run uphill by way av variety until she stops. An' the same hold's true if she breaks loose goin' up. Is ut clear?"

"It is," said Shanley. "When do I begin work?"

"In the mornin'. 'Tis near six now, an' the bhoys'll be quittin' for the night. Forty-foive is a grand game. We'll play ut to-night to our better acquaintance. I contind 'tis the national game av the ould sod."

Whether McCann's contention is borne out by fact, or by the even more weighty consideration of public opinion, is of little importance. Shanley played forty-five with McCann that night and for many nights thereafter. He

lost a figure or two off the pay check that was to come, but he won the golden opinion of the little road boss, which ethically, and in this case practically, was of far greater value.

"He's a bright jool av a lad," wrote McCann across the foot of a weekly report.

And Carleton, seeing it, was much gratified, for Carleton wasn't in the habit of making many breaks when it came to sizing up a man—not many. He did sometimes, but not often. Shanley was making good. Carleton was much gratified.

Of the three weeks that followed Shanley's advent to Glacier Cañon, this story has little to tell in a detailed way; but, as a whole, those three weeks are pointed, eloquent, and important—very important.

Italian laborers have many failings, but likewise they have many virtues. They are simple, demonstrative, and their capacity for adoration—of both men and things—is very great.

From Jacko, the water boy, to Pietro Maraschino, the padrone, they adored Shanley, and enthroned him as an idol in their hearts, for the very simple reason that Shanley, not being a professional slave-driver by trade, established new and heretofore undreamed-of relations with them. Shanley was very green, very ignorant, very inexperienced—he treated them like human beings. That was the long and short of it. Shanley became popular beyond the popularity of any man, before or since, who was ever called upon to handle the "foreign element" on the Hill Division.

And the work progressed. Day by day the cut bored deeper into the stubborn mountain-side; day by day the Glacier River gurgled peacefully along over its treacherous sandy bed; day by day regulars and extras, freights and passengers, east and west, snorted up and down the grade, the only visitations from the outside world; night after night Shanley played forty-five with McCann in the smoky, truckless box-car.

Also the camp was dry, very dry, dryer than a sanatorium—that is, than *some* sanatoriums. Carleton had been quite right. There was no opportunity for Shanley to hit the high joints quite as hard as he had that night in Big Cloud—there was no opportunity for him to hit the high joints *at all*. Shanley had not seen a bottle for three weeks. Therefore Shanley felt virtuous, which was proper.

Some events follow others as the natural, logical outcome and conclusion of preceding ones; others, again, are apparently irrelevant, and

the connection is not to be explained either by logic, conclusion, or otherwise. Rain, McCann's departure for Big Cloud, and Pietro Maraschino's birthday are an example of this.

When it settles down for a storm in the mountains, it is, if the elements are really in earnest, torrential, and prolonged, and has the effect of tying up construction work tighter than a supreme court injunction could come anywhere near doing it.

McCann had business in Big Cloud, whether personal or pertaining to the company is of no consequence, and the day the storm set in—the morning having demonstrated that its classification was not to be considered as transient—he seized the opportunity to flag the afternoon freight eastbound. This was natural and logical, and an opportunity not to be neglected.

That this day, however, should be the anniversary of the day the padrone's mother of blessed memory had given birth to Pietro Maraschino in sunny Naples fifty-three years before is, though apparently irrelevant, far from being so; and since its peculiar and coincident happening cannot be laid at the door of either logical, natural, scientific, or philosophical conclusions, and since it demands an explanation of some sort, it must, perforce, be attributed to the metaphysical—which is a name given to all things about which nobody knows anything.

"Yez are in charge," said McCann grandiloquently, waving his hand to Shanley as he swung into the caboose. "Yez are in charge av the work, me son. See to ut. I trust yez."

As the work at the moment was entirely at a standstill and bid fair to remain so until McCann's return on the morrow, this was very good of McCann. But all men like words of appreciation, most of them whether they deserve them or not, so Shanley went back into the box-car out of the rain to ponder over the tribute McCann had paid him, and to ponder, too, over the new responsibility that had fallen to his lot.

He did not ponder very long; indeed, the freight that was transporting McCann could hardly have been out of sight over the summit of the grade, when a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of the dripping figure of the padrone.

Shanley looked up anxiously.

"Hello, Pietro," he said nervously, for the weather wasn't the kind that would bring a man out for nothing, and he was keenly alive to that new

responsibility. “Hello, Pietro,” he repeated. “Anything wrong?”

Pietro grinned amiably, shook his head, unbuttoned his coat, and held out—a bottle.

Shanley stared in amazement, and then began to blink furiously.

“Here!” said he. “What’s this?”

“Chianti,” said Pietro, grinning harder than ever.

“Key-aunty.” Shanley screwed up his face. “What the devil is key-aunty?”

“Ver’ good wine from Italia,” said the beaming padrone.

“It is, is it? Well, it’s against the rules,” asserted Shanley with conviction. “It’s against the rules. McCann ’u’d skin you alive. He would. Where’d you get it? What’s up, eh? It’s against the rules. I’m in charge.”

Pietro explained. It was his birthday. It was very bad weather. For the rest of the afternoon there would be no work. They would celebrate the birthday. Meester McCann had taken the train. As for the wine—Pietro shrugged his shoulders—his people adored wine. Unless they were very poor his people would have a little wine in their packs, perhaps. He was not quite sure where they had got it, but it was very thoughtful of them to remember his birthday. Each had presented him with a little wine. This bottle was an expression of their very great good esteem of Meester Shanley. Perhaps, later, Meester Shanley would come himself to the shack.

“It’s against the rules,” blinked Shanley. “McCann ’u’d skin you alive. Maybe I’ll drop in by and by. You can leave the bottle.”

Pietro bobbed, grinned delightedly, handed over the bottle, and backed out into the storm.

Shanley, still blinking, placed the bottle on the table, and gazed at it thoughtfully for a few minutes—and his thoughts were of Carleton.

“If ’twere whiskey,” said he, “I’d have no part of it, not a drop, not even a smell. I would not. I would not touch it. But as it is——” Shanley uncorked the bottle.

Not at all. One does *not* get drunk on a bottle of Chianti wine. A single bottle of Chianti wine is very little. That is the trouble—it is *very* little. After three weeks of abstinence it is very little indeed—so little that it is positively tantalizing.

The afternoon waned rapidly—and so did the Chianti. Outside, the storm instead of abating grew worse—the thunder racketing through the mountains, the lightning cutting jagged streaks in the black sky, the rain coming down in sheets that set the culverts and sluiceways running full. It was settling down for a bad night in the mountains, which, in the Rockies, is not a thing to be ignored.

" 'Tis no wonder McCann found it lonely," muttered Shanley, as he squeezed the last drop from the bottle. " 'Tis very lonely, indeed"—he held the bottle upside down to make sure that it was thoroughly drained—"most uncommon lonely. It is that. Maybe those Eyetalians'll be thinkin' I'm stuck up, perhaps—which I am not. It's a queer name the stuff has, though it's against the rules, an' I can't get my tongue around it, but I've tasted worse. For the sake of courtesy I'll look in on the birthday party."

He incased himself in a pair of McCann's rubber boots, put on McCann's rubber coat, and started out.

"An' to think," said he, as he sloshed and buffeted his way up the two hundred yards of track to the construction shanties, "to think that Pietro came out in cruel bad weather like this all for to present his compliments an' ask me over! 'Twould be ungracious to refuse the invitation; besides, my presence will keep them in due bounds an' restraint. I've heard that Eyetalians, being foreigners, do not practise restraint—but, being foreigners, 'tis not to be held against them. I'm in charge, an' I'll see to it."

They greeted him in the largest of the three bunk-houses. They greeted him heartily, sincerely, uproariously, and with fervor. They were unfeignedly glad to see him, and if he had not been by nature a modest man he would have understood that his popularity was above the popularity ever before accorded to a boss. Likewise, their hospitality was without stint. If there was any shortage of stock—which is a matter decidedly open to question—they denied themselves that Shanley might not feel the pinch. Shanley was lifted from the mere plane of man—he became a king.

A little Chianti is a little; much Chianti is to be reckoned with and on no account to be despised. Shanley not only became a king, he became regally, imperially, royally, and majestically drunk. Also there came at last an end to the Chianti, at which stage of the proceedings Shanley, with extravagant dignity and appropriate words—and exhortation on restraint—waddled to the door to take his departure.

It was very dark outside, very dark, except when an intermittent flash of lightning made momentary daylight. Pietro Maraschino offered Shanley one

of the many lanterns that, in honor of the festive occasion, they had commandeered, without regard to colour, from the tool boxes, and had strung around the shack. Further, he offered to see Shanley on his way.

The offer of assistance touched Shanley—it touched him wrong. It implied a more or less acute condition of disability, which he repudiated with a hurt expression on his face and forceful words on his tongue. He refused it; and being aggrieved, refused also the lantern Pietro held out to him. He chose one for himself instead—the one nearest to his hand. That this was red made no difference. Blue, white, red, green, or purple, it was all one to Shanley. His fuddled brain did not differentiate. A light was a light, that was all there was to that.

The short distance from the shanty door to the right of way Shanley negotiated with finesse and aplomb, and then he started down the track. This, however, was another matter.

Railroad ties, at best, do not make the smoothest walking in the world, and to accomplish the feat under some conditions is decidedly worthy of note. Shanley's performance beggars the English language—there is no metaphor. For every ten feet he moved forward he covered twenty in laterals, and, considering that the laterals were limited to the paltry four feet, eight and one-half inches that made the gauge of the rails, the feat was incontestably more than worthy of mere note—it was something to wonder at. He clung grimly to the lantern, with the result that the gyrations of that little red light in the darkness would have put to shame an expert's exhibition with a luminous dumb-bell. The while Shanley spoke earnestly to himself.

"Queshun is am I drunk—thash's the queshun. If I'm drunk—lose my job. Thash what Carleton said—lose my job. If I'm not drunk—s'all right. Wish I knew wesser I'm drunk or not."

He relapsed into silent communion and debate. This lasted for a very long period, during which, marvellous to relate, he had not only reached a point opposite his box-car domicile, but, being oblivious of that fact, had kept on along the track. Progress, however, was becoming more and more difficult. Shanley was assuming a position that might be likened somewhat to the letter C, owing to the fact that the force of gravity seemed to be exerting an undue influence on his head. Shanley was coming to earth.

As a result of his communion with himself he began to talk again, and his words suggested that he had suspicions of the truth.

"Jus' my luck," said he bitterly. "Jus' my luck. Allus same kind of luck. What'd I have to do wis Peto Mara—Mars—Marscheeno's birthday? Nothing. Nothing 'tall. 'Twasn't my fault. Jus' my luck. Jus' my——"

Shanley came to earth. Also his head came into contact with the unyielding steel of the left-hand rail, and as a result he sprawled inertly full across the right of way, not ten yards east of where the Glacier River swings in to crowd the track close up against the mountain base.

Providence sometimes looks after those who are unable to look after themselves. By the law of probabilities the lantern should have met disaster quick and absolute; but, instead, when it fell from Shanley's hand, it landed right side up just outside the rail between two ties, and, apart from a momentary and hesitant flicker incident to the jolt, burned on serenely. And it was still burning when, five minutes later, above the swish of leaping waters from the Glacier River now a chattering, angry stream with swollen banks, above the moan of the wind and the roll of the thunder through the mountains, above the pelting splash of the steady rain, came the hoarse scream of Number One's whistle on the grade.

Sanderson, in the cab, caught the red against him on the right of way ahead, and whistled insistently for the track. This having no effect, he grunted, latched in the throttle, and applied the "air." The ray of the headlight crept along between the rails, hovered over a black object beside the lantern, passed on again and held, not on the glistening rain-wet rails—*they* had disappeared—but on a crumbling roadbed and a dark blotch of waters, as with a final screech from the grinding brake-shoes Number One came to a standstill.

"Holy MacCheesar!" exclaimed Sanderson, as he swung from the cab.

He made his way along past the drivers to where the pilot's nose was inquisitively poked against the lantern, picked up the lantern, and bent over Shanley.

"Holy MacCheesar!" he exclaimed again, straightening up after a moment's examination. "Holy MacCheesar!"

"What's wrong, Sandy?" snapped a voice behind him, the voice of Kelly, Spider Kelly, the conductor, who had hurried forward to investigate the unscheduled stop.

"Search me," replied Sanderson. "Looks like the Glacier was up to her old tricks. There's a washout ahead, and a bad one, I guess. But the meaning of this here is one beyond me. The fellow was curled up on the track just as

you see him with the light burning alongside, that's what saved us, but he's drunk as a lord."

As Kelly bent over the prostrate form, others of the train crew appeared on the scene. One glance Kelly gave at Shanley's never-under-any-circumstances-to-be-forgotten homely countenance, and hastily ordered the men to go forward and investigate the washout ahead. Then he turned to the engineer.

"The man is not drunk, Sandy," said he.

"He is gloriously and magnificently drunk, Kelly," replied the engineer.

"What would he be doing here, then? He is not drunk."

"Sleeping it off. He is disgracefully drunk."

"Can ye not see the bash on his head where he must have stumbled in the dark trying to save the train and struck against the rail? He is *not* drunk."

"Can ye not *smell*?" retorted Sanderson. "He is dead drunk!"

"I have fought with him and he licked me. He is a man and a friend of mine"—Kelly shoved his lantern into Sanderson's face. "*He is not drunk.*"

"He is *not* drunk," said Sanderson. "He is a hero. What will we do with him?"

"We'll carry him, you and me, over to the construction shanty, it's only a few yards, and put him in his bunk. He works here, you know. McCann's in Big Cloud, for I saw him there. After that we'll run back to the Bend for orders and make our report."

"Hurry, then," said the engineer. "Take his legs. What are you laughing at?"

"I was thinking of Carleton," said Kelly.

"Carleton? What's Carleton got to do with it?"

"I'll tell you later when we get to the Bend. Come on."

"H'm," said Sanderson, as they staggered with their burden over to the box-car shack. "I've an idea that bash on the head is more dirt than hurt. He's making a speech, ain't he?"

"Jus' my luck," mumbled the reviving Shanley dolefully. "Jus' my luck. Allus same kind of luck."

"Possibly," said Kelly. "Set him down and slide back the door. That's right. In with him now. We haven't got time to make him very comfortable, but I guess he'll do. I can fix him up better at the Bend than I can here."

"At the Bend? What d'ye mean?" demanded Sanderson.

"You'll see," replied Kelly, with a grin. "You'll see."

And Sanderson saw. So did Carleton—in a way.

Kelly's report, when they got to the Bend, was a work of art. He disposed of the nature and extent of the washout in ten brief, well-chosen words, but the operator got a cramp before Kelly was through covering Shanley with glory. The passengers, packed in the little waiting-room clamouring for details, yelled deliriously as he read the message aloud—and promptly took up a collection, a very generous collection, because all collections are generous at psychological moments—that is to say, if not delayed too long to allow a recovery from hysteria.

At Big Cloud, Donkin, the night dispatcher, because the washout was a serious matter that not only threatened to tie up traffic, but *was* tying it up, sent a hurry call to Carleton's house that brought the super on the run to the office. By this time the collection had been counted, and the total wired in as an additional detail—one hundred and forty dollars and thirty-three cents. The odd change being a contribution from a Swede in the colonist coach who could not speak English, and who paid because a man in uniform, a brakeman acting as canvasser, made the request. A Swede has a great respect for a uniform.

"H'm," said Carleton, when he had read it all. "I know a man when I see one. Tell Shanley to report here. I guess we can find something better for him to do than bossing labourers. What? Yes, send the letter up on the construction train. One hundred and forty, thirty-three, h'm? Tell him that, too. He'll feel good when he sees it in the morning."

But Shanley did not feel good when he saw it in the morning, for he was nursing a very bad headache and a stomach that had a tendency to squeamishness. The letter was lying on the floor, where some one had considerately chucked it in without disturbing him. His eyes fell on it as he struggled out of his bunk. He picked it up, opened it, read it—and blinked. His face set with a very blank and bewildered expression. He read it again, and again once more. Then he went to the door and looked out.

A construction train was on the line a little below him, and a gang of men, not his or Pietro Maraschino's men, were busily at work. As he gazed,

his face puckered. The problem that had so obsessed him on his return journey from the birthday celebration the night before was a problem no longer.

"I *was* drunk," said he, with conviction. "I *must* have been."

He went back to the letter and studied it again, scratching his head.

"Something," he muttered, "has happened. What it is, I dunno. I was drunk, an' I'm not fired. I was drunk, an' I'm promoted. I was drunk, an' I'm paid well for it, very well. I was drunk—an' I'm thinking 'twill be wise to keep my mouth shut."

Which was exactly the advice Kelly took pains to give Shanley half an hour later, when Number One crawled down to the Cañon and halted for a few minutes opposite the dismantled box-car, while the construction train put the last few touches to its work.

—VI—

MARLEY

THERE are some men they remember on the Hill Division—Marley is one of them.

Marley, officially, when he started in, wasn't anything—that is, anything in particular. Sort of general assistant, assistant section hand, assistant boiler washer, assistant anything you like to everybody—Marley's duties, if nothing else, were multifarious.

Physically, he was a queer card. He was built on plans that gave you the impression Dame Nature had been doing a little something herself along the lines of original research and experimentation—and wasn't well enough satisfied with the result to duplicate it! Anyway, as far as any one ever knew, there wasn't but one Marley produced. Maybe nature, even, isn't infallible; maybe she made a mistake, maybe she didn't. You couldn't call him deformed—and yet you could! That's Marley exactly—when you get to describing him you get contradictory. It must have been his neck. That lopped off two or three inches from his stature—because he hadn't any! But if that shortened him down to, say, five feet five, which isn't so short after all—there's the contradiction again, you see—the length of his arms at least was something to marvel at; they made up for the neck. Regan used to say Marley could stand on the floor of the roundhouse and clean out an engine pit without leaning over. The master mechanic was more or less gifted with imagination, but he wasn't so far out, not more than a couple of feet or so, at that. Marley's hair, more than anything else that comes handy by way of comparison, was like the stuff, in color and texture, the fellows on the stage light and put in their mouths so as to blow out smoke like a belching stack under forced draft—tow, they call it. Eyes—no woman ever had any like them—big and round and wide, with a peculiar violet tinge to them, and lids that had a trick of closing down with a little hesitating flutter like a girl trying to flirt with you.

But what's the use! Marley, piecemeal, would never look like the short-stepping, springy-walked, foreshortened, arms-flopping Marley with the greasy black peaked cap pulled over his forehead, the greasy jumper tucked into greasier overalls, who sold his hybrid services to the Transcontinental for the munificent sum of a dollar ten a day.

Marley's arrival and introduction to Big Cloud was, like Marley himself, decidedly out of the ordinary and by no manner of means commonplace. Marley arrived " 'boing it" in a refrigerator car.

They ice the cars at Big Cloud, and, luckily for Marley, the particular one he had, in some unexplained way, managed to appropriate required a little something more than icing. They pulled him out in about as flabby a condition as a sack of flour. He didn't say anything for himself mainly because he was pretty nearly past ever saying anything for himself or anybody else. The boys who found him cursed fluently because he wasn't a pleasant sight, and then carried him up Main Street on the door of a box-car with the hazy notion that MacGuire's Blazing Star Saloon was the most fitting Mecca available.

Marley continued to play in luck. Mrs. Coogan, the mother of Chick Coogan, that is, who went out in the Fall blizzard on the Devil's Slide some years before, spotted the procession as it passed her little shack, halted it, made a hasty, but none the less comprehensive, examination, amplified it by a few scathing remarks on discovering the proposed destination, peremptorily ordered them into her bit of a cottage, and installed Marley therein.

He was pretty far gone, pretty far—and he hung on the ragged edge for weeks. Nobody knows what Mrs. Coogan did for him except Marley himself; but it was generally conceded that she did more than she could afford to do for *anybody*.

Marley got well in time, of course, for, than old, motherly Mrs. Coogan there was no better nurse, even if she had few comforts and dainties and less money to buy them with; and then Marley got a job—or rather Mrs. Coogan got one for him.

There wasn't anything Mrs. Coogan could have asked for and not got that was within their power to give her—she was Chick's mother, and with Carleton or Regan or any of the rest of them that was enough. But Mrs. Coogan never asked anything for herself—she had the Coogan pride.

"The good Lord be praised," she would say—Mrs. Coogan was sincerely devout. "I'm able to worrk, so I am, an' fwhy should I ask for help?"

Why should she? They smiled at her as men smile when something touches them under the vest, and they want to say the proper thing—and can't. They smiled—and gave her their washing.

Mrs. Coogan tackled Regan on Marley's behalf.

The master mechanic scratched his head in perplexity, but his reply was prompt and hearty enough.

"Sure. Sure thing, Mrs. Coogan," he said. "Send him down to me. I'll find him something to do."

To Marley he talked a little differently.

"I ain't quite sure I like the looks of you," he flung out bluntly enough, taking in the new man from head to toe. "There's no job for you, but I'll give you a chance."

Marley's eyes came down in a flutter.

"Thanks, sir," he mumbled nervously.

Tommy Regan wasn't used to being "sir" ed—the Hill Division did its business with few handles and it wasn't long on the amenities.

"Humph!" he ejaculated with a snort, and a stream of black-strap laid the dust on a good few inches of engine cinders. "You can hand any thanks you've got coming over to Mother Coogan. And say"—the master mechanic wriggled his fat forefinger under Marley's nose—"thanks are all right as far as they go, but I figure you owe her something over and above that, what?"

A faint flush came into Marley's cheeks and he darted a quick look at Regan. His eyes were on the ground and his hands had suddenly disappeared in his pockets before he answered.

"I'm going to board with her a spell," he said in a slow way, as though he was measuring every word before it was uttered.

"Are, eh?" grunted Regan, but the grunt carried a grudging note of approval. "Well, maybe that'll help some. You can report at noon, Marley, and make yourself generally handy around. I reckon you'll find enough to do."

"Thanks, sir," said Marley again, as he turned away.

Regan, leaning on the turntable push-bar in front of the roundhouse, followed with his eyes as the other crossed the tracks in the direction of the town, then he spat profoundly again.

"Queerest looking specimen that ever blew into the mountains, and we've had some before that were in a whole class by themselves, at that," he remarked, screwing up his eyebrows. "Makes you think of a blasted gorilla the way he's laid out, what? Well, we'll give him a try anyway." And, with a final glance in the direction of the retreating figure, the master mechanic

went into the roundhouse for his morning inspection of the big moguls on the pits.

It took the division and Big Cloud some time to size up the new man; and then, just about when they thought they had, they found they hadn't.

Marley, if he was nothing else, was a contradictory specimen.

Mrs. Coogan said it was like the good Lord was kind of paying her special attention, kind of giving her another son—"so quiet, an' accommodatin', an' handy to have around. A good bhoy was Marley—a foine lad." One hand would rest on her hip, and the other would smooth the thin white hair over her ear with quick, nervous, little pats as she talked, and the gray Irish eyes, a little dim now, would light up happily. "Yes, ut's more than I deserve; but I always knew the Lord wud provide. 'Tain't so easy to move the tubs around as it uster be. I guess I knew it, but I wasn't willin' to admit it till I had somebody to do it for me. Sivinty-wan I was last birthday. 'Tain't old for a man, but a woman—indade he's a foine lad, an' 'tis myself that ses ut."

Down at headquarters Mrs. Coogan's praise went a long way, and, after Carleton and Regan and the others in the office got accustomed to seeing Marley around, they came to accept him in a passive, indifferent sort of a way. He was a curious case, if you like, but inoffensive—they let it go at that.

The men had their viewpoint. Marley didn't talk much, didn't draw out the way a new hand was expected to in order to establish his footing with the fraternity. Least of all did he make any overtures tending to anything like an intimate relationship with any of his new associates. Marley was never one of the group behind the storekeeper's office that had stolen out from the shops for a drag at their pipes and a breath of air; never on the platform to exchange a word of banter with the crews of the incoming trains; never amongst the wipers and hostlers in the roundhouse who lounged in idle moments in the lee of a ten-wheeler with an eye out across the yards against the possible intrusion of Regan or some other embodiment of authority. He was civil enough and quick enough to answer when he was spoken to, but his words were few—no more than a simple negative or affirmative if he could help it. And when he himself was in question there was not even that—Marley became dumb.

All this did not help him any—he wasn't what you'd call exactly popular! So, if he had little to say for himself, the men had plenty, and the general opinion was that he was a surly brute that by no possible chance was

any credit to the Hill Division, and by no manner of means an acquisition to Big Cloud.

A few, very few, took a more charitable view, basing it on the shy, slow flutter of Marley's eyelids—they charged it up to an acute sensitiveness of his grotesque and abnormal appearance. That isn't the way they put it, though.

"Looks like hell, an' he knows it," said they judicially. "Let the beggar alone."

It was good advice, whether their analysis was or wasn't—Pete Boileau, the baggage master, can vouch for that. As the time-worn saying has it, it came like a bolt from the blue, and—but just a minute, we're over-running our targets and that means trouble.

