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AN OREGON FOREST-FIRE

BY JOAQUIN MILLER.

The flames leapt like some winged steed
That rides on fire in his flight—
They leapt from tossing top and height
Of rosin pine to fragrant fir—
They seemed to loose themselves, to whirl
Like sportive birds, and in their speed
Leap on in long advance, and dart
Red glances through the forest's heart.
The birds rose far, a feathered cloud,
And flew toward the cone of snow;
The fierce flame saw them, and he came,
Came leaping like some great third wave
Across the tossing tops of fire.
The flame leapt high, then high, then higher,
He sounded like some hollow cave,
He leapt like some mad steed, he neighed,
He laughed to see them fly, and lo!
His nostrils fanned the stars to flame.
He then drew back, then neighed aloud,
Then blew a breath that made a cloud,
Then breathed, then saw the birds once more,
Then leapt more furious than before,
And when he now careering came
With crash and crackle from the ground,
Like upward comet in a bound,
The cloud of feathers was aflame.

TWO MINUTES.

JOE WAS not half as good looking, but Jennie liked him a great deal better; and, indeed, it was only sometimes that, in a caprice, she fancied she liked Mark Maldon at all.

Joe Thurston was the driver and Mark Maldon the fireman of freight train No. 99, which stopped regularly all the year round at Redwood station, to let Lightning Express No. 70 pass.

No. 99 whistled at 10:55 p. m. invariably; at 11 Joe had Jennie in his arms, kissing her almost to death. This was, of course, after they were married.

Jennie lived in the only house, and kept the only store there was at Redwood, and all the company she had, after dark, was her old grandfather and the little dog—at least, till the train arrived, and then Joe and Mark made their appearance.

Thus the courting was done. Somehow, although each of Jennie's lovers kept a sharp eye on the other, yet both found opportunities to propose. She accepted Joe, and when she informed Mark next night what she had done, he turned pale, and then congratulated her, and when he got aboard his engine he was unsober.

It was the beginning of his ruin; and on the night Joe and Jennie were married—which was but a brief ceremony, as Joe was pressed for time—Mark was not in a condition to take his place on the train, and on the day following the company dispensed with his future services.

From that time Mark, as the expression is, went to the bad. His little savings he proceeded rapidly to drink up, and this dissipation made the usual changes, and soon, in appearance, manners, speech, and the rest, he was a different man.

Sometimes he dropped into the little shop, and more than once Jennie spoke to him in reproach, but with gentleness; and it was only when she perceived that those well meant reproaches made him a great deal worse that she ceased to offer them.

It is a terrible sight to see a human being sinking in the dark and dreadful pool in this way; but down, down he went, and no mortal hand could save him.

I don't know when or how it was, but by imperceptible degrees Jennie grew afraid of Mark Maldon. He had never uttered one word of love to her after her marriage, nor had he seemed to like her husband the less; but, somehow, whenever she saw Mark's white and swollen face coming in at the door, or beheld, in the distant wood, his bent and furtive figure gliding softly over the broken twigs and dry grass like a ghost, her heart felt a nervous pang, and she wished he would go away to live somewhere else—or (was it wicked?)—that he might even die and be at rest.

Matters went on much as usual till one evening in October, when, about ten o'clock, looking up from her sewing, Jennie beheld a pallid face at the window staring in at her intently.

Something jumped into her throat, and she could not stir or speak. But then the face went away, and presently the door opened and Mark came into the shop.

"Didn't know me?" he said, advancing and leaning across the counter. "I hope you are not frightened, Jennie. It was thoughtless of me; but I just wanted a peep at fireside comfort, a happy face to look at, and content sitting there, and I'd give something handsome to have a pretty wife waiting at the hearth for me; and, really, you mustn't mind my ravedropping, Jennie, will you?"

There was something mournful in his looks, voice, and words that touched her deeply; and this was the more noticeable from the fact that, for once, he was

entirely sober.

"Yes, Mark, you frightened me terribly; but it's gone now. Why don't you do better?—you know what I mean—and I am sure you will not find it hard to get the pretty wife and the domestic happiness both."

He shook his head.

"Too late. I've missed my trip. I don't blame anybody, though—only my luck, you know. Joe is due pretty soon now, isn't he?" He glanced at the clock and nodded, and then said: "I've felt awfully tired and cold all the evening, and—and lonesome. I don't believe I ever knew myself to be so lonely before," and he laughed in a melancholy way, fiddling at the same time with the scales on the counter. "And I declare," he went on, glancing round oddly, "this is such a pretty scene that it—it makes my heart ache, Jennie, to think that I have no share in it. The pleasant glow of the chimney corner for Joe, and the cold and snow for Mark! Such is fate, and a fellow oughtn't to complain, ought he?"

