



## WHEN THE TRAIN WAS HELD UP.

THE STRATEGY  
OF JIM—LAST  
NAME UNKNOWN  
—WHO HATED  
ALL COMBINES.

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### I.

**H**ARLAN, express messenger on No. 6, impatiently snapped his watch shut, opened the door of his car with a jerk, and peered out into the night. He hoped to see a headlight approaching from the north; but there were only the lights of the long line of coaches behind him, waiting on the side-track for No. 7 to pass.

The icy wind dashed furiously against his face, and he was hastily closing the door when he heard sounds that moved him to glance again toward the coaches. Then he swore softly, and gritted his teeth. Harlan was tender-hearted and free-handed—foolishly so, his friends said—and the spectacle of a burly brakeman assaulting a small man of shreds and patches, with unnecessary violence and lurid language, sent his indignation to a high notch. He watched the unfortunate arise painfully from the frozen ground, and mentally execrated the heartlessness that could deny, to even a tramp, the scant shelter of a coach platform on such a night.

"The poor devil will freeze before midnight," Harlan muttered.

He sheltered his face from the wind, and calculated rapidly the chances of discovery should he indulge his impulse. The International Express Company was undoubtedly more deeply interested in the safety of its freight, es-

pecially the fifty thousand dollars at that moment in Harlan's car, than in the comfort of tramps, and its rules relative to the admission of strangers to its cars were not open to more than one construction.

When he looked out again, the ejected was limping slowly along the main track, near the express car. Harlan hesitated for another moment, then called out, cautiously:

"Hey, there, Willie!" The shabby one looked up quickly. "Don't stop—keep going," Harlan said, "but sneak around to the other side of this car. Savvy?"

The shabby one nodded and limped away, sidling and stooping to the wind. Harlan shut and fastened the door, crossed the car, and listened. A whistle sounded far up the track.

"I wish he was here right now," Harlan muttered. "They'll all be watching No. 7 as she passes."

A faint rapping sounded on the door. Harlan pulled it partly open and hauled the shabby one in just as No. 7 sped by with flash and roar, and No. 6, with shrieking whistle and much squeaking of flanges against frosty rails, resumed its journey northward. When the messenger turned from securing the door, the wanderer was stooping over the stove, almost embracing it.

"Bad weather for chilblains, Happy," remarked Harlan facetiously.

The shabby one turned his head and grinned cheerfully.

"I guess yes, pardner. But my name ain't Happy, nor yet Willie, I ain't no hobo."

"No? Perhaps you're the general manager, on a tour of inspection. Your credentials didn't seem to go with the brakeman back there! Have a chair, G. M."

The shabby one dropped into the proffered chair, and paused in his task of pulling icicles from his ragged beard to stare curiously at Harlan as he replenished the fire.

"How'd you know my name was Jim?" he asked slowly.

"Jim? I didn't call you—oh, I see. Jim, is it? And why are you jimming around on such a night as this?"

"Bummin' it to Denver. I'm promised work there, an'—"

Harlan looked up from filling his pipe, and laughed loudly.

"Work! You must be a brave man, Jimmy, to be traveling all alone in the direction of work. You might run right up against it. Something of a humorist, aren't you, James?"

James was fumbling hurriedly in the pockets of his tattered coat, and did not reply to Harlan's sally. He fished up an odorous cob pipe, seized Harlan's tobacco-box, and helped himself to a generous portion of its contents.

"Gimme a light, pardner!" he growled.

"Well, you're a cool number," said Harlan, handing his guest a match.

"Oh, I'll soon be a warm one," the man rejoined, stretching out his hands to the roaring fire, and puffing audibly at the pipe.

Harlan noticed that the hands bore unmistakable marks of toil.

"What kind of work are you promised at Denver?" he asked the man, more seriously.

"Sheet iron plant. Good pay and steady job—if they don't get on to who I am."

"On the black list, eh? Been on a strike?"

The man shook his head and pulled at his pipe in silence. Presently he planted his gaping shoes upon the upper edge of the stove, tilted back his chair, blew a

cloud of smoke upward, and keenly scrutinized his surroundings. His gaze rested on the two heavy revolvers hanging in their holsters on the wall.

"Ever have to use 'em?" he inquired, indicating the weapons by a motion of the pipe.

"Not yet. They're all ready for business, though, when the time comes," Harlan added, with a furtive glance at his guest.

"No good against dynamite," the man said decisively. "Used to know a young feller, good friend of mine, that run on the B. & Q. He always had a brace of guns ready, an' he had the nerve to use 'em, too. Never got a chance. They got him one night, 'bout such a night as this. Dynamite! Made a big touch, an' got away. Jake wasn't killed, but he'd better been. Knocked him loony. Ain't never been right in his upper story since."

