

THE MOUNTAIN LIMITED.

A Thrilling Tale of Railroading.

BY ERWIN L. COOLIDGE.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"Yes, you did for a fact," laughed Lon Woods. "Now at President Wellington's request you will run the engine over to your train as soon as the shifter gets it ready this morning. I'll see you over there."

A 8.45 o'clock Hal Harrod backed *Old Big-wheel* on to his train ten minutes earlier than his general custom.

When he did so he found a large number of gentlemen assembled awaiting his appearance.

It was the same party, headed by President Wellington, who had been on the special car on the occasion of his first run on the Mountain Limited.

President Wellington greeted him cordially and grasped the Boy Runner's hand with a hearty clasp.

"Good-morning," said he. "We have come down to see your new engine and to pay our formal respects to you."

"I am very glad to see you gentlemen," said Hal, somewhat embarrassed, "and hope that you will be as well satisfied with me as I expect to be with *Old Big-wheel*."

"Ah! that's just it!" said President Wellington with a smile, opening his coat as he spoke. "That's just it. My young friend you have done a great deal for the Eastern Central Railroad in the last month to say nothing of your previous services, and the officers of the company, myself included, have come to the conclusion that it is time to show you a tangible evidence of our appreciation. It gives me pleasure therefore to present you in their behalf this watch, chain and charm and may it be 'always on time.'"

As he withdrew his hand from his breast pocket President Wellington extended an opened watch case to our young hero who saw enfolded in the plush lining the most beautiful gold time-piece he had ever beheld.

Mechanically he took the splendid gift and raised the watch for inspection. On the case was a finely engraved miniature locomotive.

A fac-simile of the *Hesperus* and a train of cars.

The Mountain Limited.

The inscription was

PRESENTED TO

HAL HARROD, THE BOY RUNNER

BY THE

PRESIDENT AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OF THE

EASTERN CENTRAL RAILROAD

IN RECOGNITION OF SERVICE.

"ALWAYS ON TIME."

SEPT. 23, 18—

Our hero's eyes filled with moisture and looked the thankfulness he felt.

"I thank you, gentlemen," he said, "I did my duty and shall always try to be on time."

The crowd of bystanders who saw and heard what was going on now made the depot ring with cheering and Hal Harrod was compelled to mount the cab steps and bow his respects to the gathering.

In the meantime Lon Woods had stepped to the boiler head of the locomotive and removing a thin plate of tin disclosed a picture embedded there.

It was the representation of the handsome face of the Boy Runner looking from the cab of the *Hesperus* and in a half circle the words "Always on Time."

A hundred people crowded to the front to see the picture and again the cheering made the welkin ring.

But the hands on the big clock in the depot told the hour of 9.

"All aboard!"

The bell rang as it had on hundreds of other days and the Mountain Limited was on its way to greater fame.

Hal Harrod's mind was full of happy thoughts.

It pleased the Boy Runner greatly to know that the herculean efforts he had made against great difficulties were appreciated by his superiors in office.

"But they've laid it on pretty thick!" he remarked.

"Just what you deserved," was Joe Grace's emphatic comment as he shoved a mass of coal into *Old Big-wheel's* fire-box.

The new engine warmed up to her new work readily and answered to the Boy Runner's touch promptly at all times.

Promptly at schedule time the different stations on the line were reached and all went well.

Finally came Lyons.

Just as Frank Maynard, the conductor of the Mountain Limited, shouted "all aboard," and gave the signal to start from the station, a bit of paper fluttered in at the cab window and fell at Hal Harrod's feet.

Instantly he stooped and secured it.

Then, without looking to see what it was, he threw open the throttle and the

train moved northward.

As soon as the Lyons yard was cleared and the open track was reached the Boy Runner sat back on his seat and mechanically spread the bit of paper open.

Written in a faint blue ink was a single sentence.

The words like a red-hot iron burned his eyes.

They sank deep in his brain and a fierce oath came to his lips.

"It's \$500 to you if the Mountain Limited is late to-night!"

"Curse them! Would they bribe me?" he cried. "Not on my life. The Mountain Limited shall go into Athens on time!"

And then he crushed the paper into his pocket and looked long and earnestly up the track.

Joe Grace had seen the paper in the Boy Runner's hands, and he heard the firmly-spoken words.

