



THE IRON WAY

A TALE OF THE BUILDERS OF THE WEST.

By SARAH PRATT CLER

Illustrations by A. H. NEILLSON

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens during a trip of the "Overland Mail" through the Rocky mountains. "Uncle Billy" Dodge, stage driver, Alfred Vincent, a young man, and Phineas Cadwallader, introduced. They come across the remains of a massacre. Later at Anthony's station they find the redskins have carried their destructive work there also. The station, a disaster of Anthony, keeper of station, is introduced. Anthony has been killed. Vincent is assigned to work in unearthing plans of enemies of railroad being built. Vincent visits town where railroad men are working on the road and he is taken of esteem from Stella. The old stage driver decides to work close to town in order that he may be able to keep faithfully watch over the young woman. She is engaged as a tutor for Viola Bernard, daughter of hotel landlady. Vincent visits society circles and learns their secrets. He returns to Stella, showing signs of love for the other. Phineas Cadwallader, pushing a railroad opposing Central Pacific, returns home. She writes to Alfred Vincent his good. Flying his attentions Cadwallader results her and she is rescued by Gideon, her father's servant. In turn he proposes marriage, is rejected, leaves her declaring she will return the day when she will see Stella. Stella hears from her lover, Gideon, and she is phenomenal success. Finds letter of importance involving plans of opposition road. Plot to destroy company's ship. Flora is unearthing and perminating evidence against Cadwallader on charge of wire tapping is also found. Impending disaster to Central Pacific is averted by protecting the Flora. Phineas Cadwallader forces prison on charge of wire tapping. A perfect chain of evidence connects him with plot to blow up "Flora." Stella and Alfred have love for each other despite hostility of Gideon. Alfred and Stella pledge their faith and former is compelled to leave on company business. Gideon leaves her scene of husband's recent "strike," saying Stella in charge. Again the girl reflects Stella's advances. In answer she writes Hamilton, a niece of a railroad official, about the camp. Alfred somewhat neglects Stella, who shows pain at treatment. Banquet in railroad town is scene of mere monopolization of Alfred by Miss Hamilton, with determination on Stella's part to change her temperament. Alfred writes passionately to Stella, denying the attention which he was compelled to give Miss Hamilton. Mrs. "Sally" Bernard announces riches. Viola's love for Alvin, a telegraph operator, is revealed. Gideon returns to Stella and finding offers of love rejected, makes a threat against Alfred's life. Quickly leaves town on best procurable horse in search of Vincent. When Stella discovers this she makes a desperate effort and books passage on stage, which is attempting to beat that of rival company. Amid wild scenes the coach dashes out of town. Race to beat opposition company's stage a success, but Stella fails to hear of Gideon.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Heart for a Life.

In the depressing loneliness of a strange hotel Stella's fears returned, multiplied by the hours they had rested. Impatiently she paced the small room. She had no watch to count the minutes. But that the sun still shone on the mountain above her, she would have declared it already night.

Where was Uncle Billy? Why hadn't he come to take her to dinner?

Innocent Stella! She knew nothing of Mrs. Grundy's code; suspected no whit of the reason for Uncle Billy's aloofness. In Colfax, under Sally B.'s powerful wing, where Uncle Billy was known and approved, no one would have dared a breath against her. But it was very different in this feverish city. Good women were few. Honest men, toiling for loved ones away, jostled the blackleg, the gambler, the man of many aliases; and petticoated vice preyed upon its authors, and sorely beset clean hearts as well. A beautiful friendless girl must indeed be hedged by angels if she were to run safely the gamut of this "wickedest city in the world."

She left her room and wandered about in search of the parlor; came upon it at last—small, stuffy and bedeviled by several overdressed, bedeviled women, who stared at her brazenly and openly commented on her. As from a pestilence, she fled to her own corridor again, hesitating before her door. But vanquished by thought of the desolation within, she dropped the key in her pocket and began walking the narrow hall, darker, emptier than her room, but open at either end to human approach. Here the hall boy found her, bringing a message from Uncle Billy to meet him in the parlor.

Stella thought of it a little resentfully as she hurried on, recalling the hospitable occupants. But they were gone; and at sight of Uncle Billy's cheery face she forgot they had ever been.