Things had gone along, so far as Marley was concerned, without anything very startling or out of the way happening for quite a spell, and Regan, who had stood closer to Chick Coogan than any other man on the division before the young engineer died, had begun to look on Marley with a little more interest—as a sort of *deus ex machina* for Mrs. Coogan. It seemed to afford the big-hearted master mechanic a good deal of relief. He got to talking about it to Carleton one morning about a month after Marley's advent to the Hill Division.

"No, of course, I don't know anything about him," he said. "Nobody does, I guess they don't. But he minds his own business and does what he has to do well enough, h'm? The old lady's been getting a little feeble lately—kind of wearing out, I guess she is. I was thinking Marley was worth a little more than a dollar ten a day, what?"

They were sitting in the super's office, and Carleton's glance, straying out through the window from where he sat at his desk, fastened on Marley's clumsy, ungainly figure hopping across the yard tracks from the roundhouse toward the station platform. He smiled a little, and looked back at Regan.

"I guess so, Tommy—if it will do her any good. I wouldn't bank on it, though. He's a queer card. Impresses you with the feeling that there's something you ought to know about him—and don't. I've a notion, somehow, I've seen him before."

"Have you?" said Regan. "That's funny. I've thought I had myself once or twice, but I guess it's imagination more than anything else. Anyway, he seems to remember what Mrs. Coogan did for him. I dunno what she'd do even now without the board money, little as it is, to help out. There's no use

borrowing trouble, I suppose, but later on I dunno what on earth she'll do. She's prouder than a sceptred queen—and she won't be able to wash much longer, nor take a boarder either, what?"

Carleton sucked at his brier for a moment in silence.

"We've all got to face the possibility of the scrap heap some day, Tommy," he said soberly. "But it's harder for a woman, I'll admit—bitter hard. Sometimes things don't seem just right. If you want to give Marley a small raise, go ahead."

The master mechanic nodded his head.

"I think I will," he announced. "He's queer if you like, but that's his own business. Never a word out of him nor a bit of trouble since——"

Regan's words stopped as though they had been chopped off with a knife. Both men, as though actuated by a single impulse, had leaped to their feet. Behind them their chairs toppled unheeded with a crash to the floor, and for an instant, as their eyes met each other's, the color faded in their cheeks. It had come and gone like a flash—a wild, hoarse scream of rage, a brute scream, horrid, blood-curdling, like the jungle howl of some maddened beast plunged in a savage, blind, all-possessing paroxysm of fury.

Themselves again in a second, the master mechanic and superintendent sprang to the window.

On the platform, up at the far end, the great form of Pete Boileau rocked and swayed like a drunken man, and clinging to him, his legs twined around the other's knees, his arms locked around the baggage-master's body just above the elbows—was Marley!

Regan and Carleton gazed, spellbound. There was something uncanny, inhuman about the scene—like a rabid dog that had leaped, snarling, for the throat hold.

Suddenly, Marley's legs with a quick, wriggling slide, released their hold, his whole form appeared to shrink, grow smaller, and he seemed to crouch on his knees at the other's feet; then his body jerked itself erect to its full stature with a movement swift as a loosed bow-string, his arms flew up carrying a great burden, and over his shoulders, over his head, a twisting form hurtled through the air.

"Merciful God! He's killed him!" gasped Carleton, dashing for the door. "Come on, Tommy. *Quick!*"

Both men were down the stairs in a space of time that Regan, at least, chunky and fat, had never duplicated before, and hasn't since. Carleton, hard-faced and tight-lipped, led the way, with the picture beating into his brain of Boileau's senseless form on the ground and the other above tearing like a beast at its prey. He wrenched the door of the station open, sprang out on the platform, stopped involuntarily, and then ran forward again.

The baggage-master's form was on the ground, lying in a curled-up, huddled heap, and he was senseless, all right—if he wasn't something more than that. But the rest of Carleton's mental picture was wrong, dead wrong. Right beside where the fight, if fight it could be called, had taken place, was a baggage truck, and over this, his head down, his two great arms wound round his face, shoulders heaving in convulsive sobs, Marley was crying like a broken-hearted child.

Take him any way you like, look at him any way you like, Marley, whatever else he was, was a contradictory specimen.

Any other man with a skull a shade less tender than Boileau's—it must have been made of boiler plate—would never have drawn another pay check. And even granting the boiler-plate part of it, it was something to wonder at. He had gone through the air like a rocket, and his head had caught the full of it when he landed. How far? Carleton never said. He measured it—twice. But he never gave out the figures of Boileau's aerial flight. Pete was a big man, six feet something, and heavy for his height. The strength of four ordinary men concentrated in one pair of arms might have done it perhaps; mathematically it wouldn't figure out any other way. Carleton never said. But what's the use? The division did some tall thinking over it—and Marley cried!

They picked up Pete Boileau and carried him into the station, and the contents of a fire bucket over his head opened his eyes. But it was a good fifteen minutes before he could talk, and by that time, when they got over their scare and thought of Marley, the baggage truck was deserted.

"What started it?" growled Boileau, repeating Carleton's enquiry. "I'm hanged if I know. I was joshing him a little—nothing to make anybody sore. I was only funning anyhow, and laughing when I said it."

"Said what?" demanded Regan, cutting in.

"Why, nothing much. He looked so queer hopping across the tracks like a monkey on a stick that I just asked him why he didn't cut out railroading

and hit up a museum for a job, and then before I knew it he let out a screech and was on me like a blasted catamount."

"Serves you right," said the master mechanic gruffly. "I guess you won't nag him again, I guess you won't. And none of the other men won't, neither, if they've had any notion that way."

"He's a wicked little devil," snarled Boileau. "And the strength of him"—the baggage-master shivered—"he ain't human. He'll kill somebody yet, that's what he'll do!"

Pete's summing up was a popular one—the men promptly ticketed and carded Marley as per Boileau's bill of lading. There wasn't any more doubt about him, no discussions, no anything. They knew Marley at last, and they liked him less than ever; but, also, they imbibed a very wholesome respect for the welfare of their own skins. A man with arms whose strength is the strength of many is to be approached with some degree of caution.

Marley himself said nothing. Carleton and Regan got him on the carpet and tried to get his version of the story, but for all they got out of him they might as well have saved their time.

A pathetic enough looking figure, in a way, he was, as he stood in the super's office the afternoon of the fight. The shoulders were drooping, giving the arms an even longer appearance than usual; no color in his face; the violet eyes almost black, with a dead, hunted look in them. Sorrow, remorse, dread—neither Regan nor Carleton knew. They couldn't understand him—then. Marley offered no explanation, volunteered nothing. Boileau's story was right—that was all.

"You might have killed the man," said Carleton sternly, at the end of an unsatisfactory twenty minutes. "You can thank your Maker you haven't his blood on your hands—it's a miracle you haven't. Don't you know your own strength? We can't have that sort of thing around here."

Marley's face seemed to grow even whiter than before, and he shivered a little, though the afternoon was dripping wet with the heat, and the thermometer was sizzling well up in the nineties—he shivered, but his lips were hard shut and he didn't say a word.

Carleton, for once in his life when it came to handling men, didn't seem to be altogether sure of himself. An ordinary fight was one thing, and, generally speaking, strictly the men's own business; but everything about Marley, from his arrival at Big Cloud to the sudden beastlike ferocity he had displayed that morning, put a little different complexion on the matter. A

puzzled look settled on the super's face as he glanced from Marley to the master mechanic, while his fingers drummed a tattoo on the edge of his desk.

"You had some provocation, Marley," he said slowly, "I don't want you to think I'm not taking that into consideration—but not enough to work up any such deviltry as you exhibited. You'll never get on with the men here after this. They'll make things pretty hard for you. I think you'd better go—for your own sake."

There was dead silence in the super's room for a half minute; then Regan, who had been sitting with his chair tilted back and his feet up on the window-sill, dropped the chair legs to the floor and swung around.

"I put Logan up firing yesterday," said he. "There's a night job wiping in the roundhouse. What do you say about it, Carleton?"

It was Marley who answered.

"*Yes!*" he said fiercely.

Carleton jabbed at the bowl of his pipe with his forefinger, and his eyebrows went up at Marley's sudden animation. Marley's eyes met his with a single quick glance, and then the eyelids fluttered down covering them. There was something in the look that caught the super, something he couldn't define. There was a plea, but there was something more—like a pledge, almost, it seemed.

"All right," he said, shortly; then, nodding at Marley in dismissal: "I hope you will remember what I've said. You may go."

Marley hesitated, as though about to speak, and changed his mind evidently, for he turned, walked straight to the door and out; then his boots creaked down the stairs.

"He'll be away from the men there, all except a few," said the master mechanic, as though picking up the thread of a discussion. "And as for them, I'll see there's no trouble. There's Mrs. Coogan now that——"

"Yes, Tommy"—Carleton smiled a little—"I didn't put your interest all down to love for Marley."

"What gets me," muttered Regan screwing up his eyes, as his teeth met in the plug he had dragged with some labour from his hip pocket, "what gets me is the way he went to crying afterward. Like a kid, he was. It was the blamedest thing I ever saw, what?"

“I don’t think he’s responsible for himself when he gets like that,” replied Carleton. “That’s exactly what I am afraid of. It comes over him in a flash, making a very demon of him, and then the revulsion is just as uncontrollable. I don’t suppose he can help it; he’s made that way. It wouldn’t make so much difference in an ordinary man, but with strength like his”—Carleton blew a ring of smoke ceilingwards—“you saw what he did to Boileau.”

“I ain’t likely to forget it,” said Regan. “But if he’s left alone I guess he’ll be all right. Any man that’s fool enough to do anything else now will do it with his eyes open, and it’s his own funeral.”

Those of the night crew in the roundhouse were evidently of the same mind. They received Marley without saying much one way or the other, but their aloofness was decidedly pronounced, and they looked askance at the queer figure as it dodged in and out of the shadows cast by the big mountain racers, or, at times, stood silently by one of the engine doors under the dim light of an oil lamp staring out across the black of the turntable to the twinkling switch lights in the yard. They didn’t like him, but they had learned their lesson well; and, as the weeks slipped away, they practised it—he was to be left alone.

One thing they grudgingly admitted—Marley could work, and did.

So Marley wiped; but at Mrs. Coogan’s cottage, as the summer waned, there wasn’t as much washing done as there had been, and Doctor McTurk got to dropping in too frequently to put his visits down to the old-time occasional friendly calls for an afternoon chat. And then, one day in the early fall, the washing stopped altogether, and the doctor’s face was puckered and serious as he left the cottage and headed down Main Street to the station. He entered Carleton’s office, and, after a few words between them, the super sent for Regan.

That evening Carleton’s private car was waiting on the siding when the eastbound Express pulled in.

As the little yard switcher importantly coughed the super’s car on to the rear Pullman, Regan, in his Sunday best, a store suit of black twill, with boiled shirt and stiff collar, came out of the station with Mrs. Coogan on his arm.

An incongruous pair they looked. The little old lady’s walk was in painful contrast to the master mechanic’s stride—her short steps had a painful, hesitating, uncertain waver to them. One hand gripped tenaciously

at Regan's coat sleeve, while the other held the faded, old-fashioned shawl close about her thin, bent shoulders. She carried her head drooped forward a little, hiding the face under the quaint poke bonnet.

A moment later Carleton, too, emerged from the station and joined them.

The station hands and the loungers eyed the trio with curiosity, and then stared in amazement as the two officials helped the old lady up the steps of the private car—Mrs. Coogan was getting the best of it, whatever it meant.

The three disappeared inside, but presently Regan and Carleton came out again, and the super dropped to the station platform. He held out his hand to the master mechanic, as Frank Knowles, the conductor, lifted his finger to Burke in the cab.

"Good-bye, Tommy; and good luck," he called, as the train began to move out. "Don't hurry, take all the time you need."

"All right," Regan shouted back. "Good-bye."

Carleton stood for a moment watching the tail lights grow dimmer until, finally, they shot suddenly out of sight with the curve of the track; then he turned to walk back along the platform—and stopped.

Crouched back against the wall of the freight house, deep in the shadows, was Marley.

"Here you, Marley," Carleton called.

Marley, evidently believing himself to have been unobserved, started violently, and then came slowly forward.

"What are you hiding there for?" demanded the super.

"I wanted to see Mrs. Coogan off," Marley answered a little defiantly.

The tone of the other's voice did not please Carleton.

"You've a queer way of doing it, then," he snapped shortly.

Marley was twisting his hands, staring down the track.

"I said good-bye before I came down to work." He spoke as though talking to himself.

"Oh!" said Carleton, and looked at Marley sharply. "I suppose you know what she went East for?"

"Yes," said Marley gruffly. That was all—just "yes." And, with that, he turned abruptly and started across the tracks for the roundhouse.

Carleton, taken aback, watched him in angry amazement, then the scowl that had settled on his face broke in a smile, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess Tommy is right," he muttered, as he went on toward the office. "Marley's all in a class by himself. We've never had anything like him in the mountains before."

It was four days before Mrs. Coogan and the master mechanic came back. Days during which Marley slipped into Dutchy's lunch-counter at deserted moments for his meals, and, if that were possible, drew into himself closer than ever.

The boys were curious about Mrs. Coogan, naturally; curious enough even to question Marley. He had one answer, only one.

"She's sick, I guess," he said.

They got nothing more out of him than that.

One thing Marley did, though, that Clarihue, while he thought nothing of it at the time, remembered well enough afterwards. Marley asked the turner to give him a sheet of railroad paper and a manila, and in his spare moments the night before Mrs. Coogan came back he laboured, bent over the little desk where the engine crews signed on and off, scratching painstakingly with a pen. Clarihue caught a glimpse of the sheet in passing before Marley hastily covered it up—just a glimpse, not enough to read a single word, just enough to marvel a little at the wiper's hand. Marley was a pretty good penman.

Marley, of course, being on night duty slept daytimes, but the afternoon Regan brought Mrs. Coogan back to the cottage he must have heard them coming, for he was standing in the little sitting room when they came in.

Mrs. Coogan kind of hesitated on the threshold, then she called out quickly in a faltering way:

"Marley, Marley, is that you?"

Marley was twisting his hands nervously. His eyes shot a rapid glance from the old lady to the master mechanic, and then the eyelids fluttered down.

"Sure," he said, "it's me."

She stumbled toward him and burst into tears, crying as though her heart would break.

“Marley, Marley,” she sobbed, “don’t lave them do ut. Don’t lave them do ut, there’s a good bhoy, Marley.”

Marley never moved, just licked his lips with his tongue and his face grew whiter. Queer, the way he acted? Well, perhaps. Never a move to catch the frail, tottering figure, never a word to soothe the pitiful grief. He stood like a man listening as a judge pronounces his doom. Oh, yes, queer, if you like. Marley, whatever else he was, was a contradictory specimen.

It was Regan who caught the old lady in his arms, and led her gently into her bedroom off the parlour.

“You mustn’t give way like that, Mrs. Coogan,” he said kindly. “Just lie down for a spell and you’ll feel better. I’ll ask Mrs. Gilleen, next door, to come in.”

It took the master mechanic several minutes to quiet her and persuade her to do as he asked, but when he came out again Marley was still standing, exactly as before, in the centre of the room. With a black scowl on his face, Regan motioned the other outside, and, once on the street, he laid the wiper low. Hard tongued was Regan when his temper was aroused, and he did not choose his words.

“What d’ye mean by treating her like that, you scrapings from the junk heap, you!” he exploded. “You know well enough what she went away for, and if you’ve any brains in that ugly head of yours you know well enough what she’s come back to, without any printed instructions to help you out. What are you playing at, eh? What do you mean? You’re not fit to associate with a dog! And she the woman that spent about her all to save your miserable carcass, you—you——”

“You’d better stop!” The words came like the warning hiss of a serpent before it strikes. Marley’s face was livid, and his great gnarled hands were creeping slowly upward above his waist line.

With a startled oath, Regan leaped quickly back; and then, separated by a yard, the men stood eying each other in silence.

It was gone in a flash, as it had come; for Marley, with a shudder, dropped his hands limply to his sides, and the color crept slowly back into his cheeks.

“There is no chance for her?”—no trace of the passionate outburst of an instant before remained. The question came low, hesitating—more like an assertion combined with a wistful appeal for contradiction.

It took Regan longer to recover himself, and it was a minute before he answered. Then he shook his head.

"She'll be stone blind in a month," he said gruffly.

Marley's eyes came up to the master mechanic's—and dropped instantly with their habitual little flutter.

"Ain't no doubt, no chance of a mistake?" he ventured.

Again Regan shook his head.

"Not a chance. The best man we could find East made the examination. We're arranging to get her into an institute—a home for the blind somewhere."

"I thought you would." Marley's voice was monotonous. "That's what she was talking about, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Regan.

Marley wagged his head with a judicial air.

"That'll kill her," he remarked, as though stating a self-evident, but commonplace, fact. "That'll kill her."

"I'm afraid it will," the master mechanic admitted gravely. "But there's nothing else to do. It's impossible for her to stay here. She's got to have some one to look after her, and she has no money. God knows I wish we could, but we can't see any other way than put her in some place like that."

"I thought you would, if it turned out bad," said Marley again, in dead tones. "I figured it out that way when you were gone." His hands were travelling in an aimless fashion in and out of his pockets. Suddenly he half pulled out an envelope, started, hastily shoved it back, and looked at Regan. "I—I got a letter to post," he muttered.

"Well, supposing you have," said Regan a little savagely—Regan wasn't interested in letters just then, "supposing you have, you needn't——"

But Marley was well across the street.

The master mechanic gasped angrily, choked—and went into Mrs. Gilleen's cottage on his errand. It was wasted breath to talk to Marley, anyhow.

It didn't take long for the news to spread around Big Cloud, and for three days they talked about Mrs. Coogan pretty constantly—after that they talked about Marley.

The westbound Express schedules Big Cloud for 2:05 in the afternoon, and on the third day after Mrs. Coogan's return Marley came down the street about half-past one, and crossed the tracks to the shops. Regan was in the fitting-shop when Marley walked in.

"I'd like to speak to you," said Marley, going straight up to the master mechanic.

"Well?" grunted Regan, none too cordially.

"I'd like you to come over to Mr. Carleton's office with me."

There was something in Marley's voice, feverish, impelling, something in his face, that stopped the impatient question that sprang to Regan's lips. He looked at the ungainly, grotesque figure of the wiper for an instant curiously; then, without a word, led the way out of the shops.

They traversed the yard in silence, climbed the stairs in the station, and entered the super's room. Marley closed the door and stood with his back against it.

Carleton, at his desk, looked from one to the other in surprise.

"Hello," said he. "What's up?"

The master mechanic jerked his thumb at Marley, and appropriated a chair.

"He wanted me to come over. I don't know what for."

Carleton turned enquiringly to the wiper.

"What is it?" he demanded.

Marley walked slowly across the room until he reached the super's desk. His face was drawn, and he wet his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"It's about Mrs. Coogan," he said jerkily. "Five thousand would be enough, wouldn't it?"

Carleton stared at the man as though he were mad, and Regan hitched his chair suddenly forward.

"Will you swear to give it to her if I get it for you?" Marley's hand, clenched, was on the desk, and he leaned his body far forward toward the super. There was no flutter of the eyelids now, and his eyes stared into Carleton's without a flicker. "*Swear it!*" he cried fiercely.

Carleton drew back involuntarily.

“Marley,” he said soothingly, “you’re not yourself, you——”

“No, I’m not mad,” Marley broke in passionately. “I know what I’m talking about. I know she’d die in one of them charity places. It’s up to me. She treated me white—the only soul on God’s earth that ever did. And maybe, maybe too, it’ll help square accounts. You’ll play fair and swear she gets the money, won’t you?”

“I don’t understand,” said Carleton slowly; “but I’ll swear to give her anything you have to give.”

Marley nodded quickly.

“That’s all I want,” he said. “There ain’t much to understand.” He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a newspaper clipping, a column long, which he laid on the desk. “I guess you’ll get it all there.”

The heavy “set” of the heading leaped up at Carleton. “$5,000 REWARD.” Below, halfway down the column, was the reproduction of a photograph—Marley’s.

Regan was up from his chair, bending over the super’s shoulder.

“I thought I’d seen you somewhere before.” Carleton’s voice sounded strained and hollow in his own ears. “It must have been the picture. I remember now. You—you killed a man in Denver a year ago.”

“It’s all there,” said Marley, licking his lips again. “I never saw him before. I killed him like I almost killed Boileau this summer. I didn’t know till afterward that he was rich, not until the family hung out that reward.”

Carleton did not speak. Regan reached viciously for his plug. Marley stirred uneasily, and drew the back of his hand across his forehead. It came away soggy wet. In the silence the chime of the Express’ whistle floated in through the open window; then, presently, the roar of the train and the grinding shriek of the brake-shoes.

“My God,” said Carleton in a whisper, “you want me to give you up and get the reward—for her!”

A queer smile flickered across Marley’s face. Heavy steps came running up the stairs. There was a smart rap upon the door, and a man stepped quickly inside. For a second his eyes swept the little group. Then he whirled like a flash, and the blue-black muzzle of a revolver held a bead on Marley’s heart.

“Ah, Shorty,” he cried grimly, “we’ve got you at last, eh? Put out your hands!”

Without protest, with the same queer smile on his face, Marley obeyed. There was a little click of steel, and he dropped his locked wrists before him.

“You’re Mr. Carleton, aren’t you?” The newcomer had swung to the desk.

“Yes,” said Carleton numbly.

“I’m Hepburn, of the Denver police,” went on the officer. “We appreciate this, Mr. Carleton. Shorty, here, has been badly wanted for a long time. We got your letter yesterday.”

Hepburn paused to reach into his pocket, and in the pause Carleton’s eyes met Marley’s—and he understood. Marley had written the letter himself and signed his, Carleton’s, name. And, too, it was clear enough now, the telegram he had puzzled over the previous afternoon. It was lying before him on his desk. His eyes dropped to it: “Will be on hand on arrival of Express, (signed) Denver.”

“We can’t give you any receipt for him as you requested,” continued Hepburn, drawing a paper out of his pocket; “but here’s an acknowledgment that his capture is due to information furnished by you. I guess that will answer the purpose. You won’t have any trouble getting the reward.” He handed the paper to Carleton.

The super took it mechanically, and started as it crackled in his fingers.

“Now,” said Hepburn briskly, “I don’t want to appear abrupt, but there’s a local east at two-twenty. We’ll move along, Shorty. Good-bye, Mr. Carleton. Next time you’re in Denver look us up.” He took Marley’s arm and moved toward the door.

“Don’t—tell her, Mr. Carleton.” There was a catch in Marley’s voice, and the words came low.

Carleton did not answer. He was staring at the paper in his hand—Marley’s price.

Regan had turned his back, with a hasty movement of his fist to his eyes.

“Don’t tell her”—the plea came again from the doorway.

Carleton tried to speak, and his voice broke; then he cleared his throat.

“She will never know, Marley,” he said huskily.

—VII—

"IT DOESN'T MATTER"

As far back as any one on the Hill Division could remember the boy, which was going back to the time that old John MacGallaghan spent everything but the odd change on a month's pay check celebrating the arrival of an offspring that he had given up hoping for years before, everybody had always called him Spud. Why? Nobody knew.

But then, nobody knew, for that matter, how the kid ever lived, or, more pertinently—why. But Spud managed it somehow—in spite of the bag of candy sticks that accounted for the odd change on old John's pay check being diverted into more sober and solid channels, as you might say. Old John bought the candy about halfway through the celebration, being suddenly minded of what the celebration was all about and, Mrs. MacGallaghan not being very well at the time and not on hand to interfere, the infant, in the soap box that had been rigged up as a bassinet, and temporarily relegated to the front room by one of the neighbours who was looking after Mrs. MacGallaghan, got the taffy—and got black in the face with colic and convulsions. Little Doctor McTurk spoke frizzled words when he got there, started the celebration on its way again by kicking old John bodily out of the shanty, and sat up with the patient for the rest of the night. Spud lived.

Nobody ever said Spud was handsome, not even his mother—which is some concession. The plain English of it is that Spud wouldn't have had a look-in for a prize at a beauty show even with a blind man as the judge. He had eyes and nose and mouth just like any other boy, only with Spud they didn't seem to harmonize into any classical effect. Including his features, which were a round knob of nose, a very sizable mouth, and very innocent blue eyes, he was kind of all ragged, from his hair, which was a sort of carroty brown, to his clothes, which were mostly patches sewn around the holes in old John's cast-offs. Not that anybody ever held the boy's clothes up against him. Everybody knew that the MacGallaghans weren't rich. Wiping in the roundhouse, even after you've wiped for fifteen years and get to drawing one-forty-five a day on account of long service, wasn't enough so that Mrs. MacGallaghan could dress Spud up in any Little Lord Fauntleroy fixings even on Sundays. Take it all around, appearances were against Spud from the start—but, according to Tommy Regan, that wasn't the seat of

Spud's troubles. Regan said the trouble was that Spud lived up to appearances.