Jennie never felt so uncomfortable in her life. She was not afraid of him any longer; but she wished he would go. Still he stood there talking in the same melancholy strain, and at length came the shrill scream of the engine's whistle outside, and then, very soon after, entered Joe, smoky and all begrimed, but all smiles and good humor.

"Four minutes late," said Mark, glancing up at the clock.

"Yes, my fireman was taken sick at the cut above," said Joe, after kissing his wife, as usual, "and I made the run from the last station alone. I don't know what I'm to do—unless—by Jove! I just thought of it—I can get you to go with me, Mark."

"The company mightn't like it, Joe," said Mark, with the same strange depressed smile.

"In a case like this there's no choice. I can't keep my train here all night, and I can't go on without a fireman. Come, I'll take the responsibility and make it worth your while."

Jennie looked uneasy. Mark Maldon rubbed his hands together in a feeble, imbecile sort of way, hesitating.

"The company didn't treat me right," he replied; "but that wasn't your fault, Joe. Well, I'll help you out. I always do a friendly turn when I can."

"Good! There's the express now," added Joe, as the whistle of No. 70 sounded, and the train went thundering by.

"Let's get aboard at once I must make up for lost time."

"Very well, I'll just get my coat and be on the engine in two minutes," and Mark Maldon hurried out.

"Good-by, Jennie," said Joe, "I must be off."

"Joe," she hesitated, "I half wish you were not going to take that man!"

Joe started.

"Why?"

"I don't know. I don't feel quite satisfied."

"Pshaw, Jennie! Mark never harmed any one but himself, and he couldn't harm me if he wanted to. I guess I run the engine, don't I, little girl?"

"Please don't take him."

"And keep my train standing here all night, and be discharged to-morrow morning? Nonsense! I must clear the track, darling. You forget that there's another express yet. You don't want a collision, do you? Good-by, Jennie, darling."

"Take care of yourself, Joe," she said, very pale and trembling, and almost trying to detain him.

"Don't leave your engine a minute."

"I never do. Against the rules."

A few minutes later, freight No. 99 was on its way, Joe at his accustomed post, and Mark in his old office of fireman.

"Now, what's the instructions, Joe?" said Mark, much more cheerfully, his spirits rising with the speed they were making as they tore along through the dismal night.

"Well, we go on as hard as we can till we reach Clear Spring, and there we pull over to the south siding and let No. 80 express pass, and then we have the right of way all the rest of the route."

"After Clear Spring there is no siding till we reach Apsley Junction, seven miles beyond?"

"None. We wait sixteen minutes if necessary, at Clear Spring," replied Joe, decisively.

"All right. By-the-way, I haven't had a drink to-day. I brought a flask along," said Mark, producing the article and unscrewing the top, which formed a cup.

"Take a nip. Cold night; won't hurt you."

Joe shook his head.

"I never touch it when I'm on duty."

"Once and away won't hurt you, Joe. It's good stuff, and won't do you any harm."

"Well, perhaps one drink won't hurt your health!"

He drank. Three minutes afterward he was as incapable of exercising his faculties as if he had swallowed a quart. His brain reeled, his sight became dim,

his limbs relaxed, and he fell helpless upon the bench built against the side of the cab.

A lurid triumph filled the eyes of Mark Maldon. He flung the bottle out of the window, and seized the handle that governed the movement of the locomotive.

"I have owed you a long debt, Joe," he shouted above the roar of the wheels, "and now I can pay it with compound interest! You took everything from me and made me what I am, and now fate gives me my revenge!"

Joe was incapable of moving, but his senses in some degree still remained.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped.

"You shall see."

The wretch pulled the lever, and the engine leaped suddenly as a horse bounds when pricked with a spur. Every pound of steam she could bear with safety from instantaneous explosion was put on, and the train dashed forward at lightning speed.

"Remember Clear Spring siding," gasped Joe, hardly conscious.

"I shall remember to pass it," yelled Mark, with demonic joy, above the clatter and crashing of such mighty machinery. "I looked into your home to-night, Joe Thurston, and saw your happiness, and then I asked myself where was my home and where my happiness? I saw your wife—the woman I loved, and of whom you robbed me. It was a comfortable reflection—all that love and peace for you, all the shame and despair for me! My chance to get even came before I dreamed of it. You are in my power now, and I'll use it. We both die to-night."

He stooped and seized Thurston's watch.

"Every minute brings us nearer to death. Ha, ha! We are at Clear Spring already," he cried, glancing out; "but we don't stop. No, no! We go on till we smash into the express, and be ground to atoms."

This horrible design seemed to sober Joe somewhat. He at last comprehended it.

