The Mysterious Message.

By CY WARMAN.

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Any one could see by the air of industry that pervaded the place that something unusual was going on. Everybody was busy. Three or four switch engines—noisy little tugs of the rail—were puffing and snorting amid the sea of cars that covered the freight yards. Down at the roundhouse the day foreman, in a newly washed suit of overclothes, hurried to and fro with crumpled copies of telegrams from the trainmaster. The boss wiper, with his gang, was clearing the circle in front of the house of dirty waste and lumps of coal. One of the men was sweeping the turntable with a new broom. Now a yard engine came by with a freshly painted mail car, and another followed it with a mile or so of empties, reminding you of a little black ant at one end of a fish worm.

The superintendent had gone into the dispatcher's office to talk with the trainmaster about a meeting point for No. 8 and the president's special. This was the new president, who, with the chairman of the board of directors, was making his first tour of inspection.

Every one must be busy without appearing to try to be. The section boss saw that each man was at his shovel, and waved a "slow" signal himself to show the officials that they had been doing something to the track. The roadmaster had gone out that morning, occupying a camp stool on the rear platform of No. 8.

All these things combined to show to the most casual observer that something was up. In the face of every officer of the road at this particular point there was a look of anxiety, as though he might be repeating:

He'll cut me off or let me stay,
Just as he happens to feel today.

The division superintendent who had just gone into the dispatcher's office was an exception to the rule that all subordinate officials are afraid of a new management. He knew his business, and knew he could go with the retiring manager to another road. The train master was of a different caste. He was as nervous as a maiden lady in her first bicycle suit. Having sent the "trick" man away, he was handling the trains himself, to make sure that everything was O. K'd.

"I sent a girl over here yesterday—an operator"—said the superintendent, after they had fixed the meeting point, "and you sent her away. I have instructed her to call here again this morning, and I hope you will be good enough to put her to work. Her father was the engineer who was killed when the fast mail went in the ditch on the east end, and she is the only support her mother has."

The trainmaster mumbled something about the company running unnecessary risks for charity's sake, when the superintendent cut him off with the information that there was no charity about it. It was just an act of simple justice and decency, and he hoped the trainmaster would not only give the girl something to do, but that he would take especial care of her and keep her out of trouble. The man at the key said he would endeavor to find a place for her, but he positively refused to be responsible for her. "Then, sir," said the superintendent, "I shall cease to be responsible for you," and there followed a scene in the midst of which a pale girl slipped into the room and sank upon a seat outside the railing unobserved by either of the angry officials.

The superintendent, after pacing the room a time or two, paused at one of the windows overlooking the yards. The president's special had for the moment been forgotten by the dispatcher, who now turned to the key to send the order for the meeting.

Still smarting from the effect of the tilt with his chief, his mind was disturbed.

The office was now as still as death, save for the clicking of the keys and the slow measured ticking of the great clock above the dispatcher's desk—the clock that marked time for all the clocks on the entire system. Presently the dispatcher jerked the key open and began to call Westereck, and when he got them said:

"Train No. 8, Conductor Smith, will take siding for special west engine 88 at Eastcreek."

Now he began calling the operator at Lookout siding, and when he answered the dispatcher shot him an order that almost burned the wire.

"Special west, engine 88, will meet train No. 8 at Westereek."

The pale girl sprang to her feet. The dispatcher turned and saw her, and when he realized that she must have overheard the quarrel between the superintendent and himself his anger rose against the innocent young woman, and the other official, seeing their embarrassment, quit the room by a side door.

"Mr. Goodlough, you've made a great mistake," said the girl.

"Have I?" shouted the trainmaster, "and do you expect a salary for correcting me?"

"Look at your sheet. You've—"

"What?" yelled the man. "Do you mean to—"

"For heaven's sake, man," pleaded the

I ASSURED HIM THERE HAD BEEN NO COLLISION ON THE ROAD FOR OVER A YEAR.

girl, "see what you've done—look at the clock—there'll be a collision in less than ten minutes. You'll be a murderer if you fail to save those trains."

"You're about as crazy as they get," said the dispatcher, and really she looked like a mad woman, with her big eyes burning in her pale face. Of a sudden she turned, darted out of the office and ran down the stairs as an actress quits a burning hotel.