Maybe it wasn't altogether Spud's fault that he began to grow up, too, in a sort of ragged way. Spud had to play second fiddle to Mrs. MacGallaghan's washtubs, because the washing Mrs. MacGallaghan did was what bridged the gulf between old John's pay check and the bills; and when she wasn't washing she was cooking, and when she wasn't cooking she was eternally and everlastingly sewing, and mending, and putting on patches. And as far as old John was concerned, Spud never had a hope when it came to either precept or example. Everybody liked the shiftless old wiper, who, starting out with no more ambition than a stray cat, attained that ambition before ever he got started, and had everybody else on the Hill Division faded into oblivion when it came to immunity from ever worrying about anything. Old John, with his black cutty, and his grin, and his greasy overalls, was liked by everybody for exactly what he was—a good-natured, happy-go-lucky, the-Lord-will-provide sort. Years ago he had got the habit of just letting things slide, and he still had the habit when Spud was born, and he just naturally kept on letting things slide—including Spud.

Maybe there is something in heredity. When Spud got old enough he went to school—on occasions. There wasn't any truant officer out there in Big Cloud under the shadows of the Rockies in those days. Not that it mattered, perhaps. *One* wouldn't have done any good, so far as Spud was concerned! It was astonishing, though, what the boy picked up, considering the ardent way he devoted himself to gophers, and the out-of-doors, and nature generally. Spud seemed to have some special faculty for absorbing things on the jump. There's no other way to account for it; for, otherwise, when it came time for him to take upon his shoulders some of the burden of the MacGallaghan household, he wouldn't have been able to write his own name, whereas, as a matter of fact, Spud could do a lot better than that—a whole lot better.

There wasn't any question, of course, as to what Spud would do to make his mark in life. No boy in the little divisional mountain town ever had but one idea on that score. There wasn't anything to it but railroading. If you were born in Big Cloud, you started in railroading as soon as you were old enough, and sometimes when you weren't. That was all there was to it. There wasn't anybody in Big Cloud but the railroaders who counted for anything, except the Indians who strayed in from the reserve, and strayed all over the town, and sold home-made relics to the tourists on the station

platform, but who, socially speaking, were out of the running anyhow. Even Spud himself had a hazy idea he was going to be a railroader.

All this naturally obviated any vexing parental worry anent a boy's future in Big Cloud. The only complication came from the boy himself in his effort to make choice between the engine crews, the shops, the trainmaster's department, or the key—not that the complication is to be made light of, far from it! With most of the boys it narrowed down to a choice between wearing brass buttons and a swell uniform and twirling a nickel-plated ticket punch royally around his forefinger, or being an engineer on a fast run with his head stuck out of the cab window of a ten-wheel mountain racer, streaking it with every right on earth from one end of the division to the other. The intermediate steps, of course, the kids bridged with one single and majestic leap of the imagination; but, at that, it was a pretty stiff proposition for a boy to make up his mind about.

Spud, however, was perhaps the exception that proves the rule. When his father asked him about it, Spud said:

"It doesn't matter."

So old John, being in the roundhouse, naturally tackled Regan on the subject. He hit up the fat little master mechanic for a job for Spud one morning as Regan came in through the roundhouse doors.

Regan sparred for wind from the start.

"H'm!" said Regan cautiously, as he eyed the old wiper. "A job for Spud, eh? I dunno! It seems to me I've heard a few things about him!"

Old John clawed earnestly at Regan's sleeve.

"Listen here, Regan!" he said anxiously. "Yez have been listenin' to tales out av school. Listen, Regan! Shure ut's mesilf thot knows the lad, an' wot he don't know, I dunno. He can read an' write ilegant, an' he's better at figures now nor ever I was in me life."

"H'm!" said Regan.

"Regan," said the old wiper, in sudden dismay, "Regan, yez weren't thinkin' av not givin' the lad a job!"

Regan pulled at his scraggly little brown moustache.

"How old is he?" he enquired.

"Thirteen," said old John. "Thirteen—come next Sunday."

"It's an unlucky number," said Regan—and then he screwed his eyes up at the dawning dismay in the old wiper's face, and reached into his back pocket for his chewing. "All right," said the big-hearted little master mechanic hurriedly, as his teeth met in the plug, "he can start in the shops. It's risking the company's money, but I'll take just one chance on him. H'm?"

But therein Tommy Regan was wrong; he took more than one chance. Before he was through he took several chances.

Old John went home to break the news to the rest of the MacGallaghans. Mrs. MacGallaghan beamed her delight, and in view of the increased income in prospect treated herself to a half day off after about forty years of soft soap and suds and washtubs. Spud was the only one who didn't seem to be interested; old John might as well have been talking about the weather—though it did occur to Spud, later on over the supper table, to ask one question.

"What kind of a job have I got in the shops?" he enquired, staring at his father around the kerosene lamp.

"I dunno," said old John. "Regan didn't say."

Spud had picked up an amazing lot of things, and he didn't seem to have overlooked much in the picking. He had even commenced to get a grip on philosophy—of a sort.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Spud inconsequentially.

Which was exactly what he said to Regan a month later, in reference to a little matter of some forty gallons of machine oil that, wending its way from the barrel tap across the floor of the storekeeper's domain, disappeared in a sodden, greasy stream, following the handcar tracks under the door, in the general direction of the blacksmith's shop—for whose use it was not intended.

"It doesn't matter," said Spud, facing the irate master mechanic—and said it because, being a little frightened, it was the first thing that came to his tongue. Habit wasn't letting go its grip any. "It doesn't matter," said Spud, whose attention had been diverted to something other than the tap during the process of drawing off a five-gallon can for a machine shop requisition.

It took a lot to make Regan lose his hair—what he had left of it. Nevertheless Regan was red in the face as he eyed Spud, and did a sum in mental arithmetic with forty gallons of standard, grade I. oil at one dollar and fourteen cents per gallon as the prime factor. But the trouble was that

the unhandsome features, now somewhat modestly averted from his gaze, topped only the small and diminutive figure of a boy. It didn't appease Regan's wrath any, not at all—but Regan was not without dignity fitting any occasion.

Regan choked.

"Get out!" said the master mechanic apoplectically.

And Spud got out.

Maybe it was old John's cajolery that got Spud back again into a job; or maybe it was the Klondike boom that was just opening up, and which, to say nothing of the tourists' specials that were running in sections and crowding on each others' heels and demanding double shifts from the crews, was spreading its contagion through the Hill Division itself until the pay roll began to thin woefully from the gold-itch casualties. Maybe the scarcity of *labour* had something to do with it—maybe not. Regan didn't commit himself. But, anyway, at the end of a month, Spud went back to work.

He went into the roundhouse this time—with his father. Old John swore by all that was holy, and gave Regan his solemn word for it, that he'd keep his eye on the boy. And old John meant it, all right. He wasn't making any rash promises, either. He had been keeping his eye on Spud since the night he had given the young man taffy to suck in the soap box, and he didn't see any reason why he couldn't keep on keeping his eye on the boy. Maybe it wasn't the sort of indorsement that a bank would take on avowedly questionable paper, and maybe Regan was sophisticated enough to be a trifle leery about it; but, anyway, Spud went into the roundhouse—to make himself generally useful.

Spud stayed there longer than he had in the shops. There was quite enough to keep the boy busy; what with sweeping and cleaning up, and running errands for Clarihue, and acting as helper to the roundhouse fitters, there was quite enough to keep several Spuds on the jump, but there wasn't any one particular or prolonged job that kept him with his nose clamped to the grindstone, or under anybody's watchful eyes for any length of time at a stretch—except old John's.

Spud figured it out for himself. Spud figured that, being at everybody's beck and bidding, everybody would figure it out that somebody else had, at the moment, a prior lien on his services when he did not respond to a call; also he figured out that the fitters would even manage somehow to make their minor or emergency repairs without his assistance, and that it really

didn't matter how infrequently he swept out the roundhouse because it was bound to get dirty again—and also that the back windows of the roundhouse, when there was, as there always was, an engine or two on the pits to hide the windows from prying eyes, had been built especially for his benefit. It was easier, a whole lot easier than sneaking out of school, and school hadn't bothered him very much even in that way.

It was wonderful what Spud had picked up—on the jump, as has been said—in his somewhat abbreviated career. The red men are great gamblers. It is a passion with them. That Spud, through intimacy with them from babyhood, should have discovered this somewhat obvious trait is not at all miraculous; but how Spud picked up both an acquaintance and an exceeding dexterity with the game of craps, Spud himself alone knew.

A few yards behind the roundhouse was an old store shed no longer in use, and beyond this—this being the lower end of the town—there was nothing but buttes and a few Polack shanties. The locality was one of perfect security and ready accessibility. Also the Indians were near at hand—every time a train came in they lined the platform from end to end to sell their wares. It wasn't hard to inveigle a few of the second generation of the trusting children of the Great White Father, which is to say those of about his own age, over behind the shed and initiate them into the game of craps. After that the only difficulty Spud had was to keep the crowd from becoming so large it would attract attention.

Spud always played for the same stakes; that is, he always stood to lose the same thing every time. Spud put up a cigarette. The young blankets not having any cigarettes, or any money to buy them, were more versatile, so to speak, in their wagers—they put up anything they had, from personal belongings to articles subject to a suspicion of having been surreptitiously extracted from the packs that the squaws trustfully hoped to sell to the tourists. Spud ran his gambling joint on broad lines; no bet was refused.

"It doesn't matter," Spud would say. "You, there, Wind In The Face, I'll play you for those beaded moccasins you got on."

Spud lost a few cigarettes, it is true—but not many. The old store shed came into active service again; Spud used it as a warehouse for his winnings—and went into partnership with Squidge Meeks, the newsboy on the Limited. And while the Indians waited on the Big Cloud platform for the vestibuled travelling mint to pull in, Squidge beat them to their sales by the margin of about three hundred miles, or so. And the big braves were not happy with their squaws, and the squaws grunted and consulted their

medicine men as to why their sales fell off, and the young blankets being trained to silence, and laconic by nature, as is the way of Indians, said nothing—and Spud thrived. Which is to say that if Spud neglected his roundhouse duties for matters of more consequence, and didn't get on any more intimate terms than before with a sense of responsibility, it might at least be inferred that he was no fool.

All things come to an end; but, at that, Spud was on the pay-roll in the roundhouse for a good many months. It wasn't until a day in late fall that Regan got wind of what was going on, and one afternoon raided the gambling hell that was operating without lease on the company's property. Spud, rolling the ivories at the moment, did not have time to pick them up, as, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of the master mechanic coming around the end of the shed; but the raid was a clean-up as far as paraphernalia and evidence were concerned—Regan got the dice.

Maybe it was old John again who saved Spud; or, perhaps, if you like it the other way, it was Mrs. MacGallaghan this time. Old John had been taken down sick the week before, and Doctor McTurk was shaking his head over the old wiper. Regan, thinking of the washtubs minus the pay check, said a heartful of things to Spud—when he got hold of him—and Spud went back to the roundhouse.

With the windows barred against him, Spud naturally had to confine his attention more intimately to the immediate surroundings where his job was supposed to be; but by the end of a month Clarihue began to regret that Regan had ever found out anything about Spud's propensities for dice. It wasn't anything very much; just a whole lot of little matters—things had gone more smoothly before Spud stopped climbing out of the back windows! There wasn't anything vicious about Spud—just a profound and utter absence of any sense of responsibility. It didn't matter to Spud, for instance, if he mixed up a pail of packing in the sand-box pail—without first removing any small quantity of sand that might happen to be remaining in the bottom. It wasn't good for the journals, and the sand had a habit of working its way into the babbiting, and the percentage increase of hot boxes on the tenders leaped right up in the air. Clarihue got as hot as the boxes. It lasted a month. And then Clarihue blew up. He blew up the afternoon that Spud, doing calisthenics in the cab of the 506, unfortunately kicked a hole in the water glass. Not serious? No; but a bit of a dirty mess. The 506 was waiting to go out, and, having a full head of steam, she spouted like a geyser. Before they got it stopped she drenched her cab; and MacAloon's lunch, that the engineer had left on his seat while he was oiling around,

became a sticky mixture of newspaper, soft cheese and dough; and the roundhouse filled up with the drifting steam until it had a London fog beaten seven ways for Sunday.

Clarihue was Irish. He spoke Irish to Regan—but the meaning was unmistakable.

"I'm sorry for Mrs. MacGallaghan," he said. "D'ye mind, Regan? I'm sorry for her. But one MacGallaghan is enough around here for me even when he's laid up sick. Take the boy away, Regan, before I mangle the ugly face of him, as I've got into the way of doing in me dreams at night!"

It worried Regan. Old John had worked fifteen years for Regan. Regan went around all day scowling about it. A railroad man in hard luck could get under the soft-hearted, fat little man's vest quicker than anything else on earth. He put it up to the super.

"It's Mrs. MacGallaghan I'm thinking of, Carleton," he said. "The doc says old John'll mabbe be months before he's on his feet again. Kind of run down. Guess he's getting old. H'm?"

Carleton smiled in his quiet way over the bowl of his brier.

"I can see it coming, Tommy!" he said. "I remember occasions before. But why me? Isn't your own department big enough so that you can find room for him, without getting me hated by jamming him down somebody else's throat? Why don't you put him back in the shops again?"

"How much," said Regan, "does forty times one hundred and fourteen make?"

"Well?" grinned Carleton.

"Well," said Regan, "that's the answer. I'd like to put him somewhere where he couldn't get into trouble if he tried—until old John gets drawing pay again."

Carleton shook his head helplessly.

"I don't know where that is, Tommy. I've been brought up all my life on a railroad."

"Mabbe!" said Regan. "But let that go. I was thinking of bringing him over here with the dispatchers. The night kid that's here now carrying the messages is due for a lift."

"Spud's getting a little grown up for that, isn't he?" observed Carleton.

“He’ll mabbe die at eighty, but he’ll never grow up,” replied Regan. “ ’Tis only till old John gets back. After that I’ll fire him for the last time—and take pleasure in it.”

Spud went over to the dispatchers’ office.

Maybe Regan was right. Maybe things ran smoothly for Spud for a while because the job was fool proof. Regan wagged his head, quite pleased with himself, and put it down to that, anyway. Maybe Regan was right—but maybe, too, Fred Blainey had something to do with it. Donkin having gone as chief of the Prairie Division, Spud went on the night trick with Fred Blainey, who wasn’t much more than a boy himself, not much more than twenty-four or five, quiet, white-faced, delicate—the doctors down East had ordered him out to the mountains the year before—but quick as a steel trap, quick as the current that purred under his slim, white fingers, one of the best dispatchers that ever held down a key on the Hill Division.

Queer? Well, perhaps! Spud and Fred Blainey codgered up to each other from the start—and it started on the first night Spud went on duty, and, fitting into the niche in the time-honoured way, as though he had filled it all his life, curled himself up in a chair over in the corner, and buried his nose in a nickel thriller.

Blainey, between train orders and meeting points, looked Spud over.

“I used to read them, too,” said Fred Blainey genially. “Pretty good stuff!”

Spud’s jaw dropped, and he stared at the dispatcher.

“Huh?” he said.

“You bet!” said Fred Blainey. “But how about copying some of these train orders?”

Somehow that started it. But Spud wasn’t changed much. Any other man but Blainey wouldn’t have let Spud copy for him again. Not but what the writing was all right and legible. It was. But Spud, with his mind on the nickel thriller, got the engine numbers mixed up—and put them down mixed up.

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” said Spud ingenuously, when the dispatcher with a grim little smile called his attention to the mistake, “I can change ’em easily enough.”

And Spud changed them; but, as has been said, Spud himself didn’t change much in spite of the fact that, as time went by, he came to think that

the sun rose and set on Fred Blainey, and on no one else. And so the weeks went into a month, and into another; and Spud, irresponsibly playing havoc with about every mortal thing when the opportunity offered, stayed on with Fred Blainey—and Regan, hearing no complaints, began to wonder why he hadn't thought of the fool proof job from the first.

Possibly Fred Blainey was a better judge of human nature than Regan was; possibly that was why he hid Spud's light under his own bushel, so to speak, and stood between Spud and the carpet a dozen times. He even told Regan one day that he thought Spud had the makings of a railroad man in him.

Regan eyed the dispatcher blandly.

"That's all right, Fred," laughed the little master mechanic, thinking that Fred Blainey was trying to get a rise out of him. "Only he'll have to hurry up—what? Old John'll be out in another month, or so."

Fred Blainey let it go at that. Perhaps, after all, he might be mistaken. He wasn't altogether sure of Spud himself. Spud, curled up in a chair and raising the hair on the nape of his neck with his nickel thrillers, hadn't seemed to be very much interested in telegraphy, though he, Fred Blainey, had tried to teach the other something of it. But perhaps interest hadn't anything to do with it, anyway; perhaps it was just a queer subconscious sixth sense to make up for the sense of responsibility which was lacking, for Spud, somehow, acquiring it in spite of himself, it seemed, had picked up quite a little Morse, and if it wasn't thrown at him too quick he could even handle the taking after a fashion. And it was Spud's faculty for absorbing things in that way that had prompted Fred Blainey to make a stab at prophecy to Regan; but when Blainey put it up to Spud, and suggested the possibilities that might lie in developing Spud's latent abilities, Spud sort of treated the subject as though he were sorry it had been mentioned.

"It doesn't matter," said Spud—and always seemed in a hurry to get back to his paper-covered novel again.

Two months, three months Spud spent listening to the current, and listening to Fred Blainey cough, and doing odd jobs with his mind on something else, and listening to Fred bawl him out and then frame up an alibi to save him; and then, one night when he trudged into the dispatcher's room, Spence, the chief, was in the chair—and Blainey wasn't there.

Spence told Spud that Blainey had had a hemorrhage. Spud had no more than a very hazy idea of what that meant; but he got the impression that Fred

Blainey was good and sick, and for perhaps the first time in his life Spud got through his trick without any foolishness. He went up to the boarding house the next day to see Blainey—and came away whistling. Blainey seemed pretty near all right again. He couldn't figure out what they were making all the fuss about. Fred himself said he'd be sitting in again the next night at the office.

But Blainey was wrong. The next night Fred Blainey got down to the station all right, but he went into Carleton's office instead of his own—and Carleton said "no." He told Blainey to take a month's holiday. And Blainey's white face flushed painfully.

"I can't take a month's holiday," he said, shaking his head.

"McTurk says you've been over-doing it lately," said Carleton genially. "You've got to let up a bit. A month off, quiet, is what you want."

Blainey shook his head again.

"I can't," he said.

"Why?" demanded Carleton.

It came out then—because Carleton dragged it out piecemeal. There was a mother and sister back East who weren't depending on—holidays.

Carleton didn't say anything for a moment. He got up from his chair, and went over to the window, and stood staring out at the yard lights twinkling up at him red, white and green from the murk below. When he turned from the window after a little while, he didn't go back to his chair—he laid his hand on Fred Blainey's shoulder.

"You'll take a month's holiday, just the same, Fred," he smiled. "You can put in the time up at the Mitre Rock station. There's plenty of altitude there—and plenty of quiet. We'll shift Crane along the line somewhere until you get back, and we'll bring some one in here to fill in. At the end of a month, with no night work, and nothing to do during the day but O.S. a train or two, it'll come pretty near filling McTurk's prescription, and it won't change any of the figures on your pay check. What do you say?"

That was Carleton's way. Fred Blainey went up to Mitre Rock the next day.

So far as Blainey was concerned this was apparently eminently satisfactory; but so far as Spud was concerned it apparently wasn't. Spence, who inherited Spud, began to look at Regan when they met as though the master mechanic owed him something. But Regan only grinned now. Old

John was on his feet again, a little shaky, a little wobbly, but on his feet. Old John was back in the roundhouse again, kind of taking it easy until he got his strength back, and not doing much of any work to speak of except draw his pay. So Regan grinned at Spence. He had washed his hands of Spud. It was up to the dispatcher.

But it was Tommy Regan, and not Spence, for all that, who fired Spud conclusively, definitely, and for all time—as he thought. It was a question, perhaps, which department head should have officially discharged Spud; but as both the motive power department, which was Regan, and the dispatchers' end of it, which was Spence, would have taken pleasure in attending Spud's funeral under the circumstances that arose, any consideration of red-tape was whole-heartedly and unanimously thrown to the winds.

The fast express for the coast, otherwise No. 73, came in off the Prairie Division, and scheduled Big Cloud in the early evening. She pulled into the Big Cloud yards one night, a week after Blainey had left, about half an hour late, which is to say about ten o'clock. Also she was very heavy that night. The train sheet was full, but it was an understood thing that No. 73 was to get the best of it any old time.

It has already been said that, due partially to the Klondike boom, traffic through the mountains, single-tracked, was straining the Hill Division to the limit, and that night, as Spence pushed the hair out of his eyes and studied his train sheet it looked like a Chinese puzzle gone wrong. From Big Cloud to Loon River, clear through the Rockies to the Sierras, extras, specials and regulars, east and west, were hugging the sidings and trying to dodge each other as they felt their way along. Spence cursed the belated No. 73. Late already because she was heavy, she couldn't be trusted to keep to any kind of schedule on the mountain grades ahead of her, and it wasn't the kind of a night to hunt trouble by inviting confusion. Regan and Carleton were across the hall at their pedro in the super's office, and Spence went in for a consultation. It was decided to send No. 73 out in two sections.

And then, with the matter settled, Spence studied his train sheet again; and, barring the meeting points that he sent out along the line, his new train orders as they pertained specifically to First No. 73 and Second No. 73—already thirty minutes late—read like this:

> First No. 73, Engine 568, will run thirty minutes late, Big Cloud to Antlers.

Second No. 73, Engine 1610, will run one hour late, Big Cloud to Antlers.

And then it was all up to Spud. Spud, being handy, he was sent uptown to call a crew for Second No. 73, which was to follow thirty minutes behind the first section. And it was impressed upon Spud to hurry.

Spud hurried—until he was about halfway up Main Street. And then Spud stole just the fraction of a second to wriggle his way into the heart of a little crowd that had collected on one of the corners, because he wanted to see what the excitement was about—which would have been all right if he hadn't stolen any more than the same amount of time to wriggle out again.

Big Cloud, in those rough and ready days, ran wide open; it was even wider open than usual at that time, thanks to a pretty hard element that was wending its way West like a flock of buzzards to feed on the Klondike rush—and Spud's eyes widened as he gained the inside edge of the crowd. A young man, with his hat far back on his head, stood beside a torch that was stuck in the ground, and in front of him was a sort of small, high-legged, folding table, covered with green baize. On the table, quite carelessly displayed, was a generous wad of bills, and the young man manipulated three walnut shells on the green baize cover, and a little pea was busily engaged in taking shelter under first one and then another of the shells. Spud had played craps—quite successfully to an audience of his own. Maybe there was something of an analogy in the present situation; but, if so, Spud failed to see it—in time.

He drew in his breath—almost commiseratingly—as Benny Horgan, who ran the one dray the town boasted, reached out and picked up a shell, and paid for his lack of insight. But then, Benny Horgan wasn't rated very high anyhow when it came to brains, not much higher than the pair of mules he drove. A blind man could have seen where the pea went. Spud saw it. And Spud saw the young man lift the particular shell upon which he, Spud, had clamped his eyes—and there the pea was, safe enough, underneath.

Spud's fingers, itching at their tips, went feeling through his pockets. He had a little money. Be it said to his credit, he had not very much. Yesterday had been pay day, and Mrs. MacGallaghan never had to ask for the pay check. Spud was possessed of seventy-five cents.

His heart began to beat like a trip hammer. He staked a quarter—and won. He staked again—and won. Likewise a third time. Spud's pulse dropped back to a sort of contemptuous sub-normal. It was a softer thing

than playing craps with the young blankets. All you had to do was to watch the pea.

The young man was a good sport. He didn't seem to mind losing. Some of the crowd begin to chirp up, and bet—the same way Spud did. They bet quite a wad, and Spud went a whole dollar—but, somehow, the pea wasn't there, though the young man let Spud lift the shell himself. Then the young man winked encouragingly at Spud, and Spud bet again—a quarter this time—and Benny Horgan, the only one who didn't appear to have lost faith in Spud, bet too, and they both won. It began to grow exciting. Time went like the wind. The crowd chirped up again and came in, with Spud playing bell-wether, though he didn't know it—and the young man collected a month's rent.

It just kept on zigzagging up and down, and at the end of about an hour Spud still had fifty cents left. He kept his eyes glued on the pea. He got a dollar ahead of the game again, and then dwindled down to his last quarter—and up again to a dollar, with the crowd's enthusiasm working up nicely again along with him. Spud had struck another winning streak. And now he hesitated—but the young man's smile was encouraging, and besides Spud was dead sure he knew where the pea was. Spud staked his dollar, and the crowd went the limit—and Spud, suddenly experiencing a gone and empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, saw that the pea had vanished—also his dollar. But that wasn't all that Spud saw. He saw Tommy Regan pushing his way through at the back of the crowd. And upon Spud there descended the realization that possibly something had delayed the departure of Second No. 73, and that Spence's train sheet would require about a bushel of new orders, and some hard feeling, before it got straightened out again. And temporarily Spud forgot about his dollar.

As on a former occasion, Spud did not stand upon the order of his going. Spud bolted—and he chose the line of least resistance; and thereby, where before he had been the medium through which the crowd had lost its money, he now became the medium through which the crowd got it back—which was proper. Being hemmed in by a phalanx of humans everywhere except directly behind the young man, Spud naturally bolted in that direction, and the table, and the young man, and the bale of green backs went down in a heap, and the crowd went to the rescue—of the money.

There were some harsh words—but all Spud heard was the panting of the fat little master mechanic, as Regan came on in pursuit. It wasn't much of a chase, however. Nature had handicapped Tommy Regan. Regan never

had a chance. He stopped on the next corner, and fought to get back a little breath.