He came to her with outstretched hands. "As I told you, honey, Vincent's O. K. He's—"

"Here?" she interrupted impetuously.

"No; he didn't come through, honey. Doddget, the driver, said he got off at Carson. Cadwallader met him; they seemed to have business together."

"Oh!" The long-drawn exclamation was all of Stella's reply; and he hoped she would ask no questions.

"You must shut those sweet peepers of yo's sharp afeft suppeh; get right smart of sleep to-night, fo' you must start home early in the mawning."

"Gideon—where do you suppose he is, Uncle Billy?"

He had dreaded the words. "Honey, why do you pesteh yo'self about Gideon? If Vincent's doing business with another man, both of them C. P. fellows, how can Gideon get in any deviltry?"

Stella was not reassured. "But, Uncle Billy, Phineas Cadwallader's no protection; he hates Alfred. And why didn't we see Gideon on the way? He must have come in ahead of us—must be here now, and— If I could only get word from Alfred!"

"Shall I telegraph for you?"

She shrunk back. "Oh, no. He wouldn't wish me to send him messages over the wires."

"I'll fix that. He won't know yo're heah."

"That will be good; thank you. I'm such a trouble to you, Uncle Billy! And my trip has been quite useless," she added wearily.

"Not useless, honey. You brought me luck—won the race fo' us."

She smiled. "I hope I'll bring you

more luck. I'll go home with you to-morrow."

"That's right, child. Good-bye till mawning. Have sweet dreams."

"Good-bye?" she echoed wonderingly. "Aren't you going to stay here to-night? Take me in to supper."

He winced before her steady eyes, and lied heroically. "I have a heap to do befo' I'll be ready for the trip home; and I won't have time to see you again. Eat a good suppeh, child, what you? Have you money to pay for it?"

"Not a two-bit piece, Uncle Billy. You pay for me, won't you? And book me, too? I'll have it for you when we get home."

She was surprised by his silence and nervousness. He opened his purse quickly, and forced some money upon her, his embarrassment increasing as he looked furtively through each open door while pressing her hand shut over the coin. "Take that," he whispered. "You must pay yo' own bills, and book yo'self, honey. Don't ask me why!" he added as she opened her lips to speak.

Instantly he was gone, leaving her to puzzle out the matter for herself. But the need for dissembling her relations with Uncle Billy, whom she had known longer than any one living save Gideon, did not dawn upon her.

Supper alone was less an ordeal than she had expected. On her return

voice came through the door telling her that Alvin waited in the parlor to say good-bye.

She went into the parlor. Alvin, a man in years, yet ever the buoyant boy, sprang forward with outstretched hands to greet her.

"Oh, Miss Stella, the 50 miles are done! Done 'pon honor, too. The commissioners have examined and accepted the work. They say it's O. K. and the government's bound to receive it. And the blamed strike that broke out yesterday won't hinder the C. P. a mite; they've got more men coming on the sly. I'm going to my Sacramento office in the morning. I came to say good—Why, Miss Stella! What's the matter?"

His exuberance was a tonic. Stella's numb heart began to beat a little color to her lips, hope to her soul. Yet she did not speak, though she smiled.

"What is it, Miss Stella?" Alvin repeated. "You look as if you'd died and come back, though not all of you. There's awful things in—your face!"

"And in my heart, too, Alvin. Oh, Alvin, I—"

She grew cold again, and was silent.

Tactful Alvin said nothing, but pushing a chair behind her pressed her gently into it. He did not release her hand, but stroked it softly, waiting for her to speak.

Suddenly she started up. This was the thirtieth, and—a week, the letter had said! And she did not know how far the answer was to go. Precious time had already been wasted. It was ages since she read those awful words. She must do something, tell someone, get help. Alvin! He was the one. She put the letter in his hand. "Read it, quick!" she commanded.

He complied, starting at the first words, then reading on quietly, through the postscript directions, and ending with a careful scrutiny of the envelope. Stella watched him anxiously, wondering, even in her preoccupation, at the maturity and wisdom that came into his face at emergency's call. "Oh, Alvin, there must be some way be-



The Message Was Cruel.

to her room she met the hall boy and ordered pen and paper. She had barely seated herself to write when a dispatch interrupted her; it was addressed to William Dodge, and from Alfred at Carson City. "Am detained here. Will be in Colfax on the thirtieth."

