

## JUNCTION JACK.

There was a stir in the camp at Niger's Creek, and some five or six men were busy with the arms and accoutrements of their horses in preparation for a couple of days' hard riding. It was the habit of the camp to turn out to see the start, no matter whether the expedition were of limited or of general interest. In the present case it was certainly a secret, and probably a desperate one, its object being unknown to the community in general, and round about the busy centre of shouting men and plunging horses lounged knots of the "boys," mostly in shirt-sleeves, and in their customary unshaven and unkempt condition, puffing at short pipes and criticising audibly the points of men and animals during the various stages of preparation.

The little band of five or six men comprised the desperadoes of Niger's Creek—what community is there which does not number a few amongst the members?

Fortune had dealt hardly with the camp of late. Not for many months had the winning card turned up for a single member, and the men were simply at their wits' end and ready for almost any deed of daring. By a strange combination of circumstances, which it is not necessary to relate here, a piece of intelligence of the kind usually kept a profound secret has come to the ears of one of the men. The mail train of the D and R—run on Thursday night, was to carry specie to a large amount. At a certain point the mail overtook a freight train which had to be switched off to a siding running for some distance beside the level; this junction was in the keeping of a single man.

Now Niger's Creek was just in the mood to carry out the most villainous plot ever conceived.

They were agreed to let such a chance slip in the present state of affairs would be suicidal; they therefore resolved that in order to gain possession of this rich prize, which would float them and set them on their legs again, the simplest and easiest thing would be to wreck the mail train by permitting it to collide with the other at the junction, and in the confusion when all attention would no doubt be entered on the injured passengers, to make off with the booty.

To do this safely "Junction Jack," as the switch-tender was called, must be tampered with—he must by fair means or foul be kept from his post that night; how it was to be done no man stopped to consider, but it may well be conceived that very nice notions of duty or of the value of human life were not rife amongst those who could devise an enterprise of this nature. They were quite ready to believe that the switch-tender only wanted a sufficiently tempting bribe to entice him from the path of duty; if not—and there were ugly looks all round—other means of silencing him were at their disposal.

The log-cabin of Junction Jack stood quite close to the line, and was a low, roughly-built structure consisting of two rooms. It was in the centre of a small clearing, where some attempt at order was observable; vegetables were arranged in neat rows, and one small patch in front was dedicated to the cultivation of such simple flowers as one may see any day growing wild.

It was the early part of the fall. All through the long summer Jack had devoted his spare time to the putting up of his new log-house. Every block was hewn and firmly fastened together, the roughly-glazed windows put in, the smart picket round the clearing set up—all by his own hands—and with a will, for at Christmas he was to marry Margie Dewar.

He had just finished rigging up a set of shelves for Margie's books and work; three shelves in a niche beside the stove; and when he had driven home the last nail he stepped back and looked at his work, whistling softly.

Then he crossed the floor to an old locker and brought out half a dozen thumb and well-worn books; the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a well-worn Bible and prayer book bound together in a faded green cover, and a couple of volumes of Dickens which had found their way across the Atlantic to this remote spot.

Having arranged these to his satisfaction, after changing their position several times and looking at the whole from different points of view, Jack heaved a sigh of content from the depth of his capacious chest, unrolled his shirt sleeves and shook himself into his jacket. He then made up the fire, broiled himself a slice of pork and sat down to his lonely supper—a thing he never did without a rapid mental calculation of the number of days that must elapse before the sweet face of Margie Dewar would confront him on the other side of the stove.

A couple of miles away down the line stood the substantial homestead of the Dewar family, and about half-way between this and his cabin, was a little hut beside the track just large enough to shelter him from the wind and rain in the performance of his duty. At nine o'clock every night he was there at his post listening for the rumbling of the heavy cars, which could be heard in that pure atmosphere long before they came in sight; and it was Junction Jack's important office to clear the road for the safe transit of the mail which followed close on the heels of her slow and cumbersome sister; for the safety of both trains he and he alone was responsible, and it was the most interesting duty of his dull and monotonous routine.

He led a lonely life, for beyond an occasional "Good night, mate!" from the locomotive drivers, Junction Jack held but little communication with his fellows, his instructions with his pay being transmitted weekly through the conductor of the freight train, who, in passing, flung the passage containing these at Jack's feet; he was stationed fully fifty miles from the nearest depot, no such surprising fact when we remember that the track runs for a thousand miles and more through the forests and prairies of the Far West.

Jack was a fine, broad-shouldered fellow, true to his post, and all of his big heart that wasn't given up to his duty was enslaved by Margie, and he would not have changed places with the president.

Well, Margie was a girl to be proud of. There is a simple daguerreotype on the shelf, of a vastly inferior kind, and executed by a wandering artist. Look at the soft eyes, the sunny face and bright hair framed in a cunning little pink calico bonnet. Junction Jack looked again and again as he sat there, and he heaved another big sigh of satisfaction every time.