"She's a bird in a telegraph office," muttered the trainmaster going back to his desk. "Ah, well! I'm sorry for her and glad she's gone. I presume she's lost her mind grieving after her father; but what could have put that fool notion in her head? Can it be—" and then he stopped short, staring at the train sheet in front of him, and one would have thought to look at him that his eyes had caught the wild light that was in the eyes of his visitor, and that the malady he seemed to see in her mind had been suddenly transmitted to his. Now he glanced quickly from the sheet to the clock. "Twenty-seven," he said, and he knew by heart that No. 8 was due at Westereek at twenty-eight, and he reached a trembling hand for the key and began calling the operator. Ten, twenty, thirty seconds went by and no answer came. Forty, fifty, fifty-five seconds, and he fancied he could see the operator standing out in front of the little station with a pen behind his ear and ink on his shirt sleeve. For another five seconds he called, and as the minute wasted it seemed to him that his blood was boiling and his brain on fire. Then he thought of calling Eastereek to hold the special. The operator, who happened to be at the key about to report, answered quickly, and the dispatcher asked: "Where's the special?"

"Gone," said the wire, and the trainmaster pitched forward, fainting among the inkstands and instruments.

The operator at Westereek stood in front of the little station, smiling at the roadmaster on No. 8, and the operator at Eastereek sat looking through the window at the rear end of the president's private car, puckering up in the distance; and the three drivers, ignorant of the awful mistake, were now dashing at the rate of a mile a minute, into the open door of death.

The superintendent, who had looked into the ghost-like face of the girl as she passed him on the stair, thought he read there of a wrong done and returned at once to the dispatcher's office, determined to have the matter out with his rebellious trainmaster. He had entered the office unobserved by the operator and stood directly behind him and heard him ask Eastereek where the special was and heard the answer, "gone." Of this he made nothing, until the dispatcher threw out his arms and fell forward upon his desk, then the superintendent knew that something had gone wrong. A glance at the record of the dispatcher's work showed it all. It was 9:29. The great clock told him that No. 8 had already passed Westereek, the special had passed Eastereek and now there was nothing to do but wait for the collision, which, in the narrow, crooked canyon, was sure to come.

Tenderly he lifted the limp dispatcher from the table and laid him upon the floor. He poured water in his hand and bathed the face of the unfortunate official, but it failed to revive him, and then he called up the hospital and one of the surgeons came with an ambulance and carried the sick man away.

The superintendent, who was himself an operator, called Eastereek, and told him to let nothing pass that point westbound until further notice from the dispatcher's office.

He walked to the window and looked out over the coach yards, and saw the pale girl pacing the platform, waiting for a train to carry her back to her home. Her heart was heavy with dread of the collision, and at thought of returning to her widowed mother with the news of her failure to secure work. The superintendent tapped upon the window with a switch key and, when she looked up, he beckoned her to him.

"Take that seat," said the superintendent, pointing to an empty chair at the dispatcher's desk. She did as he had told her, and waited tremblingly for the wire to give her something to do.

Mr. Creamer, the first trick man, who had been sent away, having heard of the sudden illness of the trainmaster, now came hurriedly into the office. The superintendent waved his hand in the direction of the desk where the girl sat. "Keep your seat," said the dispatcher, as she was about to rise, and after glancing over the work, turned a blanched face to the superintendent.

There was a moment of silence in which the two men gazed helplessly into each other's faces and listened constantly for a call from East or Westereek. The keys clicked merrily, and the girl, whose cheeks were now burning red, gathered in the reports from the various stations of the coming and going of many trains.

Now the operator at Eastbrook touched the key and said: "No. 8 twenty minutes late," and fresh color came to the white faces in the dispatcher's office.

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When the operator at Westereek quitted the platform and re-entered the office, he heard a hurry-up call for him, which came in a quick, nervous way, and told him that he was wanted. He answered at once and got this in return: "Hold No. 8, lap order." The last two words assured him that compliance with this order was necessary to prevent a collision. "No. 8 is gone," he replied. "Hold her—T. J. G." came back to him in an instant. The man is crazy, thought the operator, but he would try. As he rushed from the office a light engine was just pulling out of the siding to take water. This locomotive belonged to the crew of a work train, but the train had been left in the siding. The operator sprang into the cab and shouted to the engineer to pull out and catch No. 8. "Lap order," he added, and that was enough. The driver, without waiting for his fireman, who was some yards behind, tugging at a stiff switch in an effort to close it, pulled the throttle open and bounded away up the steep grade behind the passenger train.