"My God, Mark, have mercy!" he groaned. "Think of my poor wife. Reverse the engine or we are lost."

"I do think of your wife, and that nerves me to go to my death smiling and joyously, because you go along with me," returned the fiend. "More steam, more steam, if we blow up! What care I?"

He turned to the coal tender. There was a flash in his face, a report rang out, and he tottered and dropped down among the wheels. Something hot spurted upward—blood—and the train jolted.

A woman clambered down from among the coal. It was Jennie, pale as death, revolver in hand.

"You, Jennie, or is it fancy?" moaned poor Joe.

"It is I, Joe. I distrusted that man, you remember, and before the train left, I armed myself and sprang on the last car. You made such speed that I have been all this time getting here; I wasn't used to running on along the roofs, you know, and leaping from one car to another; but here I am, and just in time, Joe."

"God bless you, darling; but I fear it is too late. Where is my watch?"

"That villain took it with him when he dropped under the wheels. What is to be done?"

"We must go on just as we are going now. If we can't reach Apsley Junction before the express, we are lost."

And so they still tore on through the murky night, plunging deathward with every second.

Jennie looked steadily ahead.

"A lantern, Joe."

"A lantern!" he cried, trying to rise. "It is the switchman at Apsley Junction!"

At the same instant both heard the wailing and ominous scream of a whistle.

"It is the express approaching at the other end!" shouted Joe, with the sudden energy of despair. "If we have two minutes in our favor we are saved!—What is the color of the lantern, Jennie, darling?"

"Red, and he waves it up and down—He is running across the track."

"Sound the whistle four times!" Joe screamed. "It is the signal to switch us off!"

She knew how. Three shrieking blasts and a long concluding wail! The watchman had set his lantern down. One minute!

Over the rails they jumped, and were safe on the siding. With a rusty groan the switchman closed the switch. A flash and a yell, and express No. 80 had safely passed.

Both trains were secure. Two minutes!

"Kiss me, Joe—no danger now," she whispered. He caught her just in time, for she had fainted. Already he had reversed the engine, and the train was standing still.

The old switchman, with his lantern came hobbling over.

"You whistled in the nick of time," he said, tremulously. "There was only

two minutes between you and eternity, my man!"

"Two minutes," said Joe, "and a woman's loving heart!"

And that was true.

THE HORSE DEALER'S STORY.

MANY YEARS ago, before the era of railroads, and when highwaymen abounded along the great routes from Calais to Paris, a noted drover, who had been to Boulogne with a large drove of horses, which he had sold for cash, was overtaken by night on his return, near Marquise. He remembered that a little distance ahead was a quiet inn he had never stopped at, and he determined to spend the night there.

As he rode up to the house, the landlord, a respectable looking person, received his horse and led him away to the stable, while he invited the drover to enter the public sitting-room.

Here he found two young men, one of whom, from his resemblance to the landlord, he recognized as his son; the other, somewhat older, from his manners, appeared also to belong to the family. Immediately after supper (during which the drover stated where he had been and what good luck he had met with) the son mounted a horse, and stating that he was going to Marquise to stay all night, rode off. The drover, having looked after the comfort of his horse, soon after requested the landlord to show him to his room.

As the traveler slipped off his garments, he felt for the leather belt about his waist, to see that it was secure. This contained his gold, while his paper money was in a large wallet, carried in a pocket made for the purpose, in the inside of his vest. Depositing these articles beneath his pillow, he extinguished the light and threw himself upon the bed, when, overcome by weariness, he soon fell asleep.

How long he had been in this state of forgetfulness he could not tell, when he was aroused to wakefulness by the sound of some person endeavoring to open the window near the head of the bed. At the same time he heard suppressed voices without, as of several persons in whispered consultation.

Startled by this suspicious appearance of things, the drover reached toward the chair on which he had thrown his clothes, for his weapons; but to his dismay, he remembered that on his arrival, when preparing to wash off the dust of his journey, he had laid them aside, within the bar, and had neglected to resume them.

Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, the defenseless drover slipped from the foot of the bed, and hid himself in the darkness behind a lot of women's dresses suspended from the wall, and watched the motions of a man who was now slowly and cautiously entering the room. He even fancied he could detect the reflection of the dim light upon an upraised knife as the man approached the bed with staggering and uncertain steps. But great was his relief when, instead of an attempt at murder, the intruder carelessly shuffled off his clothes, and throwing himself into the bed he had just vacated, was soon in a sound sleep.

Not knowing what to make of this strange affair, the drover determined to dress himself, call up the landlord, and have this singular intrusion explained. He had reached his clothes, and slipped on his trousers, and was moving toward the door, when steps were heard cautiously crossing the outer room. Once more he sought the shelter of the dresses, which completely screened his person, and awaited the entrance of the persons, whoever they might be. Presently the door of the room was silently opened, and two men made their appearance. It was not so dark but that the drover could readily distinguish them to be the innkeeper and the man he had seen at the table.