His simple meal finished, he began to prepare for his walk down the line to the Junction. This spot was sacred to the lonely man's one romance; here Margie had promised to be his; here Margie had given him shyly the first kiss, the remembrance of which thrilled him still; here they had met evening after evening all the summer through to discuss the progress of the log cabin and their plans for the future.

Would Jack and Margie meet to night as usual?

Jack hadn't a doubt of it; he had raked together the ashes, lighted the lamp which he always left burning, and set it on the window-ledge, when a sound of footsteps fell on his ear. He strode to the door, and was confronted on the threshold by a man, dusty and travel-stained, who unceremoniously entered the cabin, seated himself uninvited by the stove, and began to knock the ashes out of his pipe. He was armed and fully equipped for riding; while the lower part of his face was covered by a dark beard, his eyes and forehead were almost hidden by a wide hat drawn low over them.

Jack turned a little reluctantly—his lonely life had not rendered him very sociable and hospitable to strangers.

"Been riding far?" he inquired.

"A matter of a few miles," replied the visitor carelessly, lighting his pipe and beginning to smoke. "Anything to drink handy?"

Jack set the whiskey bottle and a glass before him, and asked:

"Going on to-night?"

"Maybe I am," said the stranger; and then looking up at his host: "Where are you off to in such a hurry? Sit down, man! I want a talk with you!"

"Then short and sharp's the word," said Jack, good-humoredly, sitting on a barrel.

"I've a bit of work down yonder that won't wait!"

"You may as well let it be at this hour of night; it's time for a pipe and a glass of this good stuff, man!"

Jack turned around; he had risen, and was half-way to the door.

"Perhaps," said the stranger, looking at him keenly, "perhaps it might be worth your while not to go down to that same bit of work to-night?"

"D'you know what you're talking about?" demanded Jack angrily, roused by something in the other's manner. "It's a matter of life and death, I tell you, and I'm off! I'll sit with you as long as you like when I'm through—stop till I come back if you choose!"

The stranger rose to his feet coolly.

"Then you'll lose the best bit of work you ever did in your life, my man! And all I reckon I can see as far as most men—all for a word with the owner of this pretty face here," and he reached up for the little portrait on the mantel-shelf.

Jack was at the door, but he strode back at this.

"Hands off!" cried the stranger. I can have a look at it, I suppose, or any other man?"

Jack stood savagely silent; there was no valid reason for his objection to have Margie's beauty admired by this cool and unceremonious visitor.

"What's your business with me?" he demanded at last. "Out with it, quick! I want to be off!"

The other removed his pipe before he answered slowly:

"Well, I guess I won't waste ammunition by firing any more in the air!" He hesitated a moment, fixing his eye on Jack.

"There's money in it—a clean three or four thousand for you and me and some other—it—you'll stop away from the Junction tonight?"

"What d'you mean?" asked Jack again.

"Do you know there's wholesale murder in the plan you're proposing?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders carelessly. "Look here, my man, I'll make it all square for you. I've got something here which will make you sleep like the dead till the morning—or, if you don't take to that dodge, why, once out of this, as we shall all be by dawn—come, give us your fist on it!" and he advanced with an air of cordiality.

But Jack started back as if he had been shot. The hideousness of the proposition dawned on him and turned his blood to fire. Snatching his derring from the mantel shelf—

"Stand off!" he shouted, "or I'll put a bullet into you! Whoever you are, if there's law in the country, you are, swing for this!"

The other remained outwardly calm, and there was an ominous gleam in his eyes. He made no answer, but raised his hand quickly—a signal agreed on—for with a crash of glass, the barrel of a rifle protruded through the window, covering Jack's movements, and a hoarse voice shouted from the darkness without—

"Blaze away, captain! I told ye the fellow would show fight!"

Jack sprang to the wall and stood firm against it, his great chest heaving, his gray eyes flashing, and lips set together. A howl of execration followed, and then the men of Niger's Creek poured into the cabin.

Meanwhile at the farm the evening meal had been cleared away, and Margie, free from household duties, was engaged in the essentially feminine occupation of tying the strings of her bonnet before the little oval mirror, which hung on the wall, and reflected her features somewhat imperfectly—for plate-glass was unknown in these regions. Then she stepped through the porch where the rosy flush of the sunset enveloped her, lending a tender bloom to her cheek, and a dewy brightness to her eyes.

Margie Dewar was no beauty, in the common acceptance of the term; in a Boston drawing-room she would have probably passed unnoticed, for there was not a perfect feature in her face. But she was the daughter of the sunshine and the fragrant breeze, and many a city belle would have envied her the clear pink and white of her complexion, the strength and grace of her perfectly-proportioned figure, the dainty poise of her head, the lightness and freedom of her footstep, and the sweetness of her winning smile—outcome of her simple life and pure and happy thoughts!