"I—I fire you!" gasped Tommy Regan, articulating with difficulty through rage and physical distress. "I fire you, and I fire you for keeps, and I ____"

But Spud didn't hear any more. Regan's voice was too shaky to carry far—and Spud hadn't stopped running.

And he didn't stop running until, on the outskirts of the little mountain town, he sat down in the shelter of a butte and the darkness, to take stock of the situation. He was both jobless and penniless. He lay on his back and stared up at the cloud wracks that were sweeping somewhat ominously across the moon, as he pondered this.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Spud complacently. "I can get another job."

This, however, was by way of being a problem. And the more Spud really got to thinking about it, the greater were the proportions that the problem assumed. Intuition, to say nothing of Regan's voice, which, for all its shakiness had lacked nothing of fervor, assured Spud that he couldn't get another railroad job. And there weren't any other kind of jobs in Big Cloud that he had ever heard of to *be* got. Therefore, where was the job to come from? Logic came to his rescue, and gave him a lift at this point. If he couldn't get a job in Big Cloud, it would have to be out of Big Cloud. That was perfectly reasonable. But where?

"It doesn't matter," said Spud, sitting up and hugging his knees for inspiration.

The inspiration came. It came in one magnificent, stupendous, overwhelming flash. It took his breath away. The Klondike! It was so conclusively, so obviously the solution that the last thing to be thought of was to question it for even a single instant. Everybody was going to the Klondike. He had heard them all talking about it for months—from car tinks to the billiard marker in Ike's Emporium. It opened a vista that prevented him from regaining his lost breath for some time.

Furthermore, he would go at once. There were reasons. He had an uneasy feeling that Big Cloud wasn't big enough for both himself and the young man who shelled peas with his hat on the back of his head, and that the young man might possibly be lingering around for a day or so yet.

Sure! The Klondike! But how? He hadn't any money. They hadn't any money to give him at home either; and, besides, if he went home they wouldn't let him go at all—and he just *had* to go now. It would be very much better—and safer, so far as his plans were concerned—if he wrote a letter about it after he got away.

Spud resolved himself into a committee on ways and means. But the debate, however, though it lasted for a very long time, didn't supply the budget deficiency. There wasn't any money in sight. It finally came down to Spud solving the problem in his own way.

"It doesn't matter," said Spud.

He got up from the ground, and started back toward the other end of the town, heading in the direction of the railroad yards; but, mindful of the young man with the wrecked table, Spud made a wide detour, and stuck to the rough country and the buttes. It didn't cost any money to ride on a freight if one weren't found out, and the local way-freight, west, would be making up and pulling out just about now.

Spud reached the yards, and, finding the way-freight ready, beset himself to find accommodations for the rest of the night. Spud played in hard luck. For some unexplained reason there wasn't a single box-car door open. The only alternative was a flat car. Spud boarded a flat as the local pulled out, and curled himself up in a corner, and went to sleep.

Purdy, the front-end brakeman, found him there about ten minutes later, shoved his lamp into Spud's unhandsome countenance without waking the boy up—and grinned. There had been some little talk around the yards, and some mention of Second No. 73 that night, that had been loud enough for Purdy to overhear. So Purdy grinned. If the sleeping figure had been a rod-rider Purdy would have incontinently thrown him off, but the flavour of a railroad man still lingered around Spud. Any one of that status—except Spud—would have been invited into the caboose, of course; but, it being Spud, Purdy left him there.

At the age of fifteen, or thereabouts, one sleeps with profound abandon. It was light when Spud woke up; and then it was neither the rattling, nor the bouncing, nor the stops the way-freight made that disturbed his slumbers—it was the rain. It was raining steadily, and with no other promise but rain. Spud squeezed himself a little more tightly into the corner of the flat car. He was already wet; and, added to this, he began to feel hungry—and his enthusiasm for the Klondike began to wane in direct ratio as his discomfort increased—which was fast.

He stared out over the side of the car. They were just passing Spriggot's Siding. There was no use jumping off here; it wasn't anything but a siding, and——

Spud whistled suddenly, low and joyously. The next station west was Mitre Rock—and Fred Blainey was at Mitre Rock!

Spud hugged his coat more tightly around him, dug his hands into his pockets, and, as the way-freight began to climb the stiff grade that lay in front of the pilot, he snuggled down in the corner again and soaked up some more rain water from the floor of the car because a little more didn't matter, and he could get some protection for his head and shoulders that way. Spud began to whistle to keep his spirits up, but it was pretty raw up there in the heart of the range, and the whistle thinned out, and, by the time Mitre Rock was reached, Spud was shivering violently enough to add a little extra vibration to the flat car, and his teeth were going like castanets.

But half an hour later, Spud forgot all about that.

Toasting his flesh in front of Fred Blainey's heater, and with his mouth full of the grub that Fred Blainey rustled for him, Spud got a grip on himself again, and the Klondike began to look ripe enough for picking once more. Spud told Fred Blainey about it.

Fred Blainey wasn't very old, but he was a whole lot older than his age. He didn't say much of anything just then. He just coughed and looked out of the window, and said it looked as though it were settling in for an ugly spell of weather in the mountains, and that there wasn't any hurry because there wasn't anything Spud could do but stay where he was until it cleared up. But later, off and on, recurring to the subject as though it just happened to strike him at the moment, Fred Blainey, in his quiet way, drew a picture or two of how many different kinds of a fool he thought a kid of fifteen was who got notions of that kind in his head, and he wiped quite a bit of the glamour off gold rushes in general, and the one to the Klondike in particular.

Spud listened. Maybe it sank in from the start, maybe it didn't; Spud didn't do any of the talking. But Spud listened. There wasn't anything else to do. Mitre Rock even under normal conditions, let alone Mitre Rock in bad weather, didn't offer many attractions. It was all right from the observation platform of the Limited, because about half a mile west of the station the right of way, hugging the mountain wall, made a great semi-circle around a huge bluff of gray, bare rock, and the passengers, by craning their necks over the brass railings on the other side, could get a thrill out of the sheer drop of some five hundred feet to where the Moosehead River swirled and tumbled

along below them. It was very pretty. They called it Mitre Rock because that was what it looked like on account of an enormous fissure that, from a distance, appeared to split the rock bluff from the top to about three-quarters of the way to the base. That is, it looked that way—from a distance. But the road men claimed the fissure went a whole lot deeper than that; they swore never a year went by that it didn't widen at the top, and they backed up their argument by pointing out that the Rock had never over-hung the right of way in the beginning the way it did now. They talked so much about it, in fact, that the engineers, the chaps with the college alphabets after their names, went up and looked it over. The engineers' report wasn't incorporated in the road's advertising literature; but it was an open secret that there were plans out to do some boring through the mountain side, when the spring came, that would give Mitre Rock a wide berth, and this in spite of an estimated cost that made the directors wonder where the next ones were coming from every time they pocketed their gold pieces at the Board meetings.

This, however, was of no particular interest to Spud. Neither was the little hamlet, almost a mile from the station, that lay in the valley below. There were only half a dozen houses there. Spud was interested only to the extent of learning that Fred Blainey boarded in one of them, but that there wasn't any room there for Spud himself, though there would be no trouble so far as getting all he wanted to eat was concerned—which concerned Spud greatly. For the rest, there were bunks in the station, and Spud could use one of those.

Not that Spud had announced any intention of making a prolonged stay—only it was raining. Not a thin, measly, timorous drizzle; but raining pitilessly in a downpour that drove in sheets against the window panes, and ricochetted off and swelled the gathering pools on the station platform into miniature lakes, and drained off again to make young rivers along the track side.

And all that day it rained. And by the next morning the storm only seemed to have got its second wind, and to be settling down to its job as though it really meant business. There was no nightman at Mitre Rock, and wasn't supposed to be, but Fred Blainey, after a glance outside his boarding house door on the second morning, got them to carry some provisions up to the station, and figured that a bunk there with Spud was preferable to what he'd have to walk through to get home at night.

Nor was Fred Blainey the only one who looked askance at the weather. Down at Big Cloud the Big Fellows were growing anxious as the road

reports began to pile in. The water through the mountains was rising everywhere.

Spud was the only one whom the elements in uproar did not seem to effect. Spud, toasting himself at the heater, and eminently comfortable, said it didn't matter.

All that second day it rained; and all the third day it rained. Matters began to look ugly—they had long ago begun to look serious. But by now, back at Big Cloud, though the strain grew hourly, they had buckled grimly down to see the thing through. Extra men were put out, the road gangs were doubled, trebled, and even the construction bosses with their crews were thrown into the fight to hold the levels. There weren't any more reports of just rising water. The culverts were running a mill race, the creeks had overflowed their banks, and the Moosehead River, wherever it paralleled the right of way at anywhere near the same level, was lapping greedily at the ballast and the tracks. Three days of it, and there wasn't any thought of holding down schedules any more, it was a question of holding down the roadbed; and from Carleton, growing weary around the eyes for want of sleep, to the last bedraggled section hand who swung a dripping pick, the Hill Division fought with its back to the wall. Bridges were watched, trestles strengthened, culverts kept open—but no one thought of Mitre Rock. Even with the water reported at the highest level ever known in the mountains, and even though it was still rising, Mitre Rock towered five hundred feet above any such consideration. No one thought of Mitre Rock.

Fred Blainey was coughing pretty badly on that third night. There was altitude enough at Mitre Rock, but there wasn't anything dry or crisp about it by that time, and the dampness that permeated everything, in spite of the heater, wasn't doing him any good. But he talked to Spud that night as the boy began undressing, talked in a sort of peroration, as it were, kind of summing up and trying to drive home what he had been saying off and on ever since Spud had landed in on him as his guest.

"I was hoping that some day you'd get a jolt, Spud, that would bring you to some idea of a sense of responsibility," said Blainey pleasantly. "A man with 'it doesn't matter' as his philosophy of life is heading straight for only one place, and if you don't know what place that is, I'll tell you—it's the junk heap. The only advantage I can see coming to you in beating your way to the Klondike is that, if you're dead set on the junk heap, that's the line to take because you'll get a through schedule and no stop-overs to the terminal. But you're not going that way, are you, Spud—at fifteen?"

Spud didn't answer. Already half undressed, he was scowling at the heater.

Fred Blainey didn't speak again for a moment. The sounder was chattering like a woodpecker on the rampage. Blainey's face lost its smile. McCann, the construction boss, who had been thrown into the Pass with his men, was pleading hysterically for reserves. Blainey's lips tightened. It was a wild night, bitter wild in the mountains. A gust of wind tore at the window sash and shook it as a terrier might shake a rat, and followed the attack with a battery of driving rain that rattled fast and thick as gatling bullets playing on the glass.

Blainey coughed—and turned again to Spud.

"And then there's Mrs. MacGallaghan," he said. "How about the mother back there at Big Cloud that you're running away from?"

Spud's face flushed. That wasn't fair. He wasn't throwing his mother down.

"I ain't running away from her!" he said belligerently. "But I can't earn anything for her there when I haven't got a job, can I? I've told you that often enough!"

"Well, then, why don't you get a job there?" enquired Fred Blainey.

Spud eyed the other suspiciously.

"Yes, why don't I!" he choked sarcastically. "That's why!"

"Yes, why don't you?" insisted Blainey softly.

"Because they wouldn't give me one—any more," snapped Spud.

"Why not make them?" Blainey was staring out through the window.

"Heh?" Spud enquired with a gasp—and again eyed Blainey suspiciously. Fred Blainey was having fun with him. "Say, cut it out! How'd I make 'em—eh?"

"By making them believe in you," Blainey answered. "There's no kid that was ever born in Big Cloud that wouldn't rather railroad than do anything else in the world, and you're no exception, and you know it. Show them you've got the makings of a railroad man in you. Make them believe in you."

"My eye!" said Spud heavily, and shook his head. "I guess I'd have a hot chance making any of 'em believe that! None of 'em ever did to begin

with."

"That's where you're wrong, Spud." Blainey smiled. "As a matter of fact, one of them did—and said so."

"Heh?" said Spud incredulously. "Who was it?"

"His name was Blainey, Fred Blainey," said Blainey—and coughed. "Are you going to throw me cold, too, Spud—as well as yourself? It was Regan that I said it to. I told Regan you had the makings of a railroad man in you. You owe me something for Regan's laugh, Spud; you owe——"

But Fred Blainey never finished his sentence. Over the racketing of the storm, silencing the howl of the wind, and the pelting water, and the rattling sash, there came a terrific crash that seemed to shake the station to its foundations—and then a prolonged roar, punctuated by a succession of minor crashes that in themselves were like the firing of big guns.

"My God!" whispered Blainey. "What's that?"—and, snatching up a lantern, dashed out of the door.

Spud, half undressed, his face a little white, followed as far as the window, and glued his eyes to the pane. He couldn't see anything in the blackness except the glimmer of Fred Blainey's lantern, that seemed to bob queerly through the curtain of water that ran down on the outside of the window. He watched the light until it disappeared around the curve down the track, and then he went back to the heater to wait. There wasn't anything else to do. He debated with himself whether he would dress again, or complete his undressing; but he couldn't see any reason why he should do the former, and, equally, he wasn't going to get into his bunk, of course, until Fred Blainey got back and he, Spud, found out what the matter was, so there wasn't any use in taking off the rest of his clothes. So he just waited the way he was.

The minutes passed—five, ten of them. Spud's eyes kept straying to the clock. Fifteen minutes went by, and then Spud went to the window again. Yes, there it was! He could see Fred Blainey's light coming back again, but it didn't seem to be coming very fast, and at times it didn't even seem to move at all.

Spud watched. And after a long time, Fred Blainey, head down, buffeting the wind that swept the platform like a tornado, went by the window, and the door opened, and Fred Blainey staggered in—and the wind swirled in after the operator, and the lamps went to smoking and flickering badly, because Fred Blainey didn't shut the door after him.

And then something cold clutched at Spud's heart, and fear came to him. Fred Blainey was as white as a ghost, and the water ran from him and pooled on the floor; and Fred Blainey didn't seem to see him, Spud, and didn't say a word—but just lurched like a drunken man for the table, and his fingers, pawing for the key, began pounding the Big Cloud call.

One of the lamps went out then. And Spud remembered the door, and shut it. And then he listened to the stammering wire. He could read it, all right—Fred Blainey wasn't sending very fast. Mitre Rock had crashed—the tons upon tons of it that made the bluff—carrying the right of way into the Moosehead River five hundred feet below. The track was out in the middle of the curve. The track was out. Blainey kept repeating that in a queer way. The track was out. And then Fred Blainey's hand sort of jerked itself from the key, and went to his lips, and stained suddenly to a bright crimson—and Fred Blainey went down over the table.

There was nothing hazy now about Spud's idea of what a hemorrhage was, and, half wild with fear and grief, he got his arms around the operator's shoulders, and half-dragged, half-carried Fred Blainey back to one of the bunks. Only Fred Blainey didn't speak. It was more than a hemorrhage—the man had gone a long way past his strength.

Spud got some of the wet things off the other, and stirred up the heater, and kept begging Fred Blainey to speak to him. Only Fred didn't speak.

It was only the sounder there that talked. It talked insanely. It kept calling Mitre Rock, calling, calling, calling—with the *seventeen* now—the life and death. It was Spence back there calling—calling with the seventeen. Spence's sending was quick as the tattoo of a snare drum, but in a curiously detached way Spud got the gist of the message because it was repeated so often, over and over again: The Mitre Rock call, then the seventeen, and then: "No. 40 is out of Pilot Head. Can you get around the Rock to stop her? No. 40 is out of——"

Spud stood suddenly still in the middle of the room—and he stared at Fred Blainey, who didn't speak, and who lay there on the bunk unconscious. He understood now. No. 40 was the through express, eastbound. They wouldn't be able to see in time that the track was out because of the curve, and, before they could stop, they would be into the thick of it, and into the Moosehead River five hundred feet below—into eternity. And No. 40 was already out of Pilot Head, the next station west, only fifteen miles away. And there wasn't much time, perhaps not even enough left now—only Fred Blainey was lying there, hardly breathing, and—and——

Spud, with a spring, was across the room, and for an instant he knelt at Fred Blainey's side.

"I got to go, Fred," he told the unconscious man—and dug his knuckles into his eyes to brush away a rush of blinding tears. "I got to go. I wouldn't leave you, Fred, if I could help it. You know that, don't you? But I got to go. I got to go."

And in the dispatcher's room at Big Cloud, Regan and Spence and Carleton looked into each others' eyes and read the doom that each knew was in his own—because there was no answer from Mitre Rock; and they did not think of Spud, who had disappeared; and much less did they understand that Spud, not being an adept with the key, was not wasting priceless moments to practise with it now; and they could not see a little half-clad figure, with a bobbing light, staggering down the right of way on that mountain stretch of track, sluiced by the rain, fighting with every step to hold its own against the merciless gusts of storm. And so, while Spence still called, called in desperation, with hope already gone, Carleton spoke, gray-lipped, and turned his face away to hide a brave man's agony.

"Clear the line, Spence," he said. "Tommy, see that the wreckers are called—and McTurk. There's nothing else that we can do."

And while Flannagan, the wrecking boss, marshalled his crew, and, in the yards, they loaded a coach with volunteer nurses and coupled it on behind the derrick and the tool-car, Spud battered his way down the track. It was cold, bitterly cold, and the rain cut through his thin shirt, and stung like sharp needles; and it was black, pitch-black, and the lantern hardly served to show any more than the great, grotesque, looming shapes of the fallen boulders that blocked his way as he reached the spot, in the middle of the curve, where once in scenic grandeur Mitre Rock had over-hung the right of way.

There wasn't any way around—only a drop to the river below on one side, only the mountain wall on the other; and linking the two, in valleys and peaks and gaping holes, was strewn the tons of granite that they had temporized with too long, for the road men had been right, and the fissure had opened clear to a strata of sand and gravel, which, with the torrents of water pouring upon it as through a funnel, had washed out and shifted for all time the center of gravity of Mitre Rock.

There wasn't any way around. Spud began to scramble over the débris. But it wasn't easy. He couldn't see very well, and the rocks were slippery with the rain, and he kept stumbling, and the edges were sharp and jagged

and cut into his hand, and he had to safeguard the lantern with his other hand. And there wasn't any time. And fear came again to Spud because there wasn't any time. He didn't know how long ago it was that No. 40 had pulled out of Pilot Head. Her running time over the grades from Pilot Head to Mitre Rock was twenty minutes—but he didn't know how long ago it was since she had pulled out of Pilot Head.

And there were tons and tons of these great rocks, like mountains in themselves, and great holes like ridges, and he couldn't see. And he could only feel his way, and climb up one and down another, and there was hold neither for foot nor hand because the rocks were as slippery as grease with the rain.

And then, almost through to the far side, at least Spud told himself he must be almost through, he slipped suddenly from the top of a boulder, and, quick, before he could recover himself, his feet shot out from under him, and he plunged downward, for some great distance, it seemed, and his body twisted and struck—and he lay still, half-stunned, dazed.

When he moved again, it wrung a cry of agony from his lips. His leg, at the least movement, brought torture and pain that was unendurable, and brought beads of sweat out on his forehead to mingle with the rain that already ran streaming down it.

He lifted his head to look around him—but the lantern, though he still clasped it, was out, shattered to pieces in his fall. He did not know how far he had fallen. He was lying on what seemed like a great flat rock—he could feel rock, nothing but rock, around him. He raised his hand to clear the rain away from his face—but it wasn't rain, was it, that was blinding him now in that stream? Rain wasn't *hot*! It must be something else, and——

No. 40 is out of Pilot Head. The words droned in a sing-song way through his head at first, and then they seemed to act like some galvanic shock and clear his brain. And he drew himself forward over the rock on which he lay, and moaned, and fell again—but not far this time, only a foot or so—and his hand touched a steel rail. He was through. He had only to go on now just a hundred yards or so, just far enough to get around the bend, and get into the clear.

He lay still for a moment, because he was sick and dizzy, and his head was swimming, and he thought he could ease the pain a little that way. It was the pain that was robbing him of his strength. But he lay still only for a moment. There wasn't any time to lay still. He must go on.

And Spud went on. Trailing a broken limb, creeping his way along, clawing from tie to tie, until the torture of it turned him sick and nauseated him, Spud went on.

"It doesn't matter," whispered Spud, and in the agony of it bit at his lips until his teeth sank into them and they bled. "It doesn't matter," whispered Spud—and won forward yard after yard.

And then dizziness and faintness came, and a queer delirium, and queer fancies, for there was a great, round light gleaming in the distance ahead of him, and it struck upon the dripping steel rails and made them gleam and sparkle like polished ribbons of silver, and—— No. It wasn't delirium. It was No. 40's headlight coming up the stretch. But his own lamp was gone, and they wouldn't be able to see him in time to do any good if he lay here with his face on the ties.

Spud got up—first on his good knee—and then on his good leg—and stood there—and waved his arms, and screamed once because he couldn't help it, for, with the movement of his arms, the dangling leg would not hold still. And the light grew brighter, bigger, playing up the right of way, and Spud stood there—and waved his arms. And then the shriek of a whistle rang through the gorge—and Spud quit then. He fainted.

When they picked him up, Spud got his senses back long enough to tell them the track was out, and to beg for help for Fred Blainey—and then he fainted again. But Spud need not have worried about Fred Blainey. Fred Blainey got into good hands—he had a carload of volunteer nurses to look after him when the wrecker pulled in, and *they* pulled Fred Blainey through.

And when the light came, Regan, who had come up with Flannagan's men, looked the ground over, and looked Spud over, but he didn't say anything then because Spud was raving in a fever. But that night, back at Big Cloud, with Carleton as an audience, Spud didn't lose anything because it was Tommy Regan who told his story. Tommy Regan covered the boy with glory before he was through.

"And there's none like him," said the fat little master mechanic, summing up. "None! He's one grand little railroad man. I could sing the doxology for the sake of him and the lives he's saved. I could!" asserted Tommy Regan. "And if you want to know it, I did—last night."

Carleton nodded.

"I know, Tommy," he said, in his big, quiet way; and then: "What are you going to do with him when he gets around again?"

“Do with him!” ejaculated Regan—and blinked fast. “How do I know? He can have any job he likes, can’t he? Well, then—h’m? It doesn’t matter.”

—VIII—

SPITZER

SPITZER was just naturally born diffident. Sometimes that sort of thing wears off as one grows older, sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't, it is worse than the most virulent disease—it had been virulent with Spitzer for all of his twenty-four years.

Spitzer wasn't much to look at, neither was he of much account on the Hill Division. Some men rise to occasions, others don't; as for Spitzer—well, he was a snubby-nosed, peaked-faced, tousled-haired little fellow with washed-out blue eyes that always seemed to carry around in their depths an apology for their owner's existence, and this idea was backed up a good bit by Spitzer's voice. Spitzer had a weak voice and that militated against him. The ordinary voice of the ordinary man on the Hill Division was not weak—it was assertive. Spitzer suffered thereby because everybody crawled over him. Nobody thought anything of Spitzer. They all knew him, of course, that is, those whose duties brought them within the zone of Spitzer's orbit, which was restricted to Big Cloud, or, rather, to the roundhouse at Big Cloud. Nobody ever gave him credit for courage enough to call his soul his own. Even when it came to pay day he took his check as though it was a mistake and that it really wasn't meant for him. He just dubbed along, doing his work day after day like a faithful dog, only he was a hanged sight less obtrusive. Summed up in a word, Spitzer ranked as a nonentity, physically, mentally, professionally.

Of course, he never got ahead. He just kept on sweeping out the roundhouse, and puttering around playing bell-boy to every Tom, Dick and Harry that lifted a finger at him. Year in, year out, he swept and wiped in the roundhouse. As far as seniority went he was "it," but when it came to promotion he wasn't. Promotion and Spitzer were so obviously, so ostentatiously at variance with each other that no one ever thought of such a thing. When there was a vacancy others got it. Spitzer saw them move along, firing, driving spare, up to full-fledged regulars on the right-hand side of the cabs, men that had started after he did; but Spitzer still wiped and swept out the roundhouse.

Carleton, the super, called him a landmark, and that hit the bull's-eye. Summer, winter, fall, spring, good weather, bad weather, five-foot-five-with-

his-boots-on Spitzer, lugging a little tin dinner-pail, trudged down Main Street in Big Cloud as regular as clockwork, and reported at the roundhouse at precisely the same hour every morning—five minutes of seven. Never a miss, never a slip—five minutes of seven. The train crews got to setting their watches by him, and the dispatchers wired the meteorological observatory every time their chronometers didn't tally—that is, tally with Spitzer—and the meteorological crowd put Spitzer first across the tape every shot.

It was just the same at night, only then Spitzer went by the six o'clock whistle. Ten hours a day, Sundays off—sometimes—wiping, sweeping, sweeping, wiping, from his boarding house to the roundhouse in the morning, from the roundhouse to his boarding house at night—that was Spitzer, self-effaced, self-obliterated, innocuous, modest Spitzer.