But Joe Grace made no remark.

At Mountain Junction the Mountain River Railroad received the Limited as usual, and the Boy Runner's time was his own until the hour came to prepare for the return trip.

All day long the words on the paper in his vest pocket ran through his mind.

"Always on time" is my motto," he said to himself, "and I am not ready to change it."

At 5.45 o'clock that afternoon the Northern Flyer passed across the tracks of the Eastern Central Railroad from Mountain Junction, and was off "on time" express to Athens.

At 6.03 p. m. the Mountain Limited arrived at the Junction.

At 6.05 Frank Maynard gave the signal and shouted his thunderous "All aboard!"

Glancing at his new timepiece, Hal Harrod remarked:

"Five minutes late in starting. Joe, we must be on time at Lyons. Pile in the stuff."

Joe Grace spat on his hands and made his shovel fly.

Old Big-wheel was in it for keeps, and her six-footers spun and the connecting rods flashed and plunged to their full limit of speed.

Lyons!

6.15 p. m.!

Mountain Limited on time!

It did not look as if the Boy Runner would accept a \$500 bribe and delay his train.

If the would-be briber was in the neighborhood of the Lyons depot and had seen the firm look on Hal Harrod's face, he would easily have known that no attempt at bribery would succeed with him.

Was he there?

Hal Harrod looked in all directions in the fast-gathering gloom of the evening to see if he could "size up" anybody as the one who had cast the bit of paper into the cab on the up trip.

Apparently not.

"All aboard!"

Hal opened the throttle.

Something white fell at his side on his cushioned seat.

Instantly, as his train gathered momentum, he looked out on to the station platform.

Vain effort.

He could not tell from whence it came.

Two minutes later, as the giant engine was bounding along over the iron toward Lakeport, he, according to custom, screwed down the throttle into place and bent forward on his seat with his eyes scanning the rail ahead.

The darkness was growing denser and the headlight flashed brightly far to the front of the engine.

He had not yet opened the folded paper which still lay where it had fallen on the seat beneath him.

He disdained to look at it.

Joe Grace's quick eye had seen the paper fall and wondered why.

Mile after mile sped away.

The white posts flashed at their side and then were gone.

"Look at the paper!"

It was Joe Grace's voice.

Hal Harrod awoke from a reverie.

He had been watching the track ahead and thinking deeply.

"Why not?"

He dropped his hand at his side.

It touched the paper.

They were running through the suburbs of Lakeport.

By the lantern over the fire box Hal read the five words the paper contained, and his face blanched to the hue of death.

"My God!" he cried, and both hands grasped the lever to reverse.

"Be careful of Little River Bridge!"

A warning!

Danger ahead!

It was less than half a mile further to Little River.

Little River flowed under the tracks of the Eastern Central Railroad a mile from Lakeport station and then emptied into Big Lake.

The trestle across the river was more than sixty feet high.

What did the warning mean?

Was the trestle—

Horrible!

A rail removed?

Death and Destruction!

Hal Harrod thought of the ten carloads of passengers behind him and groaned.

Would the fiends who sent him the note wreck the Mountain Limited if she was on time at Lakeport?

"Oh, God!" he moaned, and his hands flew to the lever.

It was less than half a mile to Little River Bridge.

And they were speeding along at a mile a minute!

Too!

Down brakes!

Joe Grace had pulled the whistle.

The Boy Runner struggled with the lever.

Merciful Heaven!

It wouldn't work.

Just ahead of them was the long bridge across Little River.

The headlight's flash disclosed it.

The Boy Runner looked ahead.

"Too late!" he moaned. "We are lost. AN OPEN SWITCH!"

The train hands were tugging at the brakes.

Useless task!

The giant *Old Big-wheel* pulled them on to destruction!

Joy!

The lever was loose.

Bang!

Hal Harrod reversed full over.

Too late!

The open switch was reached, and then—

The rushing river roared for its train load of victims sixty feet beneath them!

But what's this?

Right in the glare of the headlight a lithe boyish form stood at the switch.

Hal Harrod saw his form sway.

Crack!

It sounded like the report of a pistol.

And then the Mountain Limited passed on, and rolled safely across Little River Bridge.

CHAPTER V.

"TELL MY MOTHER I DIED TO SAVE THE MOUNTAIN LIMITED EXPRESS."