Through the yard she walked where the feathered creatures fluttered around looking for something from her hand—through the field of ripening grain, and then turning into the little track beside the line. And here she quickened her steps, one brown hand shading her eyes, as she looked expectantly up the line, though she knew well, foolish Margie! that she could not see Jack yet.

The sun had dipped behind the distant ridge, the red glow had changed to purple, and was darkening every instant into deeper shadow, when Margie reached the junction.

She had to peer close into the little hut before she could be certain it was empty. She brought out the lantern, lighted it, and hung it on a post as she had seen Jack do many times, then she sat down on the bank where he had carved a rough seat in the brown earth and lined it with velvet moss for her. She clasped her hands round her knees and bent her face on them, singly so to herself, and the tones of her fresh young voice mingled with the hum of insects, while all the still air of the coming night was fragrant with the sweet scent of herb and flower.

How long she sat there she knew not; but at last she lifted her head to listen to a distant rumbling.

An instant of suspense and Margie leaped to her feet. She knew the sound well—it was the train—and Junction Jack, for the first time in his years of service, was away from his post.

The girl sprang down the bank, striving to pierce the gloom. No Jack was to be seen, but there were the headlights of the advancing train, fast nearing the Junction. What was she to do? She knew well that the express was due in a few moments and a terrible collision was inevitable.

There was only a moment of indecision. Margie was accustomed to emergencies and the necessity for immediate action—she remembered how often she had watched Jack at his duty, and now she flung herself on the great switch handles and pressed them down with all her strength.

Only just in time, for the next moment the heavy freight train was rolling past—she held on till the last car had passed her, and she saw its receding lights swing off on to the siding. Her work was done, for the train was saved; and her grasp loosened, the heavy handles turned slowly back, and she stood cold and trembling now that the moment of exertion was over.

The distant rumbling ceased and only the occasional cry of a nightbird broke the stillness, while Margie stood motionless, her brain busy with conjecture, her heart beating with a thousand apprehensions for her lover. And suddenly with a shriek and a wild rush the mail thundered up, past the junction—on, past the silent log house—and away in the far distance leaving a long trail of wreathing vapor in its wake.

Then Margie, stirred into action by the swift rush of the wheels and the panting breath of the flying locomotive, snatched up the lantern and sped down the track.

In sight of the still, dark cabin she stopped and uttered a peculiar cry, but the sound fell on deaf ears, and no answer came from him who was used to respond so gladly—and Margie, nameless terrors oppressing her, sprang on and burst open the door.

The light of her lantern showed her the cabin in wild disorder, and there Jack lay, bound and helpless—his head fallen inert among the ashes of the stove, and the dark blood ebbed slowly from an ugly wound.

Margie was no fainting heroine to be unnerved at the sight of blood, but she could not repress a sob as she knelt at his side, cut his bonds with fingers that never trembled, and lifting his head to the support of her arm began to feel for the signs of life. And her touch roused him. He opened his dull eyes and tried to raise himself, faintly:

"God bless you, Margie! Did you—save—the—"

Then his eyes closed again and his head dropped.

But Junction Jack didn't die, for youth and hope and courage will work wonders. All through that long, long night did Margie staunch the ebbing life-blood, and lifting him in her strong young arms with tender care, did she try to inspire his sinking frame with the life of her own bounding pulses. As the first gray streak of dawn gleamed through the shattered casement hasty steps approached the cabin and the girl's lonely watch was over.

Carried carefully to the farm, Jack found kind and capable nurses there, and at Christmas he was strong and well as ever when the minister came to join his hands and Margie's. And the log-house, enlarged and substantially rebuilt—its owner prosperous with the reward that was voted him for his bravery—is peopled with a merry company of little folks who with sweet young voices love to tell the tale "How mother saved the mail and father, too!"

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This book, and other interesting reading matter, will be mailed to any one in Canada who sends a postal card with full post office address, to Wells & Richardson Co., Montreal, P. Q.

An Ineffective Alias.

"How didt der bolice ged on to you?" asked the sympathizing friend.

"I tondt know," responded Mr. Schwindelmann, sticking his nose between the bars. "I tookt der name of Patrick Ilooban ven I vent away, budt somehow it didn't work alretty."

A Sure Way.

Ethel—Here is the loveliest housecoat that I bought for Tom, and he doesn't seem to care for it the least bit.

Clara—I can tell you how to make him value it above everything.

Ethel—Oh, how?

Clara—Tell him that you've given it away to some poor man.

The March of Fashion.

