

HOW FLANDERS KEPT HIS JOB

By Maximilian Foster.

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Behind the haze-covered portals that screen the penitentiary of the secret service...

But I tell you, he cried, "It ain't me to blame. I tell you that now—flat! Those rubber soles from the railroad do it."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," the chief corrected. "I'll have no men from this office mixing up over there. Do you know him at all?"

"Him—Piercy? No. I don't travel with that kind of cattle. Why, look at here, chief, that fellow went down to Seed City, where Doc Burdle hangs out, like as if it was with a brass band, sayin' he was there to land his mule. Why, he must be just as well he tried to flag a comin' with a crossin' flag. Did Doc Burdle do it?"

Seed City was in the heart of the southwestern moonshine district and was notorious in the annals of the service. It was midway on the Altamont & Pecos railroad, a spur that ran southward from the main line.

Flanders leaned over his desk and drew out a newspaper clipping—a scrap from the San Antonio Argus, a sheet with a neighborhood interest for Seed City. "You recall that now, Flanders," the chief exclaimed.

Flanders read his anger rising at every line. The clipping was an anonymous letter from Seed City, warning all detectives, investigators and officials on similar errands to steer clear of the place under a penalty of a charge of buckshot.

Flanders laughed scornfully as ever. "I'll take my chance, I guess. But I give you the tip I'd better feed if I'd land one on that chap Piercy. I'm riled, I am."

There are four trains daily on the Altamont & Pecos railroad—in the morning, two in the afternoon. A freighter freight train sometimes piles up and down the line, but usually the freight cars are linked on ahead of the passenger coaches.

The detective rose and swaggered aft to the smoker. "Hey, you're growled, leaning over the man, 'that ticket don't go here.'"

The man looked up. His legs were sprawled upon the seat in front and his hat was pulled down over his eyes.

once more drew his hat brim over his eyes and folding his arms fell into an attitude of ease. Behind him was a long, thin mountain-tainer, a fellow with broad, bony hands and glittering eyes.

The passenger rose. "Say," he demanded, "how long's take to get to Seed City?"

"Three minutes runnin' time," snapped the conductor, wrathfully, "and they ain't no three minutes runnin' time for me. I'll give you thirty seconds now to put up or be put off."

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meet yer. My name's Burdle." "Oh," said the other, slowly, "yer Doc Burdle, then?" "Right yer air—yer must learn tell on me."

"Yes," said the other, his eyes gleaming. "I surely have!" Six weeks had passed since Flanders' departure without word or sign from him.

Down the main line at this moment the operator at Guamo Siding, in solitary possession of the place, was deeply lamenting the change that had set him down as the surveying monarch of all its loneliness.

"The dim and swaying car, the shouts and cries of the affray, the tumult of the passengers and the roar of wheels beneath gave to the struggle a sinister effect.

"Well, I swan!" laughed the man. "The hot has got on yer nerves, sonny, ain't it? Put down that gun, you chuckle-headed brass-pounder. I ain't goin' to hurt yer."

"In answer, the man tossed a scrap of paper through the window. "Quick—wink! Rush that to the main office. Tell 'em to 'dup' it to the chief—Towers, I mean. Get a hustle on, and then skeddadle out'er his—yer hear me? Skeddadle! Vamoose lively, 'cause I'll be hotter here afore long than the hottest dogdays that Gehenna ever saw."

The face vanished from the window, and the operator, a palmy upon him, still stood shaking against the wall. Outside, the sounds of the day resumed their droning intonation, the breeze sighed softly, and though he cracked his ears listening for some sign of stealthy attack, he became at last convinced that he was alone.

"What's up?" he called, his hand hanging the key at frantic speed—"G-x—" "G-x—" "Some-where down the line another station, a sharp glance about for an operator notoriously slow, cut in with the query: "What's up?"

"P. S.—Towers will explain sig." The operator added to this a message of his own. "This lets me out. I am going to scout." Five minutes later, when the uproar in the train dispatcher's office had calmed a bit, the wire was almost blattered by a call for Guamo Siding.

"What's up?" this one asked. "Hello, Doc, yer jes' missed it." The tank mountainier pointed in explanation to the stranger among them and the newcomer eyed him keenly.

"Ver 'at 'em smart, yer did?" cried one and the man, looking around, saw that it was the tall mountainier who had sat behind him in the car. "Why, boys," laughed the mountainier, "he fit of the bull crew on them!"

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on the board and got the news hot off the wire. "Guess he's rattled some." H—M was Haney's Mill, the next station east of Guamo Siding.

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