Now they could see the rear end of No. 8 just whipping a corner. The roadmaster saw the approaching engine and as she came nearer guessed that she was running wild—riderless—or that her rider had lost control of her. It might be that the engineer did not see them. Theirs was a heavy train—they were losing time. He remembered that they had been two minutes late at Westereek. He called the rear flagman, who was "railroading" with a deadhead conductor in the smoking room of the sleeper. The flagman took in the situation at a glance. His business was to flag, regardless of circumstances and vague possibilities, and before the roadmaster could stay him the fearless flagman swung himself round and dropped from the train. By the time he had regained his feet and found his flag the light engine, uttering a wild shriek, dashed by him. The engineer, to avoid running by a red flag, turned his face to the fireman's side and refused to see the danger signal. Now he was near enough to whistle the other engines "down," and the engineman pulling the passenger train shut off, and when the driver of the light engine saw a chimney of white steam shoot up from each of the forward locomotives, he knew they had quit, and slowed his own machine accordingly. When they had come up to the train the operator ran to the rear of No. 8, shouted, "Lap order, back up," and hurried over to the head end. The roadmaster reached for the rope and signaled the engineers to back up.

The drivers opened their throttles and whistles and began to jam the train back.

The driver of the light engine reversed at once upon dropping the operator, picked up the flagman and was now backing away for Westereek at a frightful pace. His fireman, still at the switch, let him in on the siding. No. 8 dropped in after him, and just as the operator and conductor had forced the stubborn rails back to the main line, the president's special crashed over the switch.

Not a soul on board the special knew how near they had been to death. Their orders read to meet No. 8 at Westereek, and there she was, in to clear, just as the daring driver of the special engine had expected to find her.

The conductor of No. 8, with his two engineers, the roadmaster and operator, wasted five minutes reading, checking, comparing and examining the orders they had received. They were all signed "T. J. G." by the trainmaster himself. The thing was plain—he had given a lap order, but had discovered his mistake in time, by the good fortune that had left the light engine at Westereek, to prevent an awful disaster. He was a good fellow and they were all glad he had saved himself, although the incident might work to his embarrassment when he came up for promotion. Incidentally they were glad that they were alive.

To appreciate the mysterious part of the tale, the reader should understand the value of time—not of hours and minutes, but of seconds—in handling trains on a single track railroad. It will be remembered that Goodlough discovered his mistake at 9:27. No. 8 was due to pass Westereek at 9:28, and at 9:29 the superintendent had seen the trainmaster collapse. It will be remembered also that No. 8 was two minutes late, but the man who had sent the lap order did not know it, and his nerve would not last until he could find out. The order to hold No. 8—the order which prevented the collision and doubtless saved many lives—was sent at 9:31. It was signed with the initials of the trainmaster, but at a time when that gentleman was dead to the world, and had been so for two whole minutes.

No man was in a better position to know these facts than the superintendent, who was the only man in the dispatcher's office at the moment when the "mysterious message" flashed over the wire, and whose business it was to investigate the whole matter. As the investigation proceeded the superintendent became intensely interested in the mystery. For a while he kept the matter to himself, but these things will out, and in less than a month's time the "mysterious message" became the leading topic in shops, cabs, way cars and boarding houses. To say that the clocks were at variance would not satisfy a railroad man, for they had taken time at 9 a. m., only a half hour before the message went out.

In time the story of the "mysterious message" came to the ears of the president at Boston, and as his life had been saved by the sending of this wire, which amounted to almost a miracle, he set himself at once to the task of solving the mystery. He belonged to a certain society whose members delight to delve in things occult, and they were not long in accounting for all that had occurred. It fell out later that the treasurer's clerk was also a member of the Boston society to which the president belonged.

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The day's work in a dispatcher's office is divided into three tricks. The first trick man works from 8 a. m. until 4 p. m., the second from that hour to the end of the day, and the third man works the "death trick"—in which nearly all the ugly wrecks occur—from midnight till morning.

"You may go now," said Mr. Creamer to the girl, when the second man came in and took his trick at 4 o'clock.

"Shall I—come—back in the morning?" asked the girl with some embarrassment.

"Yes," was the answer, after a moment's thought.