"Hello! I see you are sending your wash to the steam laundry again. Was the washerwoman's husband wearing your linen?"

"No. She was wearing it herself."

## THE NEW U. S. RIFLE.

It is a Great Contrast to the "Snider" of War Times.

The new United States infantry rifle is similar to the arm now used by the Danish government, but so altered and improved as to make it the best magazine-gun for army use now known.

The Krag-Jorgensen or United States infantry rifle, model of 1892, is a magazine-gun with a calibre of .30 of an inch, or .15 of an inch smaller than that of the Springfield rifle now in use. The new rifle is slightly shorter than the Springfield. The breech is opened and closed by a sliding-bolt operated by a handle and knob at its rear end. The magazine is a horizontal one, lying under the receiver of the barrel, and closed by a gate at its right side. Part of the barrel, where it is grasped by the left hand in firing, is covered with wood. This is necessary, for the barrel becomes very hot from the extreme rapidity of fire. The handle at the rear end of the bolt, and a lug at its front end, fit into grooves and lock the bolt when the breech is closed. On its exterior the bolt carries the extractor, while inside is the firing-pin and spiral main-spring.

The magazine holds five cartridges, which are pressed forward by means of a follower acted upon by a spring, so that the cartridges are placed one by one in front of the bolt. The magazine can be instantly filled from a "quick-loading" box holding five cartridges. When the bolt is drawn to the rear, the cartridge just fired is withdrawn by the hook of the extractor, and thrown clear of the gun by an ejector at the bottom of the receiver. At the same time a fresh cartridge from the magazine is placed in front of the bolt. The bolt is then shoved forward, placing the cartridge in the barrel, and at the same time cocking the firing-pin, so that the piece is ready for firing.

On the left side of the piece is a "cut-off," by means of which the cartridges in the magazine can be held in reserve until the proper moment, and in the meantime the piece can be used as a single loader.

The cartridges are bottle-shaped. The bullet weighs only half as much as that of the Springfield, and is fired with nearly double the muzzle velocity, giving greater range and accuracy. The powder used is of the smokeless variety, so as not to obscure the view of the soldier and not to obstruct the small bore of the gun. The bayonet is simply a long knife, so that it is useful off as well as on the gun.

One important feature of the new rifle is that in one minute's time, without the assistance of any tools, it can be completely taken apart, any broken part replaced, and then it can as quickly be put together again.

## BETRAYED BY HIS SWORD.

How Marshal Ney Lost His Life Because of Napoleon's Present.

When Napoleon I. entered Cairo, on the 22nd of July, 1798, he was presented with three swords of honor, richly inlaid with precious stones. He brought them back to Europe, one in 1801 he gave one to General Ney and another to Murat, keeping the third for himself. Ney received his at an imperial reception; the sword passed from one to another of those present, among whom was a young subaltern of the Auvergne regiment. When Napoleon escaped from Elba, Ney left the king and took sides with his former chief. After the allies entered Paris the place became a hot for him, and he made preparations to get out of the country with a pass procured for him under a false name, but his wife and a friend persuaded him that there was really no danger, and he decided to stay in France. Then came the order for his arrest; he fled to a castle in the possession of some friends, and succeeded in reaching it without his whereabouts becoming known. But he was destined to be betrayed by the sword of honor given to him thirteen years previously. He was one day looking at the paintings in one of the more public rooms of the castle when he usually avoided, and feeling tired he threw himself on a couch, first taking off his Oriental sword, which he always wore out of affection for the Emperor. Suddenly he heard voices; he sprang up and hurriedly left the room, forgetting his sword. A minute later a party of ladies and gentlemen entered the room, one of them being the young subaltern of the Auvergne regiment, now a colonel. He at once recognized the sword and in spite of all the owner of the castle could not but call in some gentlemen and proceeded to make a search for Marshal Ney. Finding that he was discovered, Ney gave himself up quietly. On the 7th of December, the Marshal was shot, scarcely two months after the owner of the second sword, Murat, had met his fate in the same way.

Reasons for Efficiency.

Visitor: "You must have a remarkably efficient body of health in this town."

Shrewd native (one of many): "You are right about that, I can tell you."

"Composed of scientists, I presume?"

"No, sir. Scientists are too theoretical."

"Physicians, perhaps?"

"Not much. We don't allow doctors on our board of health—no, sir, nor undertakers, either."

"Hum! What sort of men have you chosen, then?"

"Life insurance agents."

A Considerate Monarch.

One of the most singular volumes extant is the manuscript diary of James I. It is preserved in the imperial library in Paris and is filled with reflections on the course he should have pursued in order to retain the English throne. He says in one place: "I did not retire from the battle of the Boyne from a sense of fear, but that I might preserve to the world a life that I felt was destined to future greatness."

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Iron " Top Filters,  
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