The Mountain Limited came to a full stop and then with the power reversed moved back across Little River Bridge.

With all his presence of mind restored to him, but trembling inwardly from the terrible shock he had just received, the Boy Runner's hand firmly held the throttle.

His train had been saved from destruction as if by a miracle.

A fraction of a second's delay in closing that open switch and the whole train had plunged into the river bed.

But how had the Mountain Limited been saved?

Hal Harrod had seen a boyish form at the switch as the locomotive flashed by and in his ears there still echoed the report of a pistol.

Had the prevention of a great tragedy resulted in a lesser one?

The question would soon be answered.

The Mountain Limited was slowly backing across the bridge to the switch.

It was reached and the locomotive was brought to a standstill.

Grasping a lantern Hal Harrod swung from the foot board to the earth.

A crowd of excited train men, and passengers piled from the passenger coaches. Lights flashed on the scene.

Lantern in hand, Conductor Frank Maynard, his face pale and his form quivering with excitement pressed forward to the engine.

"What's the matter, Hal?" he cried. "Danger?"

"Sh! Not a word!" came the Boy Runner's warning. "Do not alarm the passengers. Give me a lift to the baggage car quick before the people catch on," and as he spoke Hal Harrod raised the body of a young man from the earth beside the switch.

"What's this?" cried the conductor. "Did you run him down?"

"No," was the Boy Runner's reply. "He is a hero. He died to save the train."

In the dim light from the lanterns the youth who had given his life to save others was seen to be remarkably handsome.

His face pale with the hue of death was streaked with blood flowing from a small hole above the right temple.

His eyes were closed and his mouth partly opened.

A smile rested on his noble countenance.

Even in death the knowledge that he had saved the Mountain Limited was not denied him and the satisfaction of the deed was reflected on his face.

Death was robbed of half its terrors.

Tenderly Frank Maynard gave his assistance and aided the Boy Runner in placing the inanimate form of the young martyr on a blanket in the baggage car.

"I'll explain all when we reach Athens," cried Hal Harrod. "All aboard Frank. We must get a move on. We must be on time to-night."

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor and the still wondering passengers piled back into the coaches all unwitting the terrible tragedy that had been averted and not knowing that their savior lay silent and bleeding in the baggage car.

Hal Harrod hastened to mount the en-

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gine, pausing to snap the lock of the switch as he went and then threw open the throttle of *Old Big-wheel*.

Two minutes late.

Old Big-wheel answered her master's hand and drew the Limited across the river and on toward Athens.

At Lincoln the train was on time and 7 o'clock was just striking as the Mountain Limited drew into the Eastern Central Railroad depot at Athens.

The Boy Runner, despite attempted tribes and through awful dangers, was on time.

After leaving Little River Bridge, Conductor Frank Maynard hurried back through the long train, quieting the fears of his passengers who were startled and wondering over the sudden stopping of the Mountain Limited immediately following the call for brakes.

The reversal of the power had piled them up in a heap in their seats and had made a scene of utmost confusion in every car.

Such stops were not customary in their daily travels.

They knew to a man, woman and child that something awful had happened or would have happened if—?

And there they were lost.

Frank Maynard was besieged with questions.

To the pale-faced, trembling passengers he told the simple story:

"It was nothing to endanger the train. Our engineer saw a man's body lying at the switch at Little River Bridge and stopped to take it on board the train."

"There can be no harm in telling that," said the old conductor to himself, "and it's the truth as far as I know."

Some of the passengers were satisfied, but some were not.

Their curiosity was more than ever excited.

Many of the old travellers knew that it was an exceedingly unusual occurrence for an engineer to stop a lightning express train to pick up the body of a dead man at the side of the track.

It would ordinarily be reported at headquarters and word telegraphed to the section hands on that division.

That there was something behind it all the old travellers knew to a moral certainty.

But Frank Maynard could tell them nothing, as he knew nothing.

The old conductor, like the rest, was compelled to wait until Athens was reached before he could get more information from his engineer.

Hal Harrod, the Boy Runner, held the key to the mystery.

"Athens! All change! Do not leave your umbrellas or packages in the cars! Athens! Athens!" bawled the stentorian-lunged brakemen at every car door.

The eager, excited passengers thronged toward the engine.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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