By a sort of unwritten rule the first trick man had stepped to the post of train master when that industrious but over-zealous officer had fallen.

"Whose initials shall I put to this order?" asked the girl, sending her first message on the morning of the second day.

"Your own," said Mr. Creamer, and the receiving operator at Livingston wondered who the new dispatcher could be. Every night, after midnight, the operators along the line would ground wire, cutting off the officials, and discuss the new dispatcher.

Not a few of them felt that they were entitled to promotion and were in favor of sending a grievance committee in at once. "Who is the new guy?" asked the operator at Lookout one afternoon, when he supposed the second trick man was at the other end of the line.

"Go ahead, 'guy,'" said Miss Morgan, for she had not yet been relieved.

"Working the first trick?" said the operator, finishing his query and making it plain. There was a dash of Irish in Minnie Morgan, and she answered without hesitation, "Miles Mulcahy."

"Solid with the new push?"

"Sure," was the girl's answer, and then she shut him off.

It was not long, however, until the trainmen carried the news out over the road that Miles Mulcahy was a woman, but not until the new dispatcher had gained something of a reputation as an expert handler of trains.

Some of the swift senders began to try

"WHAT DISTRESSES YOU?" ASKED MISS MORGAN.

to rush her, but it didn't go. The great clock continued to measure off the days, trains arrived and departed on time, the mysterious message was still a mystery, and the girl stayed at her post. The superintendent was quietly proud of his protege, and Mr. Creamer was enthusiastic. She knew the road, he had declared to his chief, as the red man knows the forest, and the time card as Fr. Maloney knew the catechism. "She's just a bird, that's all," he observed to the smiling superintendent, "a regular crackerjack, and you can't tie her."

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The January sun, swinging far and low in the south, sent a stingy ray aslant the window and touched the covers on the sick man's couch. He rubbed his eyes, looked about and whispered, "Where am I?" but he was not acting. The bare white walls, the iron bedstead, the little table and the one wooden chair told him that he was in the hospital. A vase of fresh cut roses stood upon the table, and he knew that he had a friend somewhere. He remembered afterward that the smell of roses was the first thing that was quite clear to him.

"Have I been ill?" he asked of the attendant, who now entered the room, for, being an official and able to pay extra, Goodlough had not been placed in the open ward. His malady, too, had been of a nature that required close attention. At times he had been a raving maniac, screaming and calling for help to rescue the president from a burning car.

"Yes," said the nurse, coming cautiously to the sick bed, "you have been very ill. You're all right now, but you must not talk."

In a little while the sick man fell asleep again, for the fever had left him very weak. When he awoke on the following morning his mind was much stronger. His eyes wandered directly to the little table, and there was the vase with fresh flowers, and tears came to the eyes of the sufferer. He wondered as the days went by that none of his old friends came to see him. Vaguely he began to recall the past and all that had happened. He wondered how many were killed, but he dare not ask. The few people that he saw seemed so cheerful, and the chief surgeon was always so genial that he began to hope that things had turned out better than he had expected. At the end of another week the superintendent came in to see him, and he, too, was as cheerful and happy as a man could well be. "It is good of you to come and see me," said the sick man. "I don't deserve it."

"You do deserve it," was the reply, "and I have been here many times, but the doctor thought you would be better off alone, but now that you are so strong he says we can come and see you as often as we will."

"Will Creamer come? I always liked Dan, and his absence has hurt me, but he has not forgotten our past friendship," and the speaker's eyes filled with tears as they rested on the vase.

"He's here now," said the superintendent, touched deeply by the tears and tenderness of the sick man. "Every morning for nearly a month he has called here to ask after you. I shall send him to you at once, and now you must brace up—goodby."

The meeting between Creamer and his sick friend was too much for the patient, and the chief surgeon, who had come in with the visitor was obliged to send him away almost immediately.

It was nearly a week before any more visitors were admitted to the sick room. Only the flowers came every morning. They were not many, but always fresh.

"I'm strong enough to know," now, Dan," said the patient when Creamer had been left alone with him, "and I want you to tell me all about it."

"About what, Tom?"

"About the collision—how many were killed?"

Dan assured him that there had been no collision on the road for over a year. "And you," he explained, "have just been here a month today—this is the 20th of January."