In the reaction of relief she wrote a short, almost happy letter to Alfred, sending it to post by the hall boy. The next day they faced homeward. No other passenger shared the box seat with Stella; and leisurely, a little shyly, she told Uncle Billy of her plans for school, and received his advice, heart-felt, if not always wise.

At Dutch Flat she stopped to visit an acquaintance, timing her home-going for Uncle Billy's next trip, hoping vainly that Alfred would be with him. It was indeed a home-coming! Days only she had been away; they seemed weeks. Sally B., Viola, Yic Wah, even the dog, greeted her over-poweringly. Suddenly she realized with a heart-wrench her leaving it would be.

"Here's a letter for you," Sally B. said, when Stella was at last free. "It came yesterday."

She took it, but paled with quick fear when she saw the strange handwriting. She hastened to her room. There was neither date, address, nor signature; but the message was cruel.

"Stella Anthony! Alfred Vincent's life is in your hands. Send to the address below within one week after October 30 your written word that you will marry Gideon Ingram, and Vincent shall go free. Refuse to do this and he shall die. Return this letter with your answer, or it will not avail."

In the postscript were directions for address; but Stella did not read them. She thrust the sinister sheet out of sight in her pocket; yet the words burned in her brain, written there forever. Motionless, she gazed at the wall in a useless endeavor to think.

Darkness fell. Still she stood there, leaning against the wall now, though she had no memory of moving. A step caught her ear. She started up, intent on defending herself against interruption. The Chinese boy's harsh

side—beside obeying. How can I do that? Yet how can I be Alfred's murderer?" She shuddered at the word.

"Perhaps this is only a threat from some enemy of Gideon's to get him into trouble."

"Oh, no," Stella answered, remembering the last look she had seen in Gideon's face. "I'm sure it—I'm sure Gideon knows of it."

"Oh, pshaw, Miss Stella! Gid Ingram wouldn't do such a scurvy trick!"

"Alvin, you don't know. He has tried to make me marry him."

Alvin reflected again. Suddenly his face was illuminated. "There's a way, and it's sure—marry me!"

"What? Alvin!" She half rose, angry that he could jest at such a moment. But, no, his face was serious. Yet it was too absurd, impossible!

"Not really, of course, but so far as

any one else knows. Elope with me to-night!"

His daring idea was suggestive of another. "No, Alvin, not even to save Alfred Vincent could I do that. Suicide is cowardly, yet I'd rather kill myself than seem to be so fickle, to betray dear little Viola."

"Miss Stella, don't speak of suicide! And Viola! I know how it was, of course. But there's other ways, if you won't accept my offer." He smiled boyishly in spite of the tragic moment.

"Yes, there's another way; I shall disappear, just drop out of sight. And you'll help me, won't you? This very night?"

"Yes, indeed. This night is the only time I could do it, too. I'm to work nights after this."

"Can you get me away secretly, Alvin? Have you any plan?"

"Yes, I can fix it. I know a man—he's a friend of mine, and as close-mouthed as a dumb one. I'll get his team and start you on your way to Sacramento, or to the Bay, as you think best. I'd say San Francisco; it's bigger, you can hide safer there."

"Yes, that will be better. But you, Alvin—"

"Oh, don't worry about me. I'll be back here before daylight, and take the train to-morrow. Every one knows I'm to go to Sacramento."

Stella was silent.

"Got any money?"

"Not much. My trip to Virginia took most of it."

"Well, don't fidget over that. I've a couple of hundred I can lend you as well as not; and you can take your time to pay. No matter if it's never. And maybe Sally B. can think up a better trick for you."

"Oh, Alvin, you're so good! Thank—"

She could not trust her voice, yet after a struggle went on. "I'm sure, Alvin, we've thought of the only way. But we will tell— What time must we start?"

"Not later than midnight. You better get everything fixed before ten, and let the house get plumb dark an hour or so before."

"Very well. I'll have my letter written in a half-hour. Will you come for it and mail it at once?"

He nodded.

"And Alvin, will you stay here while I talk it all over with Sally B.? I want no misunderstanding of what we are to do."

Alvin assented and she left him. There was no hesitation now. A strange calmness pervaded her. Without hesitancy or revising she wrote the words that were to separate her from her past, that were to bind her to a life of lonely hiding.