"I guess Jake didn't put up much of a fight," said Harlan.

"S that so?" the shabby one exclaimed, with an inflection that indicated profound faith in Jake's bravery. He slowly removed the pipe from his mouth and the feet from the stove, leaned forward, and tapped Harlan's knee impressively. "Just s'pose you had a big bunch of coin in here to-night—as you may have, for all I know—an' was held up on such a desolate, God-forsaken stretch of track as we're runnin' over right now, by a gang that was on to their job. Sonny, you'd last just 'bout as long—just 'bout as long—as them icicles that I pitched into that fire!"

"It's getting uncomfortably warm in here," observed Harlan.

He arose and carried his chair further from the stove—nearer the weapons on the wall. His guest straightened up and pushed back his seat.

"Why ain't there two of you?" the stranger asked. "I've seen two in a car sometimes."

"My helper failed to show up this evening—sick, probably—and I had to go on alone. I'll take on another man at Denver."

The shabby one crossed his legs, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and re-appropriated the tobacco-box.

"It's a big mistake," he said reflectively, "this thing of puttin' only one man in a car. Two men could hold a car every time, if they understood how, an' had the nerve. How? S'pose you an' me was messengers. The gang flags the train, covers the engineer an' fireman, cuts the engine an' 'xpress from the train, an' runs down the track—as they 'most always does. You takes one of them guns, an' I the other. Just as the car stops, while the gang is still on the engine an' tender, I jumps out of that door, an' you out of this. We takes cover in the rocks, in good shootin' distance of the car. Ain't we got the whole situation at the muzzles of our guns?—robbers, engine, express car, everything? The gang can't get near the car, an' they can't pull her away. We've got the whole outfit covered. See? Why couldn't they attack us? They could—but they ain't never got no time to lose, an' there's the train crew hurryin' up from the rear, an' trains runnin' both ways—an' with us layin' snug down among the rocks, I reckon we could stand 'em off for a while. Course the scheme has its drawbacks—there might be no good cover, or the night might be too dark—but it's a blamed sight surer than stayin' in the car an' gettin' blowed to kingdom come!"

Harlan shifted uneasily in his chair, and regarded his guest dubiously.

"I guess there's no danger to-night," he said, with a nervous little laugh. "Let's talk about something more pleasant. It's strange that you're out of work and on the bum when times are so prosperous and work so plenty."

The shabby one uttered a strange sound, half laugh, half snarl.

"Prosperous! That's just the trouble, pardner. It's got to be a hold-up all down the line. Lookee here, pardner, mebbe you won't believe me, but it ain't been so very long since I had a nice business of my own. I'd worked up from the bottom, saved my money, got a good start, an' had a long list of names on my pay-roll. Things was comin' my way right along, when all of a sudden I found I couldn't land any more contracts. I knowed my bids was lower than some that got the business, an' I

couldn't understand it. I investigated, an' found there was a ring—a *com-bine*—that had a pull an' a system. Even the architects was in it, an' saw that outside bidders was thrown down. Whenever a job was on tap, the ring would meet an' fix the figgers for the lowest bid, with an awful margin of profit, an' would choose the firm, in rotation, to submit that bid. The others would all bid higher, an' they'd divide the profits. All my competitors was in the *com-bine*, an' I had to get in or quit. I got in. After a while I discovered there was a ring in the ring that was gettin' the big end of the divvy. I kicked. They laughed.

"One day I found the *com-bine* had submitted bids on a big job without callin' me in. Then I kicked clean over the traces. I went to the builder, give the whole scheme away, an' offered to take the job for fifteen thousand dollars—the ring's lowest bid was twenty thousand. He took me up, approved my bond, an' I went back to my factory laughin' over the way I'd beat the ring, an' tickled to death over my big profit. Next morning a walkin' delegate showed up an' ordered my men out. I tried to argue with 'em, but out they went. I tried to get other men, but times was so prosperous they all had work, an' they belonged to the union, anyhow. I went to the builder an' explained—asked for more time. He said he was sorry, but if I couldn't fill my contract he'd have to come to the ring's terms, an' hold me an' my bondsmen for the difference. That meant ruin. I throwed up my hands an' went to the ring. They finally agreed to take me back if I'd pay a heavy fine, turn over all my profit on the job, an' pay my men for lost time. I had to do it—that was the only way to save my business an' my bondsmen—an' the ring promised to let me in on all future grafts. They didn't do it; they froze me out, an' I lost everything. Everything, pardner; my family's livin' now in two rented rooms, with just enough money to pay for food an' fuel till I can send 'em my first pay. And I'm on the *com-bine's* black list, an' if the Denver firm knowed my real name they wouldn't take me."