"Don't lie to me, Dan. Anybody could do that! but from you I ask the truth, and I think I have a right to expect it. I sent a lap order the day I fell ill. I became confused over the repetition of No. 8 and engine 88, Eastereek and Westereek, and gave a lap order. A girl in the office tried to save me, but I laughed at her. I thought her crazy, and when at last I noticed my mistake I tried to call Westereek to hold 8, but could not get him. I called and called up to the last second, but he did not answer, and it seemed to me that I must go mad. Suddenly it occurred to me that I might get Eastereek, and hold the special, but the answer came quick and awful, "Gone;" and then I knew no more until I smelled the smell of those fresh roses you sent me, and came to life again."

"Now I'll tell you the truth, Tom; the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as the judge would say," began his visitor. "You did give a lap order, but you saved yourself. Westereek did answer, and got your order to hold No. 8, and he held her, and there was no collision."

"Dan, I never sent that message. I wanted to; God knows I would gladly have given my life to have saved those poor fellows on the engines; and the new president? Was he killed? Ah, Dan, why don't you tell me the truth?" and the miserable man held out his hand beseechingly.

"I have told the whole truth," said Creamer. "There was no collision;" but Goodlough shook his head, his eyes filled with tears and he turned his pale, pinched face to the wall.

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The superintendent, whose "long suit" as the roadmaster expressed it, was "hoss sense," had maintained all along that the transmission of the mysterious message was still a mystery. Those occult scientists might sit up nights and work out answers satisfactory to themselves, declared the superintendent, but they would never go at his end of the line. "There must be another solution of this mysterious message," he declared to the president, "and I shall find it before the end of the year."

At the expiration of forty days the medical staff declared Goodlough sound in body and mind, and the old trainmaster called upon the superintendent for his decision. He had begun as a messenger boy in the trainmaster's office on an eastern road when he could barely reach the top of his desk. He had been with this company so long that he felt a proprietary interest in the road. He would be glad to return to his old post, but men were usually dismissed for giving a lap order.

"It will not be necessary for us to renew this matter," began the superintendent, when Mr. Goodlough had seated himself in the private office of his old chief. "Under ordinary circumstances I should feel it my duty to discharge you, but in consideration of your excellent record and other extenuating circumstances, the confusing natures of the numbers of the locomotives and trains and the names of stations, I have concluded that I shall serve the company best by allowing you to return to your former place. In doing this I wish you to understand that the matter of personal friendship, which has grown strong in the years that we have spent together, makes no difference in my decision. The sixty days, which I must now give you, is meant more as a punishment for your refusal to listen to a well-meant warning which might have saved you than for your carelessness in giving a wrong order. It is more your misfortune than your fault, however, that you have lost these forty days therefore your suspension will date from December 20."

"Goodlough thanked the superintendent warmly for his consideration and went out to begin the hard task of waiting twenty days, for to him, every day spent away from his work was wasted.

The old trainmaster spent the greater part of his twenty days where he could hear the rattle of the instruments and the slow, measured ticking of the great clock. He was interested in, and then amazed, at the work of the young woman who was now handling the trains on the first trick. At first he felt half angry with her for being able to do what he had once made a mess of, but she was so sweetly modest and so utterly unconscious of herself and so faithful to her work, that he soon found himself wishing she were a man. He said so to Creamer once, and she heard him. Long before the time was up he had began to wonder where he could put her, for he had no thought of letting her go. But she was a lucky soul, and it seemed that the same power that sent the ravens to Elijah looked after her. Just about the time Goodlough was to resume his position a connecting road wanted a trainmaster and the place was offered to Mr. Creamer. He accepted it, of course. Mr. Goodlough was ordered to report for duty and having no one he considered competent at hand, allowed Miss Morgan to remain where he had found her. It was understood by all that this arrangement was only temporary, but Goodlough soon learned that he would lose an able assistant when he parted with Miss Morgan, and so was a good while in making a change which all precedent made necessary. The second trick man was entitled to the first, the third man was in line for the second, and if he kept Miss Morgan she must do the "death trick."