Night times? Spitzer didn't exist, there was no Spitzer—it wasn't expected of him! If any one had been asked they would have looked their amazement, but then no one ever was asked—or asked, which is the same thing the other way around. Spitzer was like a tool laid away after the day's work and forgotten absolutely and profoundly until the following morning. No one knew anything about Spitzer after the six o'clock whistle blew, no one knew and cared less—that is, none of the railroad crowd knew, and they, when all is said and done, were Big Cloud; they owned it, ran it, absorbed it, and properly so, since Big Cloud was the divisional point on the Hill Division.

In the ineffable perversity of things is the spice and variety of life. Tommy Regan was a man not easily jolted, not easily disturbed; but—perversity of perversities!—it was Spitzer who jolted the fat little master mechanic—not once, more than once. And before he got through, jolted him so hard that Regan hasn't got over the wonder of it yet.

"Think of it," Regan'll say, when the subject is brought up. "Think of it! You know Spitzer, h'm? Well, *think* of it! SPITZER!" And if it's summer he'll mop his beady brow, and if it's winter he'll twiddle his thumbs with his fingers laced over his *embonpoint*, which is to say over the lower button of his waistcoat.

Regan's first jolt came to him one morning as, after a critical inspection of his pets in the roundhouse—big eight- and ten-wheeled mountain engines—he strolled out and leaned against the push-bar on the turntable, mentally debating the respective merits of a rust-joint and a straight patch as

specifically applied to number 583 that had been run into the shops the day before for repairs.

A figure emerged from the engine doors at the far end of the roundhouse and came toward him. Regan's eyes, attracted, barely glanced in that direction, and then went down again in meditation, as he kicked a little hole in the cinders with the toe of his boot—it was only Spitzer.

When he looked up again Spitzer was nearer, quite near. Spitzer had halted before him and was standing there patiently, an embarrassed flush on his cheeks, wiping his hands nervously on an exceedingly dirty piece of packing which in his abstraction, for Spitzer was plainly abstracted, he had picked up for a piece of waste.

"Huh!" said Regan, staring at Spitzer's hands. "What are you trying to do? Black up for a minstrel show?"

Spitzer dropped the packing as though it had been a handful of thistles, and rubbed his hands up and down the legs of his overalls.

"Well?" Regan invited.

Spitzer began to talk, rapidly, hurriedly—that is, his lips moved rapidly, hurriedly.

Regan listened attentively and with a strained and hopeless expression, as he strove to catch a word and hence the drift of Spitzer's remarks.

"How?" he demanded, when he saw Spitzer was at an end. "Speak out, man. You won't wake the baby up."

Spitzer began all over again. This time he did a little better.

"A dollar twenty-five," repeated the master mechanic numbly.

Spitzer brightened visibly, and nodded.

Regan stared, bewildered and dumfounded. Gradually, impossible, incomprehensible, incongruous as it appeared, it dawned on him that Spitzer, even Spitzer, *Spitzer* was asking for a *raise*!

"A dollar twenty-five," was all Regan could repeat over again, and the words came away with a gasp.

Spitzer, misinterpreting the tone, his face grew rueful and full of trouble. He was appalled at his own temerity in broaching the subject in the first place, but now he had overstepped the bounds—he had asked for too much!

“A dollar twenty,” he ventured, in timid compromise—Spitzer was getting a dollar fifteen.

“How long you been working here?” enquired Regan, recovering a little and beginning to get a grip on himself.

“Six years,” said Spitzer faintly.

“Good Lord!” mumbled Regan. “Six years. A dollar twenty-five, h’m? Well, I dunno, I guess we can manage that.” And then, as a new thought suddenly struck him: “What the blazes would *you* do with more money, h’m?”

But Spitzer only grinned sheepishly as, after murmuring his thanks, he walked back and disappeared in the roundhouse.

“Good Lord!” muttered Regan, looking after him. “Six years, and a dollar and a quarter, *and* Spitzer! Good Lord!”

Regan went around more or less dazed all that day. He ordered the patch on 583 when he had definitely decided on the rust-joint as the best tonic for the engine’s complaint, and he figured out how much one dollar and fifteen cents a day came to for a year, barring Sundays, then he did the same with a dollar twenty-five as the multiplicand and compared the results. Spitzer’s demand was not exorbitant, and it wasn’t much to upset any man—that was just it—it was Spitzer, and Spitzer wasn’t much. Effect, psychological or otherwise, is by no manner of means to be measured by the mere magnitude of the cause; it is the phenomenal and unusual that is to be treated with wholesome respect, and for safe handling requires a double-tracked, block system with the cautionary signals up from start to finish—the master mechanic found it that way anyhow, and he ought to know.

He unburdened himself that night after supper to Carleton and a few of the others over at division headquarters, upstairs over the station.

Carleton grinned.

“Bad company,” he suggested. “Hard lot, that of yours over in the roundhouse, Tommy. They’re spoiling his manners. Been a long time in coming, but you know the old story of the water and the stone. What?”

“What in blazes would *he* do with more money?” enquired Spence, the chief dispatcher, in unfeigned astonishment.

Regan glared disdainfully. He had put precisely the same question to Spitzer himself, but since then he had been brushing up his mathematics.

"Do with it!" he choked. "Thirty dollars and eighty cents—*a year*. Hell of a problem, ain't it?"

"Well, you needn't run off your schedule," said Spence, a little tartly. "You're the one that's making most of the fuss over it."

"Tell you what, Tommy," remarked Carleton, still grinning, "you want to look out for Spitzer from now on. I guess his emancipation has begun—nothing like a start. Before you know it he'll be running rough-shod over the motive power department, including the master mechanic."

"I gave him the raise," said Regan, more to himself than aloud. " 'Twas coming to him, what? Six years, and the first time I ever heard a yip out of him."

"You'll hear more," prophesied Carleton; "even if he doesn't talk very loud."

"Think so?" said Regan, puckering up his eyes.

"I do," said Carleton.

And Regan did.

Not at once, not for several weeks. But in the meantime a change came over Spitzer. He swept and wiped and reported at five minutes of seven every morning and kept himself just as much in the background, just as much out of everybody's way, just as unobtrusive as he had been before, but Spitzer was none the less changed.

It began the day after he got his raise. It was an indefinite, elusive, negative sort of a change, not the kind you could lay your hand on and describe in so many words. Regan tried to, and gave it up. The nearest he got to anything concrete was one day when he came around the tail-end of a tender and, unexpectedly, upon Spitzer. Spitzer was sweeping as usual, but Spitzer was also whistling—which was not usual. Regan, it is true, couldn't puzzle very much out of that, but then Regan had his limitations.

Mindful of Carleton's words, Regan kept his eye in a mildly curious kind of a way on the little faded, blue-eyed drudge, and as he noticed the first change without being able to define it, he now, after a week or so, noticed a second, with the difference that this time the diagnosis was painfully obvious—Spitzer's return to Spitzer's normal self. Spitzer stopped whistling.

Regan began to catch Spitzer's eyes fixed on him with a hesitating, irresolute, anxious gaze about every time he entered the roundhouse. And

though he didn't quite grasp it, something of the truth came to him. Spitzer was screwing up his courage to the sticking point preparatory to another step onward in his belated march toward emancipation.

It was a month to the day from the first interview when Spitzer tackled the master mechanic again, and as before, out by the turntable in front of the roundhouse, and, if anything, in a manner even more nervous and ill at ease than on the former occasion. He stammered once or twice in an effort to begin—and his effort was utter failure.

Regan eyed him in profound distrust. Once in six years wasn't so much, and after all, even Spitzer, now that the shock was over, might be expected to do that. But again in a month—and from Spitzer! Something was wrong—perhaps Carleton was right.

"Well," he snapped, "you got your raise. Ain't you satisfied?"

Spitzer nodded dumbly.

"Well, then, what's the matter with you if you're satisfied?" exploded the master mechanic.

"I want to get——" The last word trailed off into tremulous, quavering incoherency.

"You want to get what?" growled Regan. "Don't sputter as though you'd swallowed your teeth. What is it you want to get?"

"Firing," blurted Spitzer after a desperate struggle.

Regan gasped for his breath. Spitzer! SPITZER—in a cab! He couldn't have heard straight.

"Say it again," whispered the master mechanic.

"Firing," repeated Spitzer, with more confidence now that the plunge was taken.

"Yes," said Regan weakly to himself. "That's it. I got it right—firing! He wants to get *firing*!"

"I—I can do it," faltered Spitzer. "I *got* to."

"Eh? What's that?" said Regan. "You got to? Say, you, Spitzer, what the devil's the matter with you anyway?"

Spitzer wriggled like a worm on a hook, and his face went the color of a semaphore arm—a deep red one. Spitzer was suffering acutely.

"Well, well," prodded Regan. "Release the air! Take the brakes off!"

"I'm," began Spitzer shamefacedly, "I'm——" He gulped down his Adam's apple hard, twice, and then it came away with a rush: "I'm going to get married to Merla Swenson."

Regan's jaw sagged like the broken limb of a tree, and his eyes fairly popped out and hung down over the roll of his cheeks. Then gradually, very gradually, he began to double up and unhandsome contortions afflicted his facial muscles. Spitzer! Spitzer was enough! But Spitzer *and* Merla Swenson! Six-foot-heavy-boned-long-armed-Swedish-maiden Merla! Oh, contrariety, variety, perversity of life!

"Haw!" he roared suddenly. "Haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" And again—only louder. Clarihue and a helper or two poked their noses out of the roundhouse doors to get a line on the disturbance.

Can a stone float? Can a feather sink? Astonishing, bewildering, dumfounding, impossible, oh, yes; but it was also very funny. It was the funniest thing that Regan had ever heard in his life.

"Haw, haw!" he screamed. "Ho, ho! Haw, haw!"

His paunch shook like jelly, and he held both hands to his sides to ease the pain. He straightened up preparatory to going off into another burst of guffaws, and then, with his mouth already opened to begin, he stopped as though he had been stunned. Spitzer was still standing before him, and Spitzer's head was turned away, but Regan caught it, caught the hurt and bitter misery in the other's grimy face. And in that moment he realized what neither he nor any other man on the Hill Division had ever realized before—that Spitzer, too, was *human*.

Regan coughed, choked, and cleared his throat. Here was Spitzer in a new light, but the Spitzer of years was not so readily to be consigned to the background of oblivion. Spitzer in a cab was as much an anomaly as ever, conjugal aspirations to the contrary.

"Firing?" said Regan, with grave consideration that he meant, by contrast, should serve as palliation for the sting of his mirth. "Firing? I'm afraid not. You're not fit for it. You're not big enough."

Spitzer dashed his hands across his eyes.

"I *can* fire," he announced with a surprising show of spirit, "an' I *got* to. There's smaller ones than me doing it."

"What do you mean by 'got to'?" demanded the master mechanic.

Spitzer shifted uneasily and kicked at the ground.

"Merla an' me's been making up for quite a while," he stammered; "but she wouldn't say nothing one way or the other till I got a raise."

"Well, you got it," said Regan.

Spitzer nodded miserably.

"Yes, an' now she says 'tain't enough to get married on, an'—an' we'll have to wait till I get firing."

"Good Lord!" murmured Regan, and he mopped his brow in deep perplexity. The destiny of mortals was in his hands—but so was the motive power department of the Hill Division. He could no more see Spitzer in a cab than he could see the time-honored camel passing through the eye of a needle. Then inspiration came to him.

"Look here, Spitzer," said he, soothingly. "There ain't no use talking about firing, and I ain't going to let you build up any false hopes. But I'll tell you what, you don't need to feel glum about it. She loves you, don't she?"

Spitzer's lips moved.

"H'm?" enquired Regan solicitously, bending forward.

"Yes; she says she does," repeated Spitzer in thin tones.

"Yes; well then, when you know women, and as much about 'em as I do, you'll know that nothing else counts—nothing but the love, I mean. It's their nature, and they're all alike. That's the way it is with all of 'em"—Regan waved his hand expansively. "It'll be all right. You'll see. She won't hold out on that line."

Some men profit much by little experience, others profit little by much experience. Spitzer, possibly, had had little, very little, but the dejected droop of his shoulders, as he started back for the roundhouse, intimated that in the matter of knowledge as applied to the eternal feminine he was perhaps, in so far as it lay between himself and the master mechanic, the better qualified of the two to speak. And that, certainly, when concretely applied, which is to say applied to Merla Swenson.

Regan couldn't have kept the story back to save his life, and it didn't take long for the division to get it. They all got it—train crews and engine crews on the way freights, stray freights, locals, extras and regulars, the staff, the shop hands, the track-walkers and the section gangs down to the last car-tink. At first the division looked incredulous, then it grinned, then it

howled, and its howl was the one word "Spitzer!" with seventeen exclamation points after it to make the tempo and rhythm hang out in a manner befitting and commensurate with the occasion.

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Dutchy Damrosch did the business of his life—he did more business than he had ever dreamed of doing in his wildest flights of imagination, for Dutchy had the lunch counter rights at Big Cloud. What's that got to do with Spitzer and his marital ambition? Well, a whole lot! Merla Swenson was second girl in Dutchy's establishment, and Merla was the "fee-ancy" of Spitzer—which was a rotten bad pun of Spider Kelly's, the conductor, and due more to the brogue-like twist of his tongue than to any malice aforethought.

To see any girl that was in love with Spitzer was worth the price of coffee and sinkers any old time. The lunch-counter took on the air of a dime museum, and the visitors questioned Merla anxiously, a little suspicious that after all there might be a nigger in the woodpile somewhere in the shape of a "frame-up" with the hoax on themselves.

Merla settled all doubts on that score. Unruffled, calmly, stoically, dispassionately she answered the same question fifty times a day, and each time in the same way.

"Yah, I ban love Spitzer," was her infallible reply, in a tone that made the bare possibility that she could have done anything else seem the very acme of absurdity. Merla's inflexion struck deep at the root of things inevitable.

After that there was nothing to be said. A few, very few, and as the days went by their numbers thinned with amazing rapidity, had the temerity to snicker audibly. They only did it once, as, with arms akimbo and hands on hips, Merla advanced to the edge of the counter with a look in her steadfast, blue eyes that was far from inviting, and enquired:

"Him ban goot mans, I tank?"

It was put in the form of a question, it is true, but the "put" was of such cold uncompromise that the result was always the same. The offender hastily buried his nose in his coffee cup, dug for a dime to square his account—with Dutchy—and made for the platform.

This was all very well, but unless Regan died and some one with a little less—or a little more, depending on how you look at it—imagination took his place, Spitzer's chances of getting into a cab were as good as ever, which is to say that they were about as good as the goodness of a plugged nickel. And the trouble was that, so far as Spitzer could see, the master mechanic

wasn't sprouting out with any visible signs of premature decay. Furthermore, as he had suspicioned and now discovered, Regan *wasn't* the last word on women; not, perhaps, that Merla put firing before love, only she was uncommonly strong on firing. Spitzer was unhappy.

All things come to those who wait, they say. So they do, perhaps; but the way of their coming is sometimes not to be understood or fathomed. Regan being still alive, the chances are better than a thousand to one that Spitzer would have known a cold and forlorn old age, as Robert Louis puts it, and Merla would never have had a second edition of herself if it hadn't been for a few measly, unripe crab-apples. What? Yes, that's it—crab-apples. That's the way Spitzer got where he is to-day—just crab-apples. Funny how things happen sometimes when you come to think of it, isn't it?

Spitzer's nocturnal habits, that were a matter of so much unconcern and of which the railroad crowd at Big Cloud were so densely in ignorance, have a part in this. The truth is that between the lunch-counter and the station is the baggage and freight-shed, and behind the freight-shed it is very dark; and also, not less pertinent, is the fact that Merla was possessed of no other quarters than those shared by her sister-in-arms in Dutchy's employ—which were neither propitious nor commodious. Hence—but the connection is obvious.

On Merla's night off at eight o'clock, Spitzer sneaked down through the fields and across the platform, weather permitting, and on those nights Merla donned her bonnet "for a walk"—at the same hour. When the station clock struck ten, and, coincidentally, Number One's mellow chime sounded down the line, Merla retraced her steps to the upstairs rear of the lunch-counter, and Spitzer retraced his across the platform to the fields in the direction of the town and his boarding house; only, of late, Spitzer had taken to lingering on the platform way up at the far end where it was also very dark and as equally deserted.

Here he would gaze wistfully at the big mogul with valves popping and the steam drumming at her gauges, as she waited on the siding just in front of him—they changed engines at Big Cloud—to back down on Number One for the first stretch of the mountain run—Burke's run at this time with the 503, and big Jim MacAloon looking after the shovel end of it.

There wasn't anything novel in the sight, but it didn't seem to strike Spitzer as monotonous although, when it was all over and he watched the vanishing tail lights, he always sighed. It was just the same performance each time. Ten minutes or so before Number One, westbound, was due,

MacAloon would run the 503 out of the roundhouse, over the turntable, up the line, and back onto the siding. Then Burke would appear on the scene, light a torch, and poke around with a long-spouted oil can.

Spitzer would usually reach his position up the platform in time to see the engineer's final jab with the torch between the drivers or into the link-motion before swinging himself through the gangway into the cab, as the Limited with snapping trucks and screeching brake-shoes rolled into the station; but one night it fell out a little differently. The station clock had struck ten, Merla had hastened to her domicile, and Spitzer to the far end of the platform as usual, but Number One was late.

Suddenly Spitzer jumped and his heart seemed to shoot into his mouth. There was a wild, piercing scream of agony. It came again. The blood left Spitzer's cheeks. He saw Burke fly around the end of the pilot, the torch dancing in his hand, and make for the cab. Spitzer involuntarily leaped from the platform to the track and ran in the same direction; then the safety-valve popped with a terrific roar, drowning out all other sounds. He clambered cautiously into the cab. On the floor MacAloon was going through a performance that would have beggared the efforts of a writhing python, and the while he groaned and yelled.

As Spitzer watched, Burke, who was bending over MacAloon with an anxious face, suddenly reached forward and picked up a little round object that rolled from the pocket of the fireman's jumper, then another, and another. Spitzer instinctively craned forward, and in so doing attracted Burke's notice for the first time. Burke's look of anxiety gave way to a grin and he held out the objects to Spitzer, just as if it wasn't Spitzer at all but an ordinary man—humour, like death, is a great leveller, but no matter, let that go. Burke held them out to Spitzer; Spitzer took them, and even Spitzer grinned. It didn't need any doctor to diagnose MacAloon's complaint—and the complaint wasn't poetic! Cramps, old-fashioned, unadulterated cramps—just plain cramps and green crab-apples! Some things lay a man out worse perhaps—but there aren't many.

Burke's grin didn't last long, for at that moment came Number One's long, clear siren note, and back over the tender a streak of light shot out in a wide circle from around a butte and then danced along the rails and began to light up the platform, as the Limited thundered, five minutes late, into the straight stretch.

"Holy fishplates!" yelled Burke. "I've got to get a man to fire. Spitzer, you run like hell to the roundhouse and——"

Burke stopped. Spitzer stopped him. There are moments in everybody's life when they rise above themselves, above habit, above environment, above everything, if even for only a brief instant. A chance like this would never come again. If he could fire one trip maybe Regan would change his mind. Spitzer grasped at it frantically, despairingly.

"Burke, I *can* fire," he fairly screamed. "Give me a chance, Burke. I'll never get one if you don't."

Burke gasped for a moment like a man with his breath knocked out of him, then something like a dry chuckle sounded in his throat. No one knows but Burke what decided him. It might have been either one of two things, or a combination of them both—Spitzer's pleading face, or the desire to take a rise out of Regan—Burke and Regan not having been on the best of terms since the last general elections. Be that as it may, Burke pointed at the squirming fireman.

"Take his feet," he grunted.

Together they lifted and dragged the stricken MacAloon out of the cab and to the ground. The 1108, pulling Number One, had come to a stop abreast of them by now, and Burke shouted at the engine crew.

"Here!" he bawled. "Lend a hand!"

And as both men stuck their heads out of the gangway, he and Spitzer boosted the fireman up to them.

"Got cramps," explained Burke tersely. "You'll be able to fix him up in the roundhouse. Five minutes late, h'm? Well, hurry; you're clear! There's your 'go-ahead.' Pull out and let me get hold."

Burke turned to Spitzer, as the 1108 slipped away from the baggage car and moved up the track, and pointed to the gangway of his own engine.

"Get in," he said grimly. "You'll get a chance to fire, and, take it from me, you'll never get a chance to do that or anything else again this side of the happy hunting-grounds, my bucko, if you throw me down."

And while Regan quarrelled amiably over a game of pedro upstairs in the station with Carleton, the 503, with Spitzer, tousled-haired, mild-eyed, heart-beating-like-a-trip-hammer Spitzer, in the cab, backed down on the Imperial Limited and coupled on for the mountain run. There was a quick testing of the "air," a hurried running up and down the platform, and then Burke, leaning from the window with his arm stretched out inside the cab

and fingers on the throttle, opened a notch, and the platform began to slide past them.

Spitzer wrinkled his face and stared at the gauge needle—two hundred and ten pounds, all the way, all the time—two hundred and ten pounds. It was up to him. With a jerk of the chain, he swung the furnace door wide and a shovelful of coal shot, neatly scattered, over the grate.

There is art in all things; there is the quintessence of art in the prosaic and laborious task of firing an engine. Spitzer was not without art, for in a way he had had years of experience; but banking a fire in the roundhouse, and nursing a roaring pit of flame to its highest degree of efficiency in a swaying, lurching cab, are two different and distinct operations that are in no way to be confounded. The 503 began to lurch and sway. Notch by notch Burke was opening her out, and the bark of her exhaust was coming like the quick crackle of a machine gun. Five minutes late in the mountains on a time schedule already marked up to a dizzy height that called for more chances than the passengers paid for is—well, it's five minutes, just *five minutes*, that's all. Some men would have left it for the Pacific Division crowd the next day on a level track and a straight sweep—but not Burke.

Spitzer's initiation was in ample form, and he got the full benefit of all the rites and ceremonies with every detail of the ritual worked in—and no favours shown. So far all was well, the rough country was all in front of the pilot, and Spitzer was all business. His pulse was beating in tune to only one thing—the dancing needle on the gauge. Again he swung the door open, and the red flare lighted up the heavens and played on features that Regan would never have known for Spitzer's—they were set, grim and determined, covered with little sweat beads that glistened like diamonds. The singing sweep of the wind was in his ears as he poised the shovel. There was a sickening slur. The 503 shot round a curve—and the shovelful of coal shot like bullets all over the cab, and, including Burke, hit about everything in sight but the objective point aimed at. Simultaneously, Spitzer promptly performed a gyration that resembled something like a back hand-spring and landed well up on the tender, to roll back to the floor of the cab again with an accompanying avalanche of coal.

He picked himself up and glanced apprehensively at the engineer. There was not a scowl, not even a grin on Burke's face, just an encouraging flirt of the hand—but the flirt was momentous. Wise and full of guile was Burke, for with that little act Spitzer, biblically speaking, girded up his loins and got his second wind.

They were well into the foothills now, and the right of way was an amazing wonder. Diving, twisting, curving, it circled and bored and trestled its way, and buttes, cañons, gorges and coulees roared past like flights of fancy.

The speed was terrific. To Spitzer it was all a wild, mad medley of things he had never known before, of things that had neither beginning nor end. The giddy slew as the big mountain racer hit the curves, the crunching grind of the flanges as for an instant she lifted from her wheel-base, the pitch, the roll, the staggering reel, the gasp for breath, the beat of the trucks, the whir of the racing drivers, the rush of the wind, the echoing thunder of the flying coaches behind—it was all there, all separate, all welded into one, a creation, new, vernal, life, the life of the rail, that beat at his eardrums and quickened the pounding throb of his heart.

At first, from time to time, Burke leaned over his levers to glance at the pressure gauge, but after a bit he crouched a little farther forward in his seat and his eyes held on the track ahead where the beam of the electric headlight flooded the glittering ribbons of steel. He was getting what MacAloon or no other man had ever given him before—two hundred and ten pounds *all* the way. SPITZER was firing Number One, the Imperial Limited, westbound, on the mountain run, *three* minutes late!

The sweat was rolling in streams from the little fellow now, and he clung to the gangway for a moment's breathing spell, leaning out, staring ahead at a few shining lights in the distance. Came the hoarse scream of the whistle, the clattering crash as they shattered the yard switches, a blurred vision of dark outlines dotted with tiny scintillating points, and a little town with its station, yard, lights, switches and all were behind him.

Spitzer drew his sleeve across his forehead, and turned again to his work as they thundered over a long steel trestle—Thief Creek. Spitzer knew the road well enough at second hand, if not from personal experience. Just ahead was The Pass straight enough for its quarter-mile stretch, but where the rock walls rose up on either side so close as to almost scratch the paint off the rolling stock. Eased for a moment in scant deference to switches and trestle just passed, Spitzer felt the forward leap of the racer as Burke threw her wide open again. He bent for his shovel—and then, quick as the winking of an eye, sudden as doom, came a tearing, rending crash, a scream from Burke, and the right-hand side of the cab seemed torn in two.

A flying piece of woodwork that struck him across the eyes, a terrific jolt as the engine lifted and fell back, sent Spitzer headlong to the floor of

the cab. Dazed, half-mad with pain, the blood streaming from his forehead, he staggered to his feet. Burke lay coiled in an inert heap just in front of him by the furnace door. A whizzing piece of steel rose up, crunched, slithered, gashed a track of ruin for itself, and was gone. It had missed Burke only by a hair's-breadth—next time there might not be even that limit of safety. With a cry, Spitzer leaped forward and dragged the unconscious engineer across the cab. Again the jolt, the slur, the stagger, the desperate wrench. It seemed like years, like eternity to Spitzer. He was living a lifetime in the passing of a second—it had been no more than that, no more than two or three at the most.