"Why didn't you lay the facts before the proper officials, and have the combine prosecuted?" asked Harlan indignantly. "The law's with you."

The shabby one regarded his host with an amused expression on his thin face.

"Yes, sonny, the law's with me, but the lawyers ain't—I'm out of cash. Pardner, you may know all 'bout the express business, but you're mighty green 'bout some things. Proper officials! What puts the proper officials into office, pardner? Votes! An' what gets the votes? Money! An' who puts up the money—the campaign funds—an' controls the nominations? The rings, pardner, the *com*-bines, that wants to be let alone, an' is willin' to pay for it. See? Prosecute! The indictment comes up, all right, for a blind, an' then the real fine work begins—an' wins out. What's the train slowin' up for, pardner?"

Harlan looked at his watch with an air of surprise.

"Water-tank. Midnight already. You're quite an entertaining conversationalist, Jimmy."

He dragged a box to the stove, and lifted out a bulging basket neatly covered over by a snowy napkin.

"Lunch time, Jim. Pitch in!"

The shabby one precipitately discarded the pipe and pitched in. A little tear of joy started to Harlan's eye when he discovered, in the depths of the basket, a diminutive pie, elaborately crimped and scalloped by a tiny thumb, and bearing the inscription, "P-A-P-A," in sprawling characters on its flaky crust.

"Some of my baby's work," he explained proudly. "She's a regular little housewife already!"

Without pausing in his vigorous attack on a ham sandwich, Jim cocked his unshorn head knowingly, and then scrutinized the small pie with evident admiration.

"T's all right, all right!" he mumbled thickly. "Say, how old's the kid, pardner?"

"Six next April."

Jim poised the fragment of sandwich in front of his mouth, and beamed up at Harlan, who was placing a can of coffee on the stove.

"You don't say! Just the age of my baby—an' she's a girl, too! How many you got, pardner?"

"Only two. Oldest's a boy."

"I've got three. What would we do without 'em, pardner?"

Harlan shook his head, as if unwilling to consider so unpleasant and desolate a situation.

"Mine's all girls," Jim said, selecting another sandwich, and eying the can of coffee. "My little boy died just after the *com*-bine did me up. We had to take a little ramshackly house, an' he caught pneumonia. Like to have killed my wife, that did. All our trouble seemed to come at once."

The man's eyes blazed, and his teeth went through the sandwich with a vicious snap. Then both men sprang to their feet. A revolver shot had rung out—then another—and still another—and then a fusillade! The car, which had barely stopped, started with a jerk that almost threw both men from their feet, then plunged forward, rocking and swaying as its speed increased.

## II.

HARLAN gave one great leap, seized both weapons from the wall, and leveled them at his guest. The shabby one threw up his hands with a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, no, pardner!" he cried. "Don't think that of me! Not guilty!"

"What business have you in here, anyway?" Harlan exclaimed.

"What business? Why, pardner, didn't you invite me in when I was freezin' to death, an' warm me, an' feed me, an' treat me like I was human? Yes, you did! An' now, by the Eternal, I'll stay with you! Gimme one of them guns, pardner—there's a *com*-bine of thieves out there that I *can* fight!"

Harlan's flaming eyes were fixed on his guest as he spoke; as if convinced, he dropped the muzzles of the revolvers.

"I believe you mean it," he said quietly, "but my job's gone, whether we win or lose this fight. The company will know you were in here."

"Cheer up, pardner; mebbe we can manage that. How much coin you carryin'?"

"Fifty thousand."

Jim emitted a long whistle.

"They'll fight hard for a pile like that. What time do you reckon we're makin' now?"

"Not less than forty an hour. We're cut from the coaches—I can tell by the swing."

"They'll stop purty soon. What's your plan of battle, pardner? Goin' to stay in here an' git blowed to the beautiful stars?"

Harlan dropped his head and reflected rapidly. The speed of the car decreased; the trucks groaned noisily; the violent motion ceased. Harlan looked up and spoke decisively:

"We'll try your plan. We're among the rocks where there's good cover, and the moon's almost full. You don't look like a fighter, but I'll trust you."

"Bully for you, pardner. I ain't very big, that's right—but you watch me grow! I was raised out West—fact is, I was dep'ty sheriff once, in Idaho—an' I reckon I know something 'bout a gun yet; enough to shoot some law into this *com-bine*. Gimme one of th' barkers, pardner!"

"Here, take both. I'm no good with a pistol, but I've got a plaything here I can handle."

Harlan reached behind a stack of boxes, and drew forth a short, heavy, double-barreled gun.

"Riot gun," he remarked grimly, as he filled a pocket with murderous-looking cartridges. "Made for mobs—at short range."

Jim grinned approvingly.

"Beats all the statutes made an' provided," he observed.