"Not to save any man's life, or even my own," she wrote, "will I marry Gideon Ingram. This much I promise, however, I will leave this place and all who know me. I will hide so securely that it will be useless for any one to seek me. And I will never meet Alfred Vincent, communicate with him, or receive communication from him until Gideon Ingram himself gives permission."

She signed the letter, directed and sealed the envelope and went downstairs.

"You pore little critter!" Sally B. cried, flying to her with open arms as she entered. "Al's told me the hull blamed layout! Blast that durned Injun!" She felt Stella tremble in her arms. "Don't be afraid, honey! You've got friends. Me'n Bill'll stand by ye. You've struck the only thing to do, I reckon."

Stella stood erect and was silent. The others watched her without speaking, waiting on her mood. At last she faced them.

"This step changes all my life. Please tell Uncle Billy the—the best thing you can think of, Mrs. Sally." Stella said, the words coming slowly, as if she were thinking out her plan as she went. "From this time I shall be Estier Anthony. Only you, Mrs. Sally, shall know where I am, or what I'm doing. Uncle Billy and Alvin—you're so good, Alvin—they can know me through you. Will you keep my secret, Sally Bernard, sacredly?"

"It's thunderin' noble, this thing that yo're goin' to do, Stella; an' I'll promise, an' keep my mouth shet O. K. if you likewise promise to always let me know where yo're a-hanging out. Do you?"

"Yes," Stella said, and walked to the window, speechless. No sound escaped her, but Sally B. saw her shoulders lift and tremble, and flew to her, comforting her with a love that Stella knew would never fail. When Alvin came at midnight the hotel was dark and silent. Not a glimmer of light came from behind the curtains where Sally B. watched with wet eyes while Stella drove away, her head turned toward that window as long as she could see it.

The next morning Sally B. joined her excited conjectures with the most eager of the wondering gossips. And none who listened to her lurid remarks upon Stella's flight dreamed that her aching heart was following the solitary, fleeing girl.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Where Mr. Spooner Lost Out

Next Time, Maybe, He Will Be More Chary of Compliments.

"Do you really mean it, Mr. Spooner, when you say I am the best girl in the world?" asked Miss Flypp, after the young man had suggested that she should become Mrs. Spooner.

"Indeed, I do, Miss Flypp," assented the young man. "I say it again—you are the best girl in the world."

"And the loveliest, I think you said?"

"The loveliest, without doubt."

"I think you said something about my accomplishments, too?"

"I did, I said they excelled those of any other girl."

"I believe you called me sweet?"

"A sweeter woman ne'er drew breath," quoted the ardent lover.

"You used the word 'perfect,' too, didn't you?"

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THE EFFECT OF WEALTH.

Billie—Who is that awfully freckled girl on the horse?

Tillie—Why, that's Miss Gotrox. She has several millions in her own name.

Billie—So? My! Aren't her freckles becoming?

"Not to save any man's life, or even my own," she wrote, "will I marry Gideon Ingram. This much I promise, however, I will leave this place and all who know me. I will hide so securely that it will be useless for any one to seek me. And I will never meet Alfred Vincent, communicate with him, or receive communication from him until Gideon Ingram himself gives permission."

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(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Southern Woman Suffered with Itching, Burning Rash—Three Little Babies Had Skin Troubles.

"My baby had a running sore on his neck and nothing that I did for it took effect until I used Cuticura. My face was nearly full of tetter or some similar skin disease. It would itch and burn so that I could hardly stand it. Two cakes of Cuticura Soap and a box of Cuticura Ointment cured me. Two years after it broke out on my hands and wrist. Sometimes I would go nearly crazy for it itched so badly. I went back to my old stand-by, that had never failed me—one set of Cuticura Remedies did the work. One set also cured my uncle's baby whose head was a cake of sores, and another baby who was in the same fix. Mrs. Lillie Wilcher, 770 Eleventh St., Chattanooga, Tenn., Feb. 16, 1907."

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Political Note.

"I think," said the old man, "Bill was cut out for on of these 'lectioneerin' fellers."

"How so?"

"Well, he can't get it out his head that twice one ain't ten!"—Atlanta Constitution.

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Defiance Starch Company, Omaha, Neb.

Shirt Bosoms, Collars and Cuffs

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