There are some things worse, much worse, in railroading than a broken crank-pin and a rod amuck, but not when it comes in The Pass, where derailment at their racing speed spelt death, quick and sudden. There was just one chance for the trailing string of coaches, just one for every last soul aboard—Spitzer. But between Spitzer and the throttle and the air latch was a thing of steel that rose and fell, now swinging a splintering, murderous arc through the shattered side of the cab, now grinding into the ties and roadbed, threatening with every revolution to pitch the 503 and the train behind her headlong from the rails to crumple like flimsy eggshells against the narrow rocky walls that lined The Pass. Just one chance for the train crew and passengers—*just one in a thousand for Spitzer*. And little five-foot-five Spitzer, diffident, retiring, self-effaced, unobtrusive Spitzer, with a dry, choking sob in his throat, flung himself forward to stop the train. His hands clutched desperately at the levers, there was a hiss, the vicious bite of the brake-shoes, then a blinding light before his eyes as the rod caught him, and he pitched, senseless, half out through the front window of the cab, head down on the running-board.

The last word is a woman's—it is her inalienable right. Said Merla to Regan with a world of suggestion in the cadence of her voice, when Spitzer was getting well enough to think about going to work again:

"I ban love Spitzer."

"Well," said Regan, squinting at her round, steadfast, blue eyes, "there ain't anything I know of to keep you waiting. He can name the run he wants." And then, the wonder of it being still heavy upon him, he exclaimed with the air of one invoking the universe: "Now, wouldn't that get you! What do you think, h'm?"

All English to Merla was literal.

“Him ban goot mans, I tank,” she said.

—IX—

THE MAN WHO CONFESSED

The Hill Division never had time to say Bartholomew all at once, hence Barty—Barty McClung. Barty, like Shanley, was a relic, so to speak, of a wreck—specifically, the Spider Cut wreck, where Flannagan, the wrecking boss, picked him out of the débris of one of the day coaches. Barty at the time, however, was quite oblivious to Flannagan's attentions and everything else—so obliviously so that Flannagan laid him down amongst the silent forms on that section of the embankment reserved for those to whom all ministering was at an end.

Barty McClung, however, was not dead, though he was perilously near to it. Doctor McTurk said that by all the rules of the game he ought to have been; the Hill Division said that any man whose skull wasn't double-plated sheet-iron and copper-riveted would have been; and Barty, when he got around to the stage where he could grin, grinned and said he'd been in worse wrecks than that before when he had been firing back on the Penn—and showed his "card" to prove it; that is, to prove he'd been firing on the Penn.

The grin through the pain and the bandages got Regan where the master mechanic's heart was soft—which was all over—and he took Barty McClung right under his wing from the start.

Regan wanted to know if Barty was married, or had been, or had any children back East to send messages to.

Barty said he hadn't kith or kin on earth so far as he knew.

Regan wanted to know what Barty was doing out West.

Barty said he was on a holiday.

Regan said: "H'm!"—reached into his hip pocket for his chewing, bit off a piece, spat out an offending branch of stalk, and offered Barty a job—firing.

"As well West as East," said Barty—and he took it.

And that's the way Barty McClung came to the Hill Division.

Perhaps Regan let his kindly feelings run away with him; perhaps he took too much for granted, accepted McClung too much on his own

cognisance, as it were—perhaps he did—there were a good many who said so before it was over, besides Johnnie Dawes, who said so all the time.

Dawes? Dawes was a wiper in the roundhouse and—but we'll come to Johnnie Dawes in a moment.

Anyway, whether Regan took too much for granted or whether he didn't, Barty McClung went to firing for Steve Patch on the 608, with the local freight run between Big Cloud and Loon Dam.

McClung made good from the start—even Steve Patch said so—and there wasn't a harder man pulling a latch on the division to get along with than Steve. Generally speaking, three trips with the shovel was about all any man would make with Steve, if he could inveigle Regan or some one else in authority to shift him to another run. Steve Patch was credited with a grouch of exactly the same age as Steve Patch himself—Steve having been born with it, so his numerous firemen said. However, be that as it may, the engineer was swearing by his new mate at the end of a week—and at the end of a month there was nothing to it at all but Barty McClung.

Nor was Steve Patch the only one who swore by Barty. Barty got under the vests of the roundhouse crowd and the engine crews quicker than any new man before or since had ever done on the Hill Division—not because Steve Patch sang his praises—far from it—with any other than Barty, Steve's encomiums might not have proved an unmixed blessing. The men liked Barty because he was—Barty.

It was natural enough. Well set-up and quick as an athlete in every movement; brains in his head, railroad brains, the kind they liked and understood; gray eyes with a smile in them even when there wasn't any smile on his lips; and a grip of the hand that made you squeeze back hard—that was Barty. Not very old, still young enough to be enthusiastic; and you hadn't to look at him more than once grooming around with a hunk of waste to know that the cab of an engine meant a whole lot to Barty McClung.

Regan pulled on his scraggly brown moustache—and smiled. Regan was pleased. If there was anything on earth the fat, jolly little master mechanic loved, it was to see a man make good—and his delight didn't lose any of its intensity because the man in question happened, so to speak, to be a find of his own. Why should it?

In a month everybody was pulling for Barty McClung—except Johnnie Dawes. Johnnie Dawes hated Barty from the moment he saw the new man poke his nose through the roundhouse doors. But that was Dawes' way—

Dawes didn't have a mean streak in him, he was *all* mean, all the way up and back again; and, to top that, he had a habit of screwing up his mouth when he talked, and talking mostly beneath his breath in a sneaking, confidential kind of a way that made you feel he was trying to make an accomplice out of you in some infernal felony every time he opened his lips. Not popular? No; not very! Not the pleasantest kind of an enemy, though—tritely, a snake in the grass.

Johnnie Dawes had wiped quite a few years in the roundhouse. Once, soon after he had started, he was promoted and given an engine to fire. The night he was to take her out he celebrated his promotion by getting riotously drunk; the next day the thud with which he returned to wiping appeared to offer another suitable occasion for another celebration—which Dawes took. He had been wiping ever since—except for lay-offs, a good many of them, of a month or two at a stretch—at Regan's request. As far as seniority went he was entitled to the left-hand side of a cab instead of a new man, Barty McClung, or any other—in that he was right.

Johnnie Dawes put it up to Regan.

"I've been wiping for years, Regan," he stated tentatively, with an ingratiating smirk.

"After a fashion," admitted Regan.

Dawes grew belligerent.

"You put a new man on over my head," he spluttered. "What do you know about him—eh? Who is he? Lands up here in a wreck. That's all you know. And you put him on!"

The little master mechanic eyed the big, hulking wiper up and down sort of reminiscently—and expectorated black-strap thoughtfully into the engine pit at his side.

"The point is, Johnnie, that I know *you*," said Regan quietly—and walked out of the roundhouse.

This didn't help the state of Johnnie Dawes' feelings any. In some ways Dawes was human; chance after chance Regan had given him, and he owed the master mechanic more than he owed to any other man on earth—so, because he owed Regan so much, he liked Regan very little. This was another grievance against McClung—not that any more were really needed—McClung was a pet, Regan's pet.

There wasn't any open friction between McClung and Dawes—not at first. Dawes had, not respect, but a certain fear of public opinion, in which McClung was strongly entrenched. So Dawes, for the spite that was in him, started in to undermine public opinion and switch it his way. Not that Johnnie Dawes conceived the strategy he adopted through any hobnobbing with logic—quite the reverse. He had not, premeditatively, even meant to put that phase of it up to Regan—it had simply come into his head on the spur of the moment, and he had blurted it out. Once there, however, it stuck, and, on being turned over in his mind a bit, seemed to Johnnie Dawes to offer a promising field for attack. Johnnie Dawes, in that unpleasant, confidential voice of his, as though he hinted at some monumental and blood-curdling secret, began to ask the engine crews and the roundhouse the question he had asked Regan.

"What do you know about McClung—eh? Except that he came out of a wreck?"

For his trouble the Hill Division laughed at him; and then, perhaps a little to Dawes' own astonishment, certainly to his utter and unhallowed satisfaction, he fell upon something that warranted what he was pleased to consider his perspicacity—or, at least, he thought he did.

It didn't get around to Barty's ears for quite a while, not for another month or so, for the very simple reason that the engine crews and the roundhouse weren't men mean enough to throw it at McClung, and Dawes was too little of any kind of a man to say it to Barty's face. In a way, perhaps, it didn't do Barty any harm, for Barty, as the days went by, kept going up, way up, in the estimation of everybody, in spite of Johnnie Dawes, and—but there's our "clearance" now!

That's the way things stood when, after Barty McClung had been a matter of some three months on the Hill Division, Regan, pleased at any chance to promote a man, gave the 608 combination, Steve Patch and Barty McClung, a big sixteen-hundred class engine, one of the swellest cabs on the roster of the Hill Division—the 1609; and, with it, one of the fast passenger runs.

A grouch Steve Patch might have, but he was an engineer from the ground up, with a year of service for pretty near every grease spot on his overalls; and, with a record as clean as the glistening slide-bars of the new giant mountain racer, the promotion was no more than his due. And Barty McClung—well Barty, apart from being Steve's fireman anyhow, was a fireman in a thousand. Regan chuckled deep down. There wasn't any other

master mechanic, not on *their* system, that could line up a team like that—the 1609 and its whirlwind schedule, with Steve Patch and Barty McClung.

Regan bubbled all over with pride, and bit prodigiously on his plug the day he promoted the men, and watched the 1609, smooth as velvet, grace and beauty in every line, glide out of the roundhouse that late afternoon; watched while Steve balanced the 'table with an art that brought a yell from the roundhouse doors, and then, leaning far out from the cab window, big with delight, backed down to couple on to the shining string of coaches, the fastest train he had ever pulled in his life, for the run west through the mountains.

In the cab, Steve for the moment forgot his chronic grouch; and Barty whistled happily like a kid out of school, as he surveyed his surroundings. Both men were excited a little bit. Perhaps there was reason for it—it meant something, this did, to a railroad man—and both of them were that. And then, besides, it was a sort of gala occasion. The super's car was on the tail end; and some of the Big Fellows, Harvey, the division engineer, Kline, superintendent of bridges for the entire system, and Riley, the trainmaster, were going up with Carleton for an inspection trip over the division.

As they rolled out of Big Cloud with Steve Patch bulking through the cab window and Barty hanging in the gangway, Regan, who had followed them over to the platform, threw a last word at his star engine crew.

"And if you can't make time with that," sputtered Regan, blinking hard, and embracing the 1609 with an eloquent sweep of his hand, "I'll set you both back wiping—where you'd belong!"

And Steve and Barty grinned at him. Make time! Was there any doubt of it?

Strange the way things come about sometimes, isn't it? Railroading's a queer business; not that life in any calling isn't full of contrasts, and contrasts sharp and bitter too, but the smiles and tears somehow seem to meet head-on oftener on the rails than anywhere else, and do it quicker—sudden as the crack of doom.

The Hill Division remembers that night—the 1609 with Steve Patch and Barty McClung in the cab, and the super's private car carrying the tail-lights. But, most of all, it remembers Riley, the trainmaster—Riley, one of the old school, from section hand up to braking, braking to carrying a punch, punch to trainmaster, and pure grit all the way. One of the best of them Riley, he was perhaps more at home with a share of Steve Patch's bumping

seat in the cab than he was with the plush and velvet upholstery of the private car, and the higher mathematics Harvey and Kline started throwing at each other over a disputed point in bridge design, for, after dark, at a stop for water, Riley dropped off the private car, walked up forward, climbed into the cab, and—but there's a word or two comes before that.

Barty hadn't said much; it seemed to be all kind of sinking in while he got acquainted with the 1609 and the fast run. He had sprinkled the grate-bars craftily, cocked his eye at the gauge—and discovered that he was not called upon to exercise half the craft he knew to fire the 1609. But it was not until darkness was beginning to fall, shading the lower levels and valleys while the snow-crowned peaks of the Rockies still gleamed and glistened white through the clear, crisp air, and they were well into the heart of things, twisting and turning and climbing the grades, and he had snapped on the electric headlight and the electric bulbs over the water-glass and gauges, that Barty walked over to Steve Patch—you could *walk* in that cab.

"Say, Steve," he bellowed over the roar, "there's nothing on wheels has anything on us—eh? We're a regular Pullman! Electric lights in the cab—wow! She's the last word, Steve—and she's *ours*."

Patch, suddenly aroused to the fact that his attitude, demeanor and expression were possibly almost cheerful, screwed around in his seat, and his wooden old face hardened.

"She's so blamed stiff," he lied with a growl, "that an elephant couldn't move the reverse. And why in blazes don't you keep your steam up!"

Barty glanced at the gauge. The needle quivered and glistened under the bulb just where it had been from the first clang of his shovel—a full head, even on the grade. And then Barty grinned—and did what no other man in a cab could do with Steve Patch. Barty brought the palm of his hand down with a resounding whack on the engineer's shoulders—and grinned again.

Steve Patch tried hard not to—but for all that Steve Patch grinned back, and impulsively shoved out his hand.

Barty grabbed it. The two had come to think a good deal of each other, and a grip like that didn't carry any jolly business with it.

"Steve," shouted Barty, "you've got just where I want to get—pulling a latch on a fast run. I guess I've always wanted to do that ever since I was a kid—as far back as I can remember. I don't know, I feel kind of queer to-night—kind of as though for the first time it looked as though it was really coming true some day."

“Nothing to stop you on this division,” growled Steve—and then Steve let it out. “Except Johnnie Dawes,” he added.

“Johnnie Dawes?” repeated Barty in surprise. “What’s the matter with Dawes?”

“Nothing—except that he ain’t dead,” snapped the engineer. “That’s the only thing anybody’s got against him. If I was you I’d bash his face for him good and plenty.”

“What is it, Steve?” asked Barty quietly. “I’m not on.”

“Well,” said Patch, “to my way of thinking, which is different mabbe from the rest of the boys’, it’s time you was. The dirty skunk is shooting his mouth around that you ain’t out here with a clean bill of health.”

Barty seemed to brace himself a little against the lurch of the cab, and the smile on his lips sort of thinned out.

“Go on, Steve,” he prompted.

“Ain’t much to go on about, nothing for that matter,” returned the engineer savagely. “That’s why I’m telling you to give him what he’s asking for. Says you claimed you was just out here on a holiday, and he says it’s queer you ain’t had no word nor nothing from anybody back where you came from, and don’t send none yourself, either—letters, he means. Old Hicks, in his little two by twice post-office, is another just like him, and I suppose that’s where he got his dope from.”

Barty was staring out through the cab glass ahead to where the headlight, sweeping from the rails as they swung a curve, lit up the foaming, bubbling narrows of the Glacier River close against the right of way. And this time Barty made no answer.

Over the roar of the train came the roar of the rapids—then the bark of the exhaust, full, deep-toned, resonant—the whistling wind, the trucks beating the fishplates, the give and take of axle-play, the steam purring at the gauges in the cab.

A minute, two, three went by—not a word between them. A wrinkle crept into Steve’s old wooden face, and trouble into the hard gray eyes under the bushy brows that softened them.

Steve broke the silence.

“Is there anything you’d like to tell me, Barty—being mates—you and me?” He asked the question with his eyes riveted on the forward notch of

the segment as though quite fascinated by it.

Barty started, looked for a moment at the engineer, hesitated—then smiled.

"No; nothing, Steve," he said, reaching for his shovel. "A fellow doesn't pay any attention to a thing like that, does he? It isn't worth while. I should think there'd be quite a few out here besides me who don't get any letters—from anywhere."

"Sure," said Steve Patch with gruff assertiveness, stealing an anxious glance at Barty as the fireman turned away. "Sure there are, Barty."

Barty pulled his door, sprinkled the fire, and went over to his seat. Steve, muttering earnest blasphemy under his breath, kept his eyes ahead. The uplift all seemed to have oozed out of the cab. And when they pulled up for water at the Beaver Tank, it was a relief to both of them to see Riley, the burly trainmaster, hoist himself in through the gangway.

Riley, with his big laugh down deep in him that was all Riley's own, shoved Steve Patch forward in his seat with a punch in the ribs to make room for himself, and—but this is not Riley's story, save only so far as fate, with what seemed like an extra grim twist, should have brought Riley into the cab of the 1609 with Barty McClung that night; that and, of course, what came after.

When it was all over nobody knew how it happened. Haley, the rear-end brakeman of Extra Freight No. 43, westbound, swore that he threw the switch all the way over for the mainline after his train had taken the siding at Hurley's Falls to wait for the express to pass her. But Haley's record had a bad mark or two against it for carelessness. It's possible he told the truth—his conductor backed him up—and if that was so the 1609's pony truck simply jumped the switch; that was the only other solution. However, one way or the other, in results it made little difference—the spill was at Hurley's Falls.

Riley climbed into the cab at the Beaver Tank. Hurley's Falls, the first station west, lies in the Elk River valley, the eastern approach to which is a nasty bit of track—a cut through walls of enormous height where the right of way comes down from the upper levels in a stiffish grade, indulging the while in gyrations that are like the wrigglings of some earth-worm burrowing through for the open. It is only a small matter, that particular section of track, when it comes to mileage, but it is one that is held in respect in the cabs of the Hill Division and is negotiated with caution.

Steve slowed as they opened the cut, and with a roar, deafening as a clap of thunder, the 1609 nosed into the maw of towering rock walls and became engulfed, immersed, buried and hidden, as it were, in the bowels of the earth. Far up above, as through a narrow rift in the roof of a tunnel, showed a scintillating star; in front of the pilot gray rock leaped into form and menace at every twist of the track, quick enough and near enough to have sent a man's heart into his mouth more than once on his first run, as the headlight shot the projections into cold, sullen, threatening relief.

Barty swung the furnace door, and the crimson glow filled the big cab and swirled skyward like a huge canopy of fire to light up the night. Steve was far forward in his seat, motionless as a statue, crouched, with his head a little out-flung from his body, his eyes never shifting from the glistening rails, his hands on "air" and throttle. Behind him Riley smiled, his big body tucked and braced against the frame of the cab.

And then, as Barty returned to his seat, Steve relaxed a little—they were around the last curve, almost through the cut, and opening the straight again. In a moment, with the rock walls behind them, they would see the lights of Hurley's Falls station.

The roar and thunder died suddenly, by contrast, to a breathless silence—only long echoing reverberations behind—they were into the clear.

Came leaping at them from a quarter of a mile ahead the twinkling lights, switch and station, and the tail-lights of the waiting freight.

"Green on the east-end switch," Barty called across the cab.

Green? Yes. There was never any question about that. Haley, at least, had made a pretence at throwing the switch—and far enough to show the green.

"Green. All Clear," Steve answered back—and began to open up the 1609.

With a snort, as though impatient at previous restraint, the big mountain racer jumped forward into her stride again. Barty pulled his watch. They were on time—if anything, a minute to the good.

Quicker came the exhausts, quicker and quicker, as the 1609 reached forward; came again the whistling rush of wind, the sway and swing of the trailing coaches, the whir of the flying drivers, the short stack volleying the red sparks heavenward in a steady stream—Steve was picking up his schedule again.

How fast? Crazy fast—but what, concretely, does it matter? Too fast to avert the horror and disaster that yawned, a pit of death, ahead of the pilot quicker than a man could think. One instant, sweeping down the straight, rights over every mortal thing on earth—and the next, the pony truck of the 1609 hit the switch, and with a lurch, sickening as the pitch of a liner to the hollow of the sea, swerved, wrenched and swung from the mainline onto the siding.

Flung from his seat, Barty gained his feet, and got a single glance through the cab glass ahead—there was no time for more than that—just a glance at the tail-lights on Extra No. 43's caboose a bare yard or so away.

Steve checked. Checked again—*hard*. And the steel flew fire, as, with a screech and shriek, like lost souls in pandemonium, the brake-shoes locked and bit and smoked, and the big racer quivered, moaning, in every bolt.

What man could do, Steve Patch, gnarled old veteran of the rail, did then—but it was past all avail.

It takes long to tell it. It happened while a man passes his hand across his eyes—no longer than that—from the switch to the tail of the freight, no longer than that. As Barty regained his feet, and, by the gangway, shot that glance ahead, they were into it.

There was a terrific crash, a hiss and rend and grind of steam and wood and steel—and into the tail of the caboose plowed the 1609, into it and through it, cutting it as a knife cuts cheese, hurling débris in a rain of death about itself—into it, snapping away a flat coupled next to the caboose as a terrier snaps away a rat, and buried itself deep into the box-car next the flat, crumpling, buckling and telescoping a half dozen more beyond.

It was Riley, probably, who saved Barty McClung; not intentionally, Riley was past all that. Barty was standing in the gangway. Across the cab, full across it, hurled as a stone from a catapult, as a bullet from the muzzle of a gun, Riley was hurled with the shock, as the 1609 hit the tail of the caboose; and the trainmaster's body swinging through the air struck Barty McClung, tumbling the fireman in a heap out of the cab, plunging him to the ground.

For a moment, Barty knew nothing. And by all the laws of probability he should never have known anything again—but he picked himself up, bleeding from face and hands and with a wrenched shoulder, it is true, but otherwise unhurt. It was another moment though, several of them, before, stunned and dazed as he was, he could remember or understand what had

happened. He sat down between the rails of the mainline track, holding his head in his hands, his body wobbling a little, trying to make out and piece together the scene before him.

Shouts, yells and cries came sounding from the head of the freight and from the direction of the station—and from behind, from the passenger coaches came screams. These sounds all seemed to obtrude themselves discordantly upon Barty's senses over a constant roar of escaping steam. Back along the mainline, just on the switch, the second-class smoker was slewed around obliquely to the right of way and lay on its side, and the end of a passenger coach had climbed up onto the smoker's vestibule—the cars behind that seemed to have held the rails. Before him, a dozen yards away, a yellow tongue of flame leaped viciously into life from where the 1609 was half buried under the wreckage. Barty rocked in his sitting posture, and, still holding his head, gazed at the scene from between his hands.

A man shook him by the shoulder—it was Brannigan, the passenger conductor, hatless, his wrist wrapped in a red-soaked handkerchief.

"Bad hurt, Barty?" Brannigan asked.

Barty looked at him a little blankly—and shook his head.

"Where's Steve?" shot out the conductor. "Did he jump?"

And then Barty came to his feet. Steve! Steve Patch, with his ugly old wooden face, and his grouch to hide a heart bigger than a woman's any time if only a man could find his way to it—as Barty had.

"No," said Barty, and his voice sounded queer to himself. "Steve didn't jump."

"My God!" whispered Brannigan, in a low, reverent way.

But Barty didn't hear him—Barty was running now in a stumbling sort of way toward the heart of the wreck, the cab of the 1609. He was conscious of forms racing up and down the track, many of them, and swinging, bobbing lanterns; but his eyes were fixed, strained on what he could see of the 1609—nothing else—just that.

It was a tangled mass of ruin that was banked in front of him, and the flames were licking at it wickedly; beyond, through the wreckage of the caboose that was piled over the drivers and heaped on the running board (for the 1609, canted up, lay half over now) the gangway step protruded at right angles—and inside there somewhere was his engineer. He swung toward it on the run—and again his shoulder was caught, this time in a tight grip. It

brought him to a halt—and he looked into the super's face, into "Royal" Carleton's face with its clamped jaws and eyes bitter with the horror of it all.

"Don't try that, McClung!" There was grim admiration blending with the finality in Carleton's voice. "You'd never come out alive."

"Why," said Barty, in a strange, inconsequential way, "you see, Steve's in there—and Riley, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Carleton—and he choked a little.

"Of course," said Barty—and with a sudden wrench he shook Carleton's arm from his shoulder and sprang away.

Up he went, over the slithered, smoking timbers of the caboose—fighting through to the gangway of the 1609—and in. Hot, blistering steam closed upon him and immersed him. The cab was full of it. He could not stand upright and make his way to the right-hand side, to where he had last seen his engineer, because of the slant of the cab, so he dropped to his hands and knees and half crawled, half slid across the iron floor-plates, hot and wet now with the swirling steam—and brought up with a nasty bump against the segment and the engineer's seat.

There was no air, and he choked for his breath. And he could not see.

"Steve!" he called. And again: "Steve!"—and his voice trailed away in a moan from the torment that was upon him now.

There was no answer.

"Steve!"—it was a babbled word. And there was no answer. And the white cloud about him seemed to whip at him with a thousand merciless lashes, flaying with excruciating agony his raw flesh, his face, his neck, his hands—there was live steam somewhere near him, a jet of it. Over the drumming roar from the boiler, the crackle of burning timber from without as the flames biting into it now snapped fiercely, over a bedlam of shouts and cries, he could hear that hiss of steam, venomous as a serpent's.

Forward a bit he groped, groped blindly toward the "air" latch and the throttle—and then his hands touched something soft and yielding, and he began to pull and drag and tug with all his might.