The two men were notified by letter of their promotion, and then the trainmaster braced himself to tell the young lady that she would be transferred to the company's telegraph office, unless she chose to take the third trick, which he felt ashamed to ask her to do. It was only right and fair, she said, and she would be glad to take the third trick. All she wanted was an equal show with the men and no favors. If he could overlook her sex and forgive her for having been born a woman she would be content to take whatever he had to offer her. "Ye Gods," said the trainmaster to himself, "she makes me ashamed. She's as brave as she is gentle, and as brilliant as she is beautiful." He wondered, now, knowing her, that he had failed to see that she was a very superior woman when he sent her away without the promise, even, of employment.

When the two dispatchers who had received notice of their promotion came into the trainmaster's office they did not appear overjoyous. The man who had thus honored them saw that something was wrong, and inquired the cause of it.

"It's just this way," said the second trick man. "If you are setting Miss Morgan back again because she is incompetent to handle the heavy business on the first trick we have nothing to say; but if the change is made because she is a woman, or as a matter of justice to us, we most respectfully decline a promotion that will work a hardship to this most deserving girl."

"The change was ordered as a matter of justice to you, and in keeping with the policy of the management. However, if you gentlemen are disposed to do the gallant the young lady can remain where she is. She is thoroughly competent to manage the business, and I can see no reason why she should not have an even break with the rest of us."

So the split-trick man who had done the talking, and the "death-trick" man who had nodded assent, went away feeling that they had done the proper thing and the trainmaster congratulated himself upon the result.

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Minnie Morgan was a woman to win a man's heart if he had such a thing to lose, and so, as the spring deepened, Goodlough, who had been too busy all his life to go out into the world and win a heart, discovered when it was too late that he was slowly but surely losing his own. Miss Morgan, on her side, had pitied Goodlough at first, then when he recovered and came back to work she had learned to respect and soon to admire him. It might have ended there, so far as she was concerned, if he had not fallen in love with her and showed it a dozen times a day, or every time he attempted to hide it; and soon they both loved and each resolved to keep the secret from the other, but while cupid held his hands over their eyes the world looked on and laughed.

They parted late at night, only to meet again in the morning. The days, that were all too short, flashed by as mileposts pass the window of an express train. In time the summer went out of the skies, the frost came and killed the flowers, but the summer stayed in their hearts and kept them glad.

It was winter without. The snow lay in deep drifts upon the pilots of locomotives that came down from the hills and hid the tops of incoming freight trains. Miss Morgan stood at the window, overlooking the yards. An old storm-stained work engine stood in front of the station, toilworn and weary, leaking like a sieve, and the water, dripping through her firebox, had frozen and hung icicles upon her very grates. Her driver, looking as rusty as his engine, was coming up the stair to tell the dispatcher that he was not yet in and would not be for ten minutes, and the dispatcher erased the arrival and put him in ten minutes later, so that the engineer might not get ten days for fast running. He was a hero, this man, begrimed as he was with soot and grease, for this was the engine, and he the engineer who had outrun the Atlantic express a year ago and saved that train as well as the president's special.

The trainmaster came in with a sad face and a heavy heart. He remembered that it was just a year ago today that he had turned a pale-faced young woman away, not because there was no room for her, but (he blushed to admit it) because she was a woman. And now that same woman was doing a man's work. More, she could enslave him with a glance or bind him with a single strand of her silken hair. He knew this, and knew that she knew it, and resolved not to let another day dawn before he had told her everything.

Miss Morgan was sad, too, for she had lost a secret—not of her love, for that was no secret—but she had just revealed to the superintendent the true story of the "mysterious message."

The superintendent was happy. He had promised to have an answer for the president by the end of the year, and this was the last week but one. Miss Morgan's story was all the more timely because the president would arrive on the morrow, and the superintendent was anxious to convince him that the average occult expert, who makes a specialty of "seeing things nights," knew about as much of the future or of things unknown as the codfish out in the Atlantic.

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She was still silent.

The morning broke clear and beautiful and the crisp air was full of the sounds of clanging bells and the screams of switch engines. Express wagons came down laden with boxes and packages—bundles of sunshine—that would find their way to hundreds of homes and gladden the hearts of thousands of people. Everybody was busy, for the president of the road was to arrive today. When Goodlough left his private office and wandered into the big room where the dispatchers worked he heard Miss Morgan calling Westereek, and when Westereek answered, heard her say:

"Train No. 8, conductor Smith, will take siding for special west, engine 88, at Eastereek."

When the operator at Lookout siding answered and she said:

"Special west engine 88 will meet train No. 8 at Eastereek."