There was an expression on his worn face that moved Harlan to thrust out his hand. Jim grasped it, and the eyes of the two men left nothing to be said. They took their stations near the doors, and waited silently. Harlan could hear the thumping of his heart as the car slid gently along the track with the gentle vibration that heralded its stoppage.

"Now!" he cried, and each threw open his door and leaped out.

The track lay half way up a steep hillside, and Harlan, leaping to the lower side, lost his footing, stumbled, and fell to his knees. From the direc-

tion of the locomotive came a loud command to halt, then several rapid shots. Harlan felt a sharp, stinging sensation in his left shoulder as he regained his feet and ran like a deer toward a mass of huge boulders, forty yards away, that glistened cold and gray in the moonlight.

Gaining their shelter, he kneeled behind the rocks and cautiously peeped out. But one robber was in sight; he stood on the cab step, his back toward Harlan, his revolver leveled at Robinson and Finney, the engineer and fireman, who sat facing the outlaw on the opposite side of the cab. Harlan raised his gun, then realized that the scattering buckshot would hit Robinson or Finney as well as the robber. He saw, too, that the fellow was protected by the loaded tender from a shot from Jim's position.

With an exclamation of disappointment he turned his head and looked up the hill beyond the car. Up there, in the shadows of the rocks, lay something that looked like the lifeless body of a man. A cold sweat started on Harlan's face as he comprehended his situation. He understood, now. The robbers were attacking the car from its unprotected side; Jim was killed, or a traitor; and he, Harlan, had deserted his car—would be branded as a coward. The company would never believe his story; it was too improbable, the circumstantial evidence against it too strong.

With a cry of despair Harlan sprang up and started toward the deserted car. He could at least die!

Two lines of light leaped from the shadows far up the hill; two quick, sharp shots rang and reverberated among the rocks; Jim's voice—it came to Harlan like a reprieve from death—sang out:

"All down but four, pardner! It's up to you. Keep 'em jumpin'!"

Then Harlan saw three forms duck hastily under the car and emerge on his side. As they rose to their feet he took quick aim and fired both barrels. One of the men staggered, then the three dropped to the earth and disappeared.

Again Jim's voice came down the hill:

"Give it 'em, sonny! There's a panic

struck one *com-bine* right now! This here's the kind of prosecution that prosecutes!"

Harlan laughed as he sped back to his shelter. He shoved two fresh cartridges into the gun, and lay down to watch and wait. He saw the man on the cab step shift his position slightly, uneasily; saw Finney's stocky body lean forward, ready to spring. Oh, if only Finney could——

A dark figure rose from the rocks at Harlan's left and hurled a dim object toward him! The earth heaved skyward with a deafening roar; a black, blurring cloud whirled before his eyes, through which gleamed a flash of fire from the further side of the cab as the man on the step threw up his arms and fell backward; and then a great cloud encircled Harlan and blotted out the world.

### III.

WHEN the world came back to Harlan he was lying on a cot, in his own car. His left shoulder throbbed and smarted. He raised his right hand painfully to his roaring, buzzing head and touched a bandage. He struggled to sit up, and Striker, the brakeman, loomed up and gently pushed him back.

"Lay still, old boy. Doc says so. You was hit on the head with a rock, but

you're all right—only a bumped head and a scratched shoulder—but you've got to be good for a week or two."

Harlan's eyes wandered to the undamaged safe, and Striker smiled and nodded.

"Everything O. K., Billy. You won out—got a majority of the delegates—two of 'em's beautiful corpses, and another one's coughin' buckshot. T'other two was huntin' for solitude when Robinson backed down to the coaches. You're sure a game one, Harlan, to jump out and fight the gang face to face like that!"

"Where's Jim?" asked Harlan feebly and unguardedly.

"Jim? Jim who?"

"The—the tramp you kicked——"

"Oh, Smith? Tom Smith, his name is, he says. Say, don't call him a tramp—he's a trump. He can have anything the company's got, I reckon. Know what he did? Climbed on the bumper of your car after I'd fired him, and when you jumped out he crawled in, got your guns, sneaked down behind Robinson and Finney, and drilled a hole clean through the old thug that had 'em covered!"

"Well, where is he now?"

"Where is he? He's in the smokin' compartment, with his feet on the cushions, burnin' ten-centers and cussin' all *com-bines*. That's where he is!"



### THE MYSTERIES OF FATE.

ONE prays for life; Love holds her hand,  
The boat to take her nears the land;  
White lilies float, her senses reel,  
'Tis Death himself stands at the wheel.

One prays for death, through waves of doubt  
That beat her drifting bark about;  
The ship that to her help is led  
Is freighted down with love instead.

Cora A. Matson Dolson.