Unconsciously, he was moaning now to himself continuously. Steve's leg was wedged between the forward end of the segment and where the seat there had been ripped and torn away from the cab frame. At first he could not budge the engineer, and his strength began to go, oozing away from him,

sucked away by the deadly white cloud that enveloped him, and that seemed now to jeer at him, mock at him, taunt him as it hissed.

He worked frantically, madly, and panic came upon him—and then he fell flat to the flooring, the engineer's body on top of him, as resistance suddenly gave way.

Barty McClung began to cry, sobbing in an hysteria of relief—and the tears baked dry on his face. But he had Steve free now, and, pulling, lifting, struggling with the inert form, Barty won his engineer to the gangway—and a yell went up from a score of men as they caught sight of him outside.

It was over then—but Barty didn't remember anything more after that.

Later, they found Riley hunched in between the tender and the back of the cab. But Riley was dead—the grim old railroader had gone that night into the Great Terminal.

Others too? Yes. But this is Barty McClung's story——

They got Steve Patch back to Big Cloud on the first wreck special—a pretty complete wreck himself. But Steve was wooden apparently all over as well as his face. After a week, Steve's grouch began to show itself in fluent, growling pessimism, and they knew then that Steve would live.

Barty, with no worse than a few burns and a tender skin, was back in a cab on a local run from the start, waiting for Steve Patch to come out of bed and the 1609 to come out of the shops for the fast run again; and, on his hours off, Barty nursed Steve, or, rather, took his turn at it a little more frequently than anybody else, where, with no trained nurses, or hospital, or anything of that kind, everybody used to chip in and do the best they knew how.

When Steve got around to where he was fit to be told anything, they told him how Barty had gone back into the cab for him. Steve listened—and growled. And that night when Barty came on for a trick at nursing, when he would better have been getting a little sleep before going out on a midnight run, Steve cussed and growled at him with such hearty abandon over what he claimed was Barty's clumsiness with the bandages, and went so far out of his way to do it, that even for one of Steve Patch's grouch it was suspiciously overdone.

But Barty only grinned at him.

"Steve," said he, "do you think you're fooling yourself? You can't chase me out that way!"

Steve sort of gasped, then blinked fast; and into the rough, hard-tongued old engineer's eyes came something that no one had probably ever seen there before—Steve's eyes went suddenly wet.

"Barty," said he, "God bless you, boy."

And Barty's grin went out and he turned away his head, and walked to the window; and then, presently, for the sake of something to say while they were waiting for the cautionaries to drop and give them the clear, he asked the question that had been on everybody's tongue on the Hill Division ever since the wreck.

"Who's going to get the train crews in Riley's place, Steve? Heard anything about it? Brannigan's only filling in, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Steve. "That's all. Just filling in. I dunno who gets it, but when the super was in here to-day, him and Regan, they was speaking about some new man from somewhere that was going to sit in the first of the month. I dunno who he is, but he'll need to be a good one to fill Riley's shoes."

"Yes," agreed Barty; "but I guess no one'll kick at any man Carleton picks."

"No," agreed Steve Patch; "I guess no one'll holler on that score."

But in that they were wrong—both of them. It was to touch them both closer than they knew—and to prove a trump card for Johnnie Dawes, whose spite had soared in direct ratio as Barty's stock had soared after the Hurley's Falls wreck. It was the natural outcome—with a man like Johnnie Dawes. It couldn't have been any other way. Johnnie Dawes never had been in right with the Hill Division; he was in wrong now worse than ever. Barty McClung had proved himself, and there wasn't much room for any one who said, or who *had* said, which is more to the point for Johnnie Dawes kept his mouth sullenly shut now, anything against a man who had pulled his engineer out of a ruck that the Hill Division generally was honest enough to admit it would have shied at doing itself. Therefore Johnnie Dawes, nursing his bottled-up spite, which curdled to hate, waited for the chance that he hoped would come to him—and took particular pains, having an eye to his physical welfare, to keep out of the fireman's road, putting a pit or two and an intervening engine between them whenever he and Barty McClung happened to be in the roundhouse together.

The weeks passed, nearly four of them, from the night of the Hurley's Falls wreck; and then there came the day, the last day of the month, when

the 1609 came out of the shops again, and Steve came to her throttle again, and Barty to the left-hand side of the cab, and the engine and men were back on their run once more.

But the fates seemed against that particular all-star combination of the fat little master mechanic. First it was the 1609 and Steve together who were laid on the shelf, and then it was—Barty McClung. But they did better this time—they made a return run through the mountains without mishap, and on schedule to the dot. And then it happened.

It was close on noon the next day, which made it the first of the month, as they pulled into Big Cloud on the return run, and the 1609 backed in over the 'table into the roundhouse, and Steve, as they came to a stop, swung down from the gangway to the floor.

Barty, still in the cab, caught the sound of Carleton's voice as the engineer alighted, and over the purr of the steam caught snatches of what the super said:

"Steve, shake hands with . . . going to take the train crews, you know . . . the 1609 . . . want him to see something of the types we're using on the mountain runs. . . ."

Then Steve's uncompromising growl:

"Glad to know you."

It was the new trainmaster, of course. Barty edged over to the other side of the cab to get a look, but the new man was standing close up against the drivers under the cab and Barty couldn't see him. Then Steve, with no intention of letting his mate stay out in the cold while introductions or anything else were going around, shouted for Barty to come down. And Barty, swabbing his hands on a piece of clean waste that he snatched hurriedly from the engineer's box, jumped to the ground.

"Barty," said Steve, usurping the super's prerogative, "this is Mr. Calhoun, the new trainmaster."

A short, stocky, grizzled-haired man, with close-cut moustache, stepped pleasantly forward, extended his hand, hesitated, drew his hand back, let it drop to his side, and a queer grim sort of an expression settled on his face.

"I've seen McClung before," he said shortly.

Nobody spoke for a moment. Johnnie Dawes, trailing the Big Fellows and playing for notice from Authority, was listening with both ears and absorbing the scene with both eyes from the nose of the pilot a little behind

the group. Steve Patch, his jaw beginning to protrude defiantly, glared at the new trainmaster, swung to look at Barty McClung, and his jaw lost its belligerent jut and sagged instead—Barty was leaning against the tender, his eyes on his boots, a whiteness in his face that was creeping to his lips. Carleton, frowning perplexedly, looked from one to the other in turn.

And then Calhoun, with a nod to Steve Patch, turned to Carleton, said something in a low tone, and the two walked away and out of the roundhouse through the big engine doors without another word.

As they stepped out on the cinders around the turntable, the noon whistle blew—and Johnnie Dawes stepped out after them—pretty close after them.

"I discharged him for lifting fares," Johnnie Dawes heard Calhoun say to the super—and Johnnie Dawes streaked for the Blazing Star Saloon to spread the news.

In the roundhouse, old Steve Patch faced his fireman.

"What is it, boy?" he demanded gruffly—gruffly because he couldn't speak any other way, much less when he was excited.

Barty McClung put out his hand to the engineer's shoulder and gripped it hard.

"Nothing you can help, Steve," he said in a low way. He jerked his head toward the 1609. "I guess I've made my last run with her. They all say a man can't 'come back', that they won't let him—but I didn't believe it. I guess it works out true though." Then abruptly: "I don't feel like talking now. I'm going up to the boarding house. I'll see you later." Then he smiled—and walked out of the roundhouse.

Steve watched him go, started to follow, stopped, swallowed the lump in his throat to make way for a rumble of muttered oaths—and hoisted himself up heavily into the cab to take off his overalls. Remembering that night in the cab just before the wreck, he knew that something was miserably wrong; that was all he knew then, and that was enough—but it wasn't long before he got the gist of it, just as everybody else did.

A bit of anything that can be turned into gossip when tacked on to a bit of news is like the tail tacked on to the kite—it makes it fly. And with Johnnie Dawes pulling the string the news flew. By the time noon hour was over everybody in Big Cloud had it—the men returning to work; and the women hurrying into each others kitchens for fear somebody would get there before they did. Regan, for instance, who had been down the line, and, coming in a little after one o'clock, was snatching a hasty lunch at the

station counter, got it from Dutchy Damrosch, the proprietor. It spoilt the big-hearted little man's lunch. He put down his coffee cup, wiped the drops from the ends of his scraggly moustache with the back of his hand, got down from the high stool, stamped out to the platform, and stamped upstairs to the super's office.

Carleton was tipped back in his swivel chair behind his desk, as Regan entered. Calhoun was over beside the window. There was nobody else in the room.

Carleton, with a glance at the master mechanic's face, spoke at once:

"I guess you've heard it, Tommy. It appears to be all over town. We were just discussing it."

"I don't believe a damned word of it!" spluttered Regan; and then, a little breathless from his climb upstairs, he puffed fiercely at Calhoun: "I know a man when I see one. McClung ain't that kind of a man. You keep your hands off my engine crews, Calhoun, or we'll meet head-on!"

Calhoun colored a little, but there wasn't a hint of animosity in his tones as he spoke.

"You're jumping pretty hard, aren't you, Regan?"

"Mabbe," snapped Regan, unappeased. "Mabbe, but——"

"Wait, Tommy," Carleton broke in quietly. "Unfortunately, it's true."

Calhoun came away from the window toward Regan.

"I'm sorry for this," he said earnestly. "It's not a very pleasant beginning for me out here, is it? But unfortunately, as Carleton says, it's true."

There was something straightforward about the new trainmaster, sincerity in his voice, an honest trouble in his face, that Regan, every inch of him a man himself, got and understood for all his ire. Calhoun, too, was the kind the men swore by, square as a die, not the man to find his pleasure in cutting the ground out from under another's feet.

Regan reached into his back pocket for his black-strap, bit deeply, and fussed somewhat as he returned the plug to its abiding place on his hip.

"Calhoun," he said, "I take back what I said to you. But this means something to me. Mabbe you're mistaken. Mabbe you've got the wrong man. What's the story?"

Calhoun shook his head.

“There isn’t any mistake,” he said. “I’ve known McClung for two years back on my old division on the Penn—got to know him pretty well for that matter, and liked him. If I hadn’t—liked him, I mean—this probably would never have happened. He threw me cold. He began as a wiper there, and had just got his engine and started in firing when the slack season this spring, beginning with that panic in Wall Street, set in. In about a month we had cancelled every freight we could on the train-sheets, and had pared our passenger schedules down to a minimum. Times got pretty hard; but it hit the engine crews harder than it did my men, for I had been short-handed before the trouble came.” Calhoun paused, and nodded toward the super. “I’ve gone over all this with Mr. Carleton already—I’m repeating it because I daresay you’re wondering what a fireman could have to do with lifting fares.”

“Yes, go on, Calhoun,” said Carleton. “Give Regan the whole of it.”

“Well,” continued Calhoun, “you can see pretty well how it worked out yourself, Regan. The junior engineers went back to firing, a lot of the firemen, senior to McClung went back to wiping, and some of the younger firemen, McClung amongst them, together with the wipers, were laid off, and had to fit in wherever they could find anything to do. I offered McClung a temporary job as brakeman with one of our conductors by the name of Kalbers on a passenger run, and McClung was glad enough to take it till times got better and he could get back into a cab again. Of course, I stretched a point to do it.”

Calhoun stopped again abruptly—and then swept out his hand impulsively, as though the whole thing were intensely distasteful to him and he wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible.

“There’s no use in making a long story of it,” he said brusquely. “In a way, I blame Kalbers. It seems that when the train was heavy Kalbers used to get McClung to help him work it—collecting tickets and fares, you know. One of our spotters was on the train one night—not that I like the breed, mind you—but he was there. He overheard two drummers talking in the smoking car—they had barely caught the train, no time to buy tickets, and they mentioned with a grin the amount of the cash fare they had paid between two points—about one-half what it should have been. It was a ‘knock-down’, of course. Nothing showed, naturally, in Kalber’s returns at the end of the run. It looked like Kalbers right off the bat, of course, and Kalbers went on the carpet for it—and then McClung confessed. It was he who had collected the fares—and pocketed them. I discharged McClung. That’s the whole story.”

Regan was pulling at his moustache—hard. His eyes that had been on the trainmaster, shifted to the superintendent. It was bad business—but Regan's creed was a man's creed, and it's foundation was in the great big heart of him.

"That may be his record back there," said Regan slowly, and he kept his eyes in a sort of tentative way on Carleton; "but out here it's white, clean white—h'm?"

Calhoun had walked back to the window. Carleton sucked at his brier and said nothing.

A moment the silence held—while the red crept into the little master mechanic's cheeks. And then Regan stormed.

"Out—eh? That means he's out. Well then, it's a damned shame—and it ain't like you, Carleton!" His fat little fist clenched and came down on the super's desk—and unconsciously he said what Barty McClung himself had said. "I've heard it said often enough that a man never gets a chance to 'come back' if he ever jumps the rails—once. Looks like it's true here—what? When a man's down, keep him down—that's the idea, eh? My God! Look at him! Look what he did that night at Hurley's Falls. He slipped once—and he's down for ever. He's trying to make good, ain't he?—and we won't let him. Can't you give him a chance, Carleton—what's it cost you to give him a chance!"

Carleton got up from his chair, came around to Regan, and laid his hand quietly on the master mechanic's arm.

"Pull your fire, Tommy," he said in his grave way. "There's no conspiracy against McClung. I like the man. I think as much of him as you do. I'd give him a chance, a hundred of them, as quick as you would—if I could. I never saw anything finer than what he did that night at the wreck. But we can't run the division on sentiment. Calhoun was obliged to discharge McClung for stealing a few months ago. Calhoun is out here now as trainmaster, and discipline and authority come first over every other consideration. Thanks to that fellow Dawes, everybody knows about this now, and that puts a clincher on it. When you've cooled a bit, Tommy, you'll see there's no other way—McClung is out."

Regan didn't answer at once. Carleton was right—Regan knew that now. But logic and Regan's heart weren't always on speaking terms.

"It's tough," said Regan. "Tough—that's what it is."

"Yes," said Carleton; then, after a pause: "Perhaps you'd rather not mix up in it, Tommy, though he's one of your men—I'll send for McClung and say what has to be said."

Regan shook his head.

"If he's out—he's out. That's the main point," he said gruffly. "I'll do the talking to McClung myself."

But Regan didn't do much talking to McClung. What was in the little master mechanic's mind was to save the fireman what bitterness he could, and let the other down as easy as he could; and, as he left the super's office and went down the stairs, his face was puckered and there was hurt in his eyes. But Regan might have saved himself this travail of mind hunting for soft words with which to send McClung away, for Regan, after all, did not discharge McClung—McClung, in a way, discharged himself. Regan found the fireman waiting for him at his office door at the shops.

"Regan," said Barty McClung, before the master mechanic could speak, "you've heard what's—what's going around?"

It came quick, a little unexpectedly, and Regan inadvertently swallowed some black-strap juice—and coughed.

McClung's face was set.

"Well, I came to tell you that it's true," he said monotonously. "Every word of it. I stole the money. Calhoun's not to blame for this, he's as straight as they make them. But I can't stay here now on the same division with a trainmaster who fired me for theft on another one. I'm going away now—this afternoon—before I'm told to go."

It wasn't in Regan to tell the other that officially he was already out. Regan didn't say anything. Regan kept pulling at his moustache.

McClung hesitated a moment, shifted a little uncertainly from one foot to the other, looked at Regan sort of wistfully like, as though he hoped to hear Regan say something he wanted to hear—and then, without a word, he turned to go.

Regan cleared his throat then, and called him back.

"If it weren't for Calhoun being here," said Regan fiercely, "I'd——"

"Yes; I know," said Barty—and he smiled a little.

"And I don't give one blamed hoot," announced the impulsive little master mechanic, "about what you've done! You were making good here,

Barty. And according to my lights there was a clean sheet coming to you after that night at the wreck. That's the way I feel, and I want you to know it. Where are you going from here?"

"I don't know," said Barty McClung.

"H'm!" said Regan down deep—and repeated it. There was something else he wanted to say, but the something else wouldn't come. And then still tugging with one hand at his moustache, he shoved out the other to Barty McClung.

And Barty McClung took it.

"You're a square man, Regan," he said a little huskily—and walked away.

From the shops, Barty headed toward the roundhouse—there were a few belongings in his box in the cab of the 1609. And he walked with his eyes straight before him across the yards, across the turntable, and in through the end doors to where the 1609 stood on her pit next to the wall.

That part of the roundhouse was apparently deserted; at least, Barty saw no one, and he could hear nothing for the roar of steam from an engine on the next pit, blowing from a full head and ready to go out.

Barty climbed into the cab of the 1609, walked over to his seat, and lifted up the cover.

"I wonder," said Barty McClung wistfully to himself, "who'll be going out with old Steve to-night?"

He bent down, rummaging in his box for his things—and then suddenly he stood erect, listening. Above the racket from the overburdened safety on the next pit, he thought he heard his engineer's voice raised in an angry growl. And as he listened now, it came again—then an oath in a half yell from another voice, and the scuffle of feet.

Barty McClung shoved his head out of the cab window. There wasn't much room between the 1609 on the end pit and the wall of the roundhouse, perhaps six feet, making a sort of alleyway to the rear, where, beyond the tender, the fitters had their benches—and as he looked Barty's jaws clamped.

Close to the bench two figures locked and swayed—Steve Patch and Johnnie Dawes. They crashed against the end of the tender, recovered themselves, and then Johnnie Dawes seemed to fling the engineer from him and follow with a swing to Patch's face.

With a jump, Barty was away from the window, through the gangway and to the ground. There wasn't any doubt what the fight was about—and there wasn't any doubt either in Barty's mind that a man two days off a month's sick bed was no better than a child in the hands of the big, sneaking, raw-boned wiper.

It wasn't far—just a little more than the length of the 1609's tender—but, as Barty ran, Dawes swung again, and the old engineer reeled back; then rushed gamely once more.

But now Dawes had seen Barty coming—and he leaped back to the bench behind him. Dawes was yellow, no one ever questioned that, but he might not have done what he did if it hadn't been for the noon hour with his foot on the rail in the Blazing Star Saloon; that, and perhaps a sudden drunken terror that he had to reckon with the two men at once who least of any he knew were likely to show him mercy. His fingers clutched a heavy, long-handled goose-neck wrench—and it was in mid-air above his head as Barty sprang in between the two men.

It was over in an instant. Before Barty could stop his headlong rush, or guard, before he well knew what the wiper was about, he went down like a log with the goose-neck full on his forehead, sprawled to the floor, twitched, and lay unconscious, his skull opened for inches to the bone.

For just a moment neither Dawes nor the engineer moved. Then the wrench clattered from Dawes' hand to the floor, and, white with terror, Dawes ran for the roundhouse door. It was Johnnie Dawes who left the Hill Division for good that day—not Barty McClung.

What? No; Barty McClung's there yet. They carried him up to Steve's, and he had a pretty tight squeak of it for a good many weeks on end; but long before he was even able to recognize anybody or was through talking queer nothings in his delirium, Calhoun got the letter that Regan, the big heart of him happy as a schoolboy's, tacked up over the train register.

Engine crews, train crews and the Hill Division generally had business there, and the men as they signed "on" and "off" their runs read it. Hard-fisted, hard-tongued, grimy, some of them, rough and ready all of them, those railroaders of the Rockies, men themselves they loved a man above all other things on earth. They read the letter and they yelled their delight, and they shook hands with each other out of the pure exuberance of their hearts.

It wasn't much of a letter—nothing to blow about so far as English and rhetoric went. It was from Kalbers to Calhoun, Kalbers' old trainmaster; and

it wasn't dated from anywhere. It ran like this:

"I've pulled off the old division. The wife's dead now. You remember she was bad all last winter. It would have killed her if she'd known. McClung knew that. Don't think too hard of me. I wouldn't have let him stand for it if it hadn't been that it would have killed the wife if she'd known. It doesn't matter now—she's dead. But she never knew I was a thief. I took the money. McClung's gone somewhere, I don't know where, but if you ever see him, tell him the wife died without ever knowing about it. But that ain't what I'm writing this for—it's to ask you to put McClung right with the boys on the old division.

"Yours truly,
"T. Kalbers."

—X—

THE BLOOD OF KINGS

THIS is the story of "King" Gilleen.

Gilleen was a man you would never pass in a crowd without twisting your head around to get a second look at him, not even in a big crowd, for nature had dealt with Gilleen generously—or otherwise—whichever way it pleases you best to consider it. He had red hair of a shade that might be classified as brilliant, but which Tommy Regan described in metaphor.

Said Regan: "You could see that head a mile away on the other side of a curve in a blizzard at night when he pokes it out of the cab window. You'll never get Gilleen on the carpet because his headlight's out, what?"

Certainly, at any rate, Gilleen's hair was undeniably red. He had blue eyes, and a very small nose which, for all that, was, next to his hair, the most prominent feature he possessed—small noses with a slight up-cant to the tip *are* pronounced, mere size to the contrary. His face was freckled, and so were his hands; also, he was no small chunk of a man, not so very tall, but the shoulders on him were something to envy if you were friendly with him, or to respect if you were not. That was Gilleen, all except the fact that he admitted with emphasis to the blood of some wild Irish race of kings coursing through his veins. This last point was never established—every one took Gilleen's word for it; that is, every one but Regan, who was Irish himself, and, more pertinent still, Gilleen's direct superior. On this point Regan, who was never averse to doing it, could get a rise out of Gilleen quicker than the bite of a hungry trout.

"By Christmas," Gilleen would sputter on such occasions, "I'll have you know I'm no liar, an' if 'twere not for the missus an' the six kids"—here Gilleen would always stop to count, owing to a possible arrival since the last clash, realizing that any slip would be instantly and mercilessly turned against him by the grinning master mechanic—"if 'twere not for them, Regan, you listen to me, I'd bash your face an' then ram the measly job you give me down your throat, I would that!"

"Well," Regan would return, "when you get to sitting on a dinky, gilded throne, sunk to the crown-sheet in the bogs though it will be, I'd ask no more nor as much from your hands as you get from mine—which is more

than your deserts. Who but me would do as much for you? You ought to be back wiping. I've thought some seriously of it, h'm? Six, is it now?—well, it's a grand race!"

Whereupon Gilleen would say hot words and say them fervently, while he shook his fist at the master mechanic.

"I'll show you some day, Regan," was his final word. "I'll show you what kind of a race it is, an' don't you forget it!"

All of which is neither very interesting nor in any degree witty—it simply shows where Gilleen's nickname came from. Everybody on the division called him "King"—not to his face, they do now, but they didn't then. Queer the way a little thing like that acts on a man sometimes. Gilleen was well enough liked in a way, but no one ever really took him seriously in anything. Associate a man with a joke and henceforward and for ever after, usually, the two are inseparable. He may have aspirations, ambitions, what you will, but he is given no credit for having them—with Gilleen it was that way. Just Gilleen, "King" Gilleen—and a grin.

The Lord only knows what possessed Gilleen to adhere with such stout-hearted loyalty to his ancestors—you may put an interrogation mark after that last word, if you like—it began with perhaps no more than a boyish boast when his official connection with the system was no farther advanced than to the degree of holding down the job of assistant boiler-washer in the roundhouse. The more they guyed him the more stubbornly he stuck—it was a matter worth fighting for, and Gilleen fought. He threw pounds, reach, and other advantages to the winds and took on anybody and everybody. By the time he had moved up to firing he had fought all who cared to fight, who were not a few; and when, following that, in the due course of promotion, he got his engine, he had by blows, not argument, established his assertion outwardly at least. At a safe distance the division, remembering broken noses and missing teeth and no longer denying him his royal blood, gave him his way, smiled tolerantly in self-solace and called him "nutty."

Regan, of course, still guyed—but Regan was master mechanic. Not that he did it by virtue of the immunity his official position afforded him, he never gave that a thought. He did it because he was Regan, and Regan was built that way. He could no more forego the chance of a laugh or an inward chuckle than he could forego the act of breathing—and live. A joke was a joke, just fun with him, that was all.

But with Gilleen it was different. Being unable to use his fists as was his wont, and being possessed of no other safety-valve, the pressure mounted

steadily until it registered a point on his mental gauge that spoke eloquently of trouble to come.

And so matters stood when, following a rather dull summer, the fall business opened with a rush and a roar. Things moved with a jump, and the rails hummed under a constant stream of traffic east and west. Here, at least, was no joke—a rush on the Hill Division, single-track, through the mountains, never was. A month of it, and every one from car-tink to superintendent began to show the effects of the strain. It was double up everywhere, extra duty, extra tricks. The dispatchers caught their share of it and their eyes grew red and heavy under the lamps at night, and the heads of the day-men ached as they figured a series of meeting points that had no beginning and no end; but, bad as it was for the men on the keys, it was worse for some of those in the cabs. Schedules went to smash. Perishables and flyers were given the best of it—the rights of the rest were the sidings. It was a case of crawl along, sneak from one to the other, with layout after layout, until the ordinary length of a day's duty lapped over into fifteen-hour stretches and sometimes to twenty-four. Sleep, what they could get of it, the engine crews snatched bolt upright in their seats while they waited for Number One's headlight to shoot streaming out of the East, or nodded until roused by the roar and thunder of a flying freight, cars and cars of it crammed with first-class ratings, streaking East, as it hurtled by with insolent disregard for every mortal thing on earth.