"Bravo," cried the trainmaster, that's exactly what I was trying to do a year ago, only I said Westereek at the last. How's everything?"

"On time," said Miss Morgan, still working the key.

After glancing about for a few minutes Goodlough returned to his office and sent out a bulletin promoting the operator at Westereek to be train dispatcher on the third trick. The same order put the two old dispatchers a step nearer the presidency of the road.

He had barely finished his pleasant task when the superintendent came in with the president, whom Goodlough had never met. When they were all seated the superintendent asked the trainmaster to relate what he knew about the so-called "mysterious message."

"I know absolutely nothing," declared Goodlough earnestly, for the subject was naturally embarrassing to him.

"You told Mr. Creamer, I believe, that you were positive that you did not send the order to Westereek to hold No. 8, although your initials went with it," said the superintendent with the air of a lawyer cross-examining a witness.

"I did."

"And you do not know who sent the message?"

"I do not."

"Well, I do," said the superintendent with a broad smile, "and I'll let you gentlemen into the secret. When Miss Morgan saw, or rather heard your mistake, she endeavored to convince you that you were in danger, but failed. Despairing, she left the building. She was almost wild with grief and alarm. I saw her face as she hurried down the stair and it was the face of a mad woman. I read it wrong and returned at once to you to learn the cause of her distress. I heard you call Eastereek and ask for the special—your last message that day—and heard the answer, 'Gone,' and saw you fall. But the frail woman whom you had turned away, did not fall. While you fell fainting among the inkstands and instruments she rushed into the hotel over the way, and finding no one in the Western Union office, took the key and began calling Westereek. She could not see the clock as you did, and she called and called, and when at last the operator answered she told him to hold No. 8." "No. 8 is gone," said the operator. "Hold her," said the wire back at him, and fearing the operator might question the message she sent your initials at the end of the order.

"Brave girl!" cried the president, rising and beginning to pace the floor, for he was deeply affected by the story of how a young woman, who, but a day before had been refused employment by the company, had contrived to save the company's property and the lives of men whom she had not known. "She shall have the company's checs for a thousand," the president added. "You will furnish her with transportation," he continued addressing the superintendent, "and have her report to me at the Boston office the first of the year."

"Miss Morgan reports to the trainmaster," said the superintendent smiling and waving a hand toward Goodlough, who sat pale and silent like a man who had just received a hard fall.

"Miss Morgan will not be in the company's employ after today," he said, looking steadily at the president.

"Has she been dismissed?"

"She has been promoted, and is to take her place on New Year's day."

"May I ask what office she is to take?" inquired the president, glancing from the trainmaster to the superintendent, who was still smiling.

"She is to be Mrs. Goodlough," said the trainmaster with a stern, calm smile.

"Accept my congratulations," said the president, holding out his hand. "This is the second time, then, she has saved your life," he continued, as Goodlough took his hand; "and I hope you will allow her to accept my personal check for another thousand, for she saved mine as well.

* * * * * * *

Goodlough was greatly affected by the news of Miss Morgan's heroism, and the conduct of the president and superintendent of the road. He kept clear of the dispatcher's office that day, for he dared not trust himself in her presence.

That evening, when Minnie's mother had retired to her room, and the lovers were left alone together in the little lamp-lit parlor, they looked at each other in silence for a moment.

"What distresses you?" asked Miss Morgan.

"And you?" inquired the trainmaster.

"Order No. 76," was her reply. "I've lost my place."

"And found a friend, a lover, aye, a husband and happiness, I hope."

"And what have you found?"

"The sender of the mysterious message, said Goodlough, advancing to where his sweetheart sat.

"Did he tell you?"

"Yes. How shall I repay you for all that you have done for me?"

"By pardoning me for forging your name to the message, and becoming cheerful, and shortening your office hours, and—well, if anything more occurs to me, I'll tell you later."

"Then you did send the message?"

"Yes."

"And how about the flowers that came to the hospital every day? The red roses, whose breath called me back to life?"

"Yes," she said; and the little hand stole into his and nestled there.

And then they talked on for just a little while. She forgot that she was out of employment, and he forgot the lap order of a year ago. The lamp burned low. He lighted a match to look at his watch, and it was neither yesterday nor tomorrow, but just between; and then as all telegraphers do at the end of the day, she gave him "good night," and he went away.

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