Maybe Gilleen got a little more of it than any one else on the throttles, maybe he did—or maybe he didn't. Gilleen thought he did anyhow, and naturally he put it down to Regan's account. Regan was head of the motive power department of the Hill Division—there was no one else *to* put it down to. It was Regan or imagination. Gilleen, not being strong on imagination, did not debate the question—he let it go at Regan.

In from one run, shot out on another—that was Gilleen's schedule. The little woman in the little house uptown off Main street got to be mostly a memory to Gilleen, and as for the six brick-headed scions of his kingly race he came to wonder if they really existed at all.

Things boomed and hummed on the Hill Division, and while everybody on it snarled and swore and nagged at each other, as weary, worn-out, dropping-with-fatigue men will do, the smiles broadened on the lips and spread over the faces of the directors down East, as they rubbed their palms beneficently, expectantly, scenting extra dividends and soaring stock.

It was noon one day when Gilleen, with a trailing string of slewing freights behind him, pulled into the Big Cloud yards, uncoupled, backed down the spur, crossed the 'table, and ran into the roundhouse. As he swung from the gangway, Regan came hurrying in through the engine doors of Gilleen's pit from the direction of headquarters, and walked up to the engineer.

"Gilleen," said he briskly, "you'll have to take out Special Ninety-seven. 1603's ready with a full head on pit two."

"What's that?" snapped Gilleen. "Take out a special *now*? You know damn well I'm just in from a run. I'm tired. You'll rub it in once too often, Regan."

"We're all tired, aren't we?" returned the master mechanic tartly. "Do you think you're the only one? As for rubbing it in, you'd better think again, my bucko. There's no rubbing in being done except in your eye! Anyhow, that's enough talk. Special Ninety-seven's carded on rush orders from down East, and she's been in here an hour now."

"Well, why didn't you let the crew that brought her in keep goin' then?" snarled Gilleen. It was a fool question and he knew it; but, as he had said, he was tired, and his temper, never angelic, was now pretty well on edge.

Regan glared at him a moment angrily. Regan, too, was tired and irritable, harassed beyond the limit that most men are harassed. The demand upon the motive power department for men and engines had kept him up more than one night trying to figure out a problem that was well-nigh impossible.

"Let 'em go on!" he snorted. "You know well enough I haven't anything on the Prairie Division men. You know that—what d'ye say it for, h'm? You're the first man in—and you go out first."

"It strikes me I'm *generally* the first man in these days," retorted Gilleen angrily; "an' I'm sick of gettin' the short end of it. I guess I won't go out this time."

It took a breathing spell before the master mechanic could explode adequately.

"You call yourself a railroad man!" he flung out furiously. "What are you talking about? Every man's got his shoulder to the wheel and pushing without talk. We haven't got any room here for quitters. I guess that blood of yours you're so pinhead-brained proud of is——"

Regan did not finish. With a bellow of rage the red-haired engineer went at the other like a charging bull, and the master mechanic promptly measured his length on the roundhouse floor from a wallop on the head that made him see stars.

Regan scrambled to his feet. His heart was the heart of a fighter, even if his build was not. Straight at Gilleen he flew, and the passes and lunges and jabs he made—while the engineer played on the master mechanic's paunch like a kettle-drum and delivered a second wallop on the head as a plaster for the first—are historic only for their infinitesimal coefficient of effectiveness. It is unquestionably certain that the master mechanic then and there would have proceeded to make up for some of his own lost sleep, at least, if Gilleen's fireman and a wiper or two hadn't got in between the two men just when they did.

Gilleen was boiling mad.

"Well," he bawled, "got anything more to say about quittin' or that other thing? I guess I won't go out this time, what?"

Regan was equally mad. And as he felt tenderly of his forehead, where a lump was rapidly approximating the formation of a goose egg, he grew madder still.

"You won't go out, won't you?" he roared. "Well, *I* guess you will; and, what's more, you'll go out *now*—and get your time! I fire you, understand?"

"You bet!" said "King" Gilleen—and that's all he said. He looked at the master mechanic for a minute, but didn't *say* anything more—just laughed and walked out of the roundhouse.

Naturally enough, the story got up and down the division, and everybody talked about it. With their rough and impartial justice the men put both Regan and Gilleen in the wrong, but mostly Gilleen for insubordination. The affront Gilleen had suffered was not so big and momentous, a long way from being the vital thing in their eyes that it was in his. Gilleen was just nutty on that point, that was all there was to it. Regan's judgment had been bad, and the moment he had seized for his thrust and fling was by no manner of means a psychological one; but, for all that, Gilleen had no business to strike the master mechanic. He had got what was coming to him—that was the verdict. He was out, and out for good. It was pretty generally conceded that it would be a long time before he pulled a throttle on the Hill Division again.

What sympathy the engineer got, for he got some, wasn't on his own account. It was on account of his family—not the ancestral end of it,

however. Six kids and a wife do not leave much change out of a pay check even when it's padded with overtime; six kids and a wife with no pay check is pretty stiff running.

Gilleen was too hot under the collar to give a thought to that when he marched out of the roundhouse that noon; but it wasn't many hours, after he had put in a few to make up for the sleep he hadn't had during the preceding weeks, that the problem was up to him for consideration with a vote for adjournment for once ruled out as not in order.

Mrs. Gilleen may or may not have shared her spouse's opinions on the subject of his illustrious descent—if she did she never put on any "airs" about it. Washing and dressing and cooking was about all one woman could manage for a household as big as hers. That's what she said anyway, whenever any one asked her about it. And one glance at the red-headed brood she mothered was enough to preclude any dispute on that score. Just a little bit of a woman she was physically; but bigger practically than the whole corps of leading lights in social and domestic economy—which, come to think of it, is damning Mrs. Gilleen with faint praise, whereas too much couldn't be said for her. However, let that go. Mrs. Gilleen *was* practical, and she had the matter up to the engineer almost before he had the sleep washed out of his eyes. No nagging, no reproach, nothing of that kind—Mrs. Gilleen wasn't that sort of a woman. "King," or not, Gilleen might have been, Katie Gilleen was a *queen*, not in looks perhaps, but a queen—that's flat! A fine woman is the finest thing in the world, and if that were said a little more often than it is maybe things generally wouldn't be any the worse for it—which is not a plank in the platform of the Suffragettes, though it may sound like it.

"Michael," said she, "you rowed with Mr. Regan and he fired you. Will he take you back?"

Gilleen lowered the towel to his chin to catch the dripping water from his hair—he had just buried his head in the washbowl the minute before—and looked at his wife.

"I wouldn't ask him, Kate," he said shortly.

Mrs. Gilleen was proud, too—but for all that she sighed.

"What will you do, then, Michael?" she asked.

"I dunno yet, little woman. Some of the others will give me a job, I guess. Mabbe I'll try the train crews. I'll hit 'em up for something, anyway."

“But there’s ever so much less money in that.” Mrs. Gilleen’s tones were judicial, not plaintive.

“I know it,” returned Gilleen; “but it’ll tide us over an’ keep the steam up till we get a chance to pull out for somewheres where a man can get an engine without a grinning fool of a master mechanic to double-cross him with the worst of it every chance he gets.”

“I hope it will all come out right,” said Mrs. Gilleen, a little wistfully.

“It will,” Gilleen assured her. “Don’t you worry, I’ll get after a job right away as soon as I’ve had a bite.”

It came easier even than Gilleen had figured it would—such as it was—and it was about the last job Gilleen had thought of as a possibility. Things have a peculiar way of working themselves out sometimes, and, curiously enough, by means which, on the surface, are, more often than not, apparently trivial and inconsequent. Certainly, if Gilleen, on his way to the station that morning, had not run into Gleason, the yardmaster, why then—but he did.

“Call-boys kind of scarce around your diggin’s since noon, ain’t they, Gilleen?” was Gleason’s greeting.

“Yes,” said Gilleen. “I’m out.”

“See you’re headin’ for the station,” remarked Gleason tentatively. “Goin’ down to patch it up?”

“No!” answered Gilleen with a hard ring in his voice—the “no” was emphatic.

Gleason stared at the engineer for a minute, then took a bite from his plug, and the motion of his head might have been a nod of understanding or merely a wrench or two to free his teeth from the black-strap in which they were imbedded.

“No,” said Gilleen again; “I’m not. I’m goin’ down for another job.”

“What kind of a job?” enquired Gleason.

“Any kind from any one who will put me on—except Regan.”

Gleason thought of his choked yards—the rush had in no way overlooked him. Men, men that knew a draw-bar and a switch-handle from a hunk of cheese, were as scarce in his department as they were in any of the others.

“Yards?” he queried—and blinked.

“D’ye mean it?” demanded Gilleen, taking him up short.

“Sure, I mean it.”

“You’re on,” said Gilleen.

“Night switchman,” amplified the yardmaster. “You can begin to-night.”

“All right, I’ll be on deck,” agreed Gilleen; “an’ thanks, Gleason. I’m much obliged to you.”

“Humph!” grunted Gleason. “ ’Tain’t much of a stake compared with an engine, but it’s yours, an’ welcome.”

It was quite true. Comparatively, it wasn’t much of a stake; and even the first night of it was enough to throw the comparison into a strong and bitter relief. All that was required to put a finishing touch on Gilleen’s feelings anent the master mechanic was that first night on yard switching; that, and, of course, the nights that followed. It wasn’t so much the work, though that was hard enough, and, being green, the engineer made about twice as much for himself as there was any need of; it was a not-to-be-denied tendency of his eyes to stray toward the roundhouse every time a gleaming headlight showed on the turntable. If Gilleen had never known before how much he loved an engine, he knew it in those dark hours while he swung a lantern from the roofs of a freight string, or hopped the foot-board of a switcher. Up and down the yards from dusk till dawn, to the accompaniment of the wheezing, grunting, coughing, foreshortened apology for a shunter, the clash of brake-beams, the bump and rattle, staccato, diminuendo, as a line of box-cars grumbled into motion, didn’t take on any roseate hues from the angle Gilleen looked at it; nor did an occasional ten-wheeler, out or in, sailing grandly past him with impudent airs help any, either. Gilleen’s language became as freckled as his face and hands, and as fiery as his head. Even that grand old Irish race from which he claimed to have sprung, that wild and untamed breed of kingly sires paled into insignificance—Gilleen was more occupied with Regan. What he thought he said, and said it aloud without making any bones about it—said it through his teeth, with his fists clenched.

Perhaps it was just as well Gilleen was on nights, for, ordinarily, the master mechanic had nothing to bring him around the yards, shops or roundhouse after sundown—Regan’s evenings being spent with Carleton, a pipe and a game of pedro in the super’s office—just as well for both their sakes; for Regan’s physically; for Gilleen’s because, little fond of his job as he was, there were certain necessities that even little Mrs. Gilleen with all

her practicability and economy could not supply without money. Anyway, the days went by and the two men did not meet, though Gilleen's orations got around to Regan's ears fast enough. The master mechanic only laughed when he heard them.

"Gilleen," said he, "is like the parrot that said 'sic 'em!' and said it once too often. He talks too much. If he'd kept his mouth shut I'd have given him his run back, after a lay off to teach him manners. As it is, if he likes switching let him keep at it. Mabbe by the time he's tired, the throne of his ancestors'll be ready for him, what?"

All this was enough to spell ructions in the air, and, ordinarily, the division to a man would have hung mildly expectant on the result of the final showdown. But the Hill Division just then wasn't hankering for anything more to liven it up—it was getting all of that sort of thing it wanted and a little besides. Attending strictly to business was about all it could do, a trifle beyond what it could do, and everything else was apart—the boom showed more signs of increasing than it did of being on the wane. There wasn't any let-up anywhere—things sizzled.

It never rains but it pours, they say; and that's one adage, at least, that the railroad men of Big Cloud, and the town itself, for that matter, will swear by to this day. There are a few things that Big Cloud remembers vividly and with astounding minuteness for detail, but the night the shops went up tops them all.

When it was all over they decided that a slumbering forge fire in the blacksmith shop was at the bottom of it—not that any one really knew, or knows now, but they put it down to that because it sounded reasonable, and because there wasn't anything else *to* put it down to. However, whether that was the cause or whether it wasn't, on one point there was no possible opening for an argument—and that was the effect and the result.

If you knew Big Cloud in the old days, you know where the shops were, and what they looked like; if you didn't it won't take a minute to tell you. You could see them from the station platform across the tracks far up at the west end of the yards; and they looked more like a succession of barns nailed on to each other than anything else, except for the roofs which were low and flat—the buildings being all one-storied. What with the quarters of the boiler-makers, the carpenters, the machinists and the fitters, the old shops straggled out over a goodly length of ground, and a grimy, ramshackle, dirty, blackened, Godforsaken looking structure it was. To-day,

thanks to that fire, there's a modern affair of structural steel—and the rest is but a memory. However——

Night in the mountains in the Fall comes early, and by nine o'clock on the night the fire broke out it had shut down pitch dark. Nothing showed in the yards but the twinkling switch lights, the waving lamps of the men, and an occasional gleam from the shunter's headlight when it shot away from the end of a box-car. Across the tracks the station lights were like fireflies, and there was a glimmer or two showing from the roundhouse.

Apart from the fact that a pretty strong west wind was brushing the yards, if you could count that as anything apart, there was nothing out of the ordinary. Everything was going as usual, when suddenly, without warning, a wicked fang of flame shot skyward, then another higher than the first. It was answered by a yell from the yardmen, caught up in the roundhouse, and then the switcher's whistle shrieked the alarm. A minute more, and everything with steam enough to lift a valve joined in. Dark forms began to run in the direction of the shops, and then the bell in the little English chapel uptown took a hand in the clamour. The alarm was unanimous enough and general enough when it came, there was never any doubt about that; but the fire must have got a pretty stiff start before it broke through the windows to fling its first challenge at the railroad men.

Gilleen and the rest of the yard crew were on the run for the scene when Gleason's voice, bawling over the din, halted them.

"Clean out three, four an' five, an' get 'em down to the bottom of the yards, an' look lively!" he yelled. "Leave that string of gondolas on six till the last. Jump now, boys! Eat 'em up!"

Oil-spattered floors and oil-smeared walls are a feeding ground for a fire than which there is no better. The flame tongues leaped higher and higher, throwing a lurid glare down the yards, and throwing, too, as the wind caught them up and whirled them in gusts, a driving rain of sparks that threatened the long, dark lines of rolling stock, for the most part choked to the doors with freight—freight enough to total a sum in claim-checks that would blanch the cheeks of the most florid director on the Board of the Transcontinental.

With Gleason in command, Gilleen and his mates went at their work heads down. There wasn't anything fancy or artistic about the way they banged those cars to safety—there wasn't time to be fussy. Behind them the south end of the shops was already a blazing mass. The little switcher took hold of first one string then another, shook it angrily for a minute as her

exhaust roared into a quick crackle of reports, and the drivers spun around like pin-wheels making the steel fly fire, then with a cough and a grunt and a final push she would snap the cars away from her, and the string would go sailing down the yard to bump and pound to a stop, with an echoing crash, into whatever might be at the other end. There was a car or two the next morning with front-ends and rear-ends and both ends at once, that looked as though they had been in a cyclone; but, anyway, the record the yardmen made that night is the record to-day, and in no more than ten minutes there wasn't a car within three hundred yards of the shops.

But while the yard crew worked others were not idle. Regan and Carleton, both of them, had caught the first flash from the windows of the super's room, and they were down the stairs, across the yards, and into the game from the start. Joined by the nightmen, and the hostlers, and the wide-eyed call-boys, they tackled the blaze. By the time they had dragged and coupled the fifty-foot hose lengths—it took five lengths—along the tracks from the roundhouse, the needle on the stationary's gauge, luckily not yet quite dead from the day's work, and whose fire-box Clarihue now crammed with oil-soaked packing, began to climb, and they got an uncertain, weakly stream playing—uncertain, but a stream. After that, things went with a rush—both ways—the fire and the fight.

From the gambling hells and the saloons, from the streets and their homes, came the population of Big Cloud; the Polacks, the Russians, the railroad men, the good and the bad whites, the half-breeds—and the local fire brigade. Two more streams they ran from the roundhouse, and that was the limit—the rest of the hose was liquid rubber somewhere under the blaze.

Regan, with a bitter, hard look on his face, for the shops were Regan's, was everywhere at once, and what man could do he did; but, inch by inch, the flames were getting the better of him. The yards were as bright as day now, and the heat was driving the circle of fighters back, stubbornly as they fought to hold their ground. It looked like a grand slam for the fire, with the four aces in one hand. Twice Regan had been on the point of ordering the men to the roof, and twice he held back—once he had even ordered a ladder planted, only to order it away again. The building was only wood, and old, and the roof was none too strong at best; but now, under and partially supported by the roof of the fitting-shop, put in a month before in lieu of the old system of jacking and blocking by hand, making the risk a hundredfold greater, were the heavy travelling cranes that whipped the big moguls like jack-straws from their wheels preparatory to stripping them to their bare boiler-shells. Regan shook his head—it was asking a man to take his life in

his hands. For the moment he stood a little apart in front of the crowd, and just behind the nozzle end of one of the streams. Again he measured the chances, and again he shook his head.

"I can't ask a man to do it," he muttered; "but we ought to have a stream up there, it's—"

"Why don't you take it there yourself, then?"—the words came sharp and quick from his elbow, stinging hot like the cut of a whip-lash. It was "King" Gilleen, red-haired, blue-blooded, freckle-skinned Gilleen.

The master mechanic whirled like a shot, and for a minute the two men stared into each other's eyes; stared as the leaping flames sent flickering shadows across the grim, set features of them both; stared at each other face to face for the first time since that noon in the roundhouse days before.

"Why don't you take it there yourself, then?" said Gilleen again, and his laugh rang hard and cold. "*You* ain't a quitter, are you? There's nothin' wrong with *your* blood, is there? If you're not afraid—come on!" As he spoke he stepped forward, pushed the men from the nozzle—and looked back at the master mechanic.

Regan's lips were like a thin red line.

Gilleen laughed out again, and it carried over the roar and the crackle of the flames, the snapping timbers, the hiss and spit of the water, the voices of the crowd.

"Put up the ladder!" It was Regan's voice, deadly cold. "Lash a short end around that nozzle an' stand by to pass it up." He was at the foot of the ladder almost before they got it in position, and the next instant began to climb.

Like a flash, Gilleen, surrendering the fire-hose temporarily, sprang after him—and up.

It wasn't far—the shops were low, just one story high—and both men were on the roof in a minute. Gilleen caught the coiled rope they slung him from below, and together he and the master mechanic hauled up the writhing, spluttering hose.

A shower of sparks and a swirling cloud of smoke enveloped them as they stood upright and began to advance. It cleared away leaving them silhouetted against the leaping wall of flame a few yards in front of them—and a cheer went up from the throats of the crowd below.

Not a word passed between the two men. Foot by foot they moved forward, laying the hose in a line behind them to lessen the weight and the side-pull, that at first had called forth all their strength to direct the play of the stream; foot by foot they went forward, closer and closer, perilously close, to the blistering, scorching, seething mass—for neither of them would be the first to hold back.

High into the heavens streamed the great yellow-red forks of angry flame, and over all, like a gigantic canopy, rolled dense volumes of gray-black smoke. Came at the two men spurting, fiery tongues, stabbing at them, robbing them of their breath, mocking at their puny might.

Another step forward and Regan reeled back; one hand went to his face —and the nozzle almost wrenched itself from the engineer's grasp.

"It's a grand race!" laughed Gilleen, but the laugh was more of a gasping cough; and the cough came from cracked and swollen lips. "It's a grand race, Regan; an' the blood——"

With a choking sob, Regan steadied himself and seized hold of the nozzle again.

They held where they were now—it was the fire, not they, that was creeping forward, pitilessly, inevitably, licking greedily at the tarred roof until it grew soft beneath their feet and the bubbles puffed up, and formed, and broke.

A cry of warning came from below, and with it came the ominous rending groan of yielding timbers. It came again, the cry, and rang in Gilleen's ears almost without sense. He could scarcely see; his eyes were scorched and blinded; his lungs were full of the stinging smoke, choking full. Beside him Regan hung, dropping weak.

"Get back, for God's sake, get back!" It was Carleton's voice. "Do you hear!" shouted the super frantically. "Get back! The roof is sagging! Run for ____"

Like the roar of a giant blast, as a park of artillery belches forth in deafening thunder, there came a terrific crash, and, fearful in its echo, a cry of horror rose from those below. Where there had been roof a foot in front of the men was now—nothingness.

Gilleen, with a shout, as he felt the edge crumple under him, flung himself backward, and as he leaped he snatched at Regan. His fingers brushed the master mechanic's sleeve, hooked, slipped—and he struck on his back a full yard away. He reeled to his feet like a drunken man, and dug

at his eyes with his fists. Over the broken edge of the shattered roof, hanging down into the black below, was the dangling hose—but Regan was gone. Weak, spent, exhausted, the master mechanic, unequal to the exertion of Gilleen's leap, had pitched downward, clutching desperately, feebly, vainly, as he went. Regan was gone, and twenty feet, somewhere, below—he lay.

Gilleen staggered forward. It was the far end of the beams that had given away, and the six or seven yards of the roof that had fallen still separated him from the heart of the blaze. The advancing flames lighted up a scene of wreck and ruin below in the fitting-shop—girders and steel T's, and cranes and tackles, splotches of roofing, shattered timbers, lay over the black looming shapes of the monster engine-shells blocked on the pits.

"Regan!" Gilleen called; and again: "Regan! *Regan!*"

Above the roaring crackle of the fire, above the surging, pounding noises that beat mercilessly at his eardrums, faint, so faint it seemed like fancy, a low moan answered him. Once more it came, and upon Gilleen surged new-born strength and life. He began to drag at the hose with all his might, dropping it foot by foot over the jagged edge of the roof until it reached well down to the snarled and tangled wreckage below. And then a mighty yell went up from a hundred throats—and again and again:

"Gilleen! King Gilleen! King! *King!*"

There was no gibe now—just a bursting cheer from the full hearts of men. "*King!*" they roared, and the shout swelled, but Gilleen never heard them as they crowned him. King he was at last in the eyes of all men, a king that knows neither blood nor race nor throne nor retinue—Gilleen was lowering himself down the hose.

It was a question of minutes. The fire was sweeping in a mad wave across the intervening space. The engineer's feet touched something solid and he let go his hold on the hose—and stumbled, lost his balance, and pitched forward, striking on his head with a blow that dazed and stunned him.

Mechanically he understood that what he had taken for flooring was a work bench. He got to his feet again, the blood streaming from his forehead, and shouted.

This time there was no answer.

Staggering, falling, tripping, stumbling, he began to search frantically amid the débris. The air was thick with the smothering smoke, hot, stifling,

drying up his lungs. He began to moan, crying the name of the master mechanic over and over again; crying it as a man cries out in delirium.

Bits of oil-soaked waste and wads of packing, catching from the glowing cinders, were blazing around his feet. The onrush of the flames swept a blighting wave upon him that sent him reeling back, scorching, blistering the naked skin of his face and hands.

Again he fell.

A great sheet of fire leapt high behind him, held for an instant, and then the dull red glow settled around him again—but in that instant, just a little to the right, pinned under a scantling, half hidden by a snarled knot of roof and girders, he saw the master mechanic's form.

On his knees, groping with his hands, Gilleen reached the other, and began to tear furiously, savagely, madly, at the timber that lay across Regan's chest. He moved it little by little, every inch tasking his weakening muscles to the utmost. Blackness was before him. He could no longer see. He could no longer breathe. Hot, nauseating fumes strangled him and sent the blood bursting from his nostrils. He tried to lift Regan's shoulders—and sank down beside the master mechanic instead. Feebly he raised his head—there came the sound of splintering glass; a rushing stream tore through a window, hissed against the boiler-shell above him, and, glancing off, lashed a cold spray of water into his face.

The window! Three yards to the window! He was up again, and pulling at the dead weight of the master mechanic. Just three yards! He cried like a child as he struggled, and the tears ran down his cheeks in streams. A foot, two feet, three—*two more yards to go*.

Axes were swinging now in front of him, shouts reached him. Half the distance was covered—but he had gone to his knees. Everything around was hot; it was all fire, and hell, and madness. A yard and a half—only a yard and a half. Alone he could make it easily enough, and maybe Regan was dead anyhow; alone and there was safety and life; alone—then he laughed.

"It's a grand race, Regan, a grand race," he sobbed hysterically, and his grip tightened on the master mechanic, and he won another foot and another and another.

A black form wavered before him; he felt an arm reach out and grasp him—then he tottered, swayed, and dropped inert, unconscious.

They got Gilleen out, and they got Regan out, and they got the fire out by the time there wasn't much left to burn; and, after a week or two, both men were out and around again. That's about all there is to it, except that Gilleen's red head now decorates the swellest cab on the division, and that he never fought for his title after that night—he never had to; though, if you feel like questioning it, you can still get plenty of fight, for all that—any of the boys will accommodate you any time.

Regan isn't an artist as a pugilist, but even so it is unwise to take risks—unscientific men by lucky flukes have handed knockouts to their betters.

"If Gilleen says so that's enough, whether it's so or not, what?" Regan will fling at you. "It's pretty *good* blood, ain't it, no matter what kind it is? Well, then—h'm?"

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Multiple spellings have been retained.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Running Special* by Frank L. Packard.]