"Step lightly, I tell you," whispered the landlord, "or you'll wake him up, and then we'll have a pretty mess on our hands."

"Nonsense!" replied the other, with an oath. "You are scared, old man."

"Scared!" repeated the first speaker. "No man ever told Jean Garnier before he was scared. Here, give me the knife. I'll show you who is scared. You secure the money—it's under the pillow—I saw him put it there, and I'll do the rest."

The old man was in advance, and as he stood between the window and the drover, the latter could see his form bent over the bed, while his hand seemed to be searching beneath the pillow.

"Here, Henri—take it. Here's the wallet, and there's the belt. How heavy it is!" and he passed the money to his companion before the other had yet reached the bedside.

The old man put his hand in his bosom, and the trembling drover saw him draw forth the long blade the other had given him. For an instant the murderer's weapon was poised over his head, and then descended upon the person of the poor wretch in the bed.

The murderer paused in his work for an instant, as if to satisfy himself that life was extinct; and then moved quickly from the room.

As soon as the sound of his footsteps had died in the distance, the horror-stricken drover escaped through the window, and ran with all his speed to Marquise, where, arousing the people of the hotel, he told his fearful story. A crowd soon collected about him, and accompanied him to the fearful murderer.

All about the house was still, but on approaching the barn a light was discovered within; and, moving noiselessly to the door, and peering through the cracks, the two murderers were found in the act of digging a grave beneath the floor. A rush was made upon them, and they were arrested.

At the sight of the drover, who was the first to confront the guilty wretches, the landlord uttered a shriek of terror, and fell to the ground, while his accomplice, as pale as a corpse, gazed upon him with a fright, not doubting it was the ghost of the murdered man who stood before him.

The party now proceeded to the house, dragging the murderers after them.

Lights were procured, and still keeping their prisoners with them, the people entered the room where lay the body of the man so strangely murdered instead of the horse dealer. The wife and daughter followed.

When the covering was removed from the face of the corpse, and the full light of the candles flared upon it, a wild cry burst from the lips of the landlord's wife.

"My son—my murdered son! Who has done this?"

And with a hysterical scream she fell to the floor.

"No, no! it can't be so, mother!" exclaimed the daughter, as she struggled to reach the bed. But the terrible truth burst upon her as her eyes fell upon the mangled form of her brother, and she also swooned upon the body.

The cries of the broken hearted females seemed to arouse the old man for a moment; and gazing wildly at the sight before him, he also realized the terrible truth. He had murdered his own son!

On investigating the facts before the magistrate on the following day, it was ascertained that the son of the innkeeper, who was a dissipated young man, had visited Marquise the previous evening, where, with some of his associates, he had been engaged in drinking and gambling till a late hour; and being too much intoxicated to remount his horse, and ashamed to meet his family, some of his fellow gamblers had accompanied him home; and supposing the room in which the drover had been put to be vacant, they had assisted the drunken man into the window. It was their voices the lodger had heard; and thus it was that the hapless youth met his death and our friend escaped.

The accomplice of the landlord proved to be his own son-in-law, Henri Legend.

From that awful hour the wretched mother of that murdered boy, murdered by his father's hand, remained a raving maniac.

It is only necessary to add, in concluding this tale of horror, that the drover recovered his money; and justice, claiming her due, the two murderers paid the penalty of their crime upon the guillotine. Shortly after this last event, the people of Marquise, to whom the scene of the unnatural murder had become an eyecore, assembled and leveled the building to the ground. The spot is now covered with brambles and thistles, and pointed out to the stranger as the place to be avoided; for the ignorant assert that it is haunted by the ghost of the murdered son.

An old lady possessed of a large fortune, and noted for her penchant for the use of figurative expressions, one day assembled her grandchildren, when the following conversation took place:

"My children," said the old lady, "I'm the root and your the branches."

"Grandma," said one.

"What, my child?"

"I was thinking how much better the branches would flourish if the root was under ground."

A dandy was one evening in company with a young lady, and observing her kiss her favorite poodle, he advanced and begged the like favor, remarking that she ought to have as much charity for him as she had shown the dog. "Sir," said the belle, "I never kissed my dog when he was a puppy." The fellow took the hint and was off instantly.

People tell the story of a man who called at the house of a neighbor, half a mile from his own house, early in the morning, and after the usual salutation seated himself on a chair, and on being asked to eat some breakfast, answered, "No, I don't suppose I ought to stop, for my house is on fire, and they sent me to tell you."

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A difficult look to pick—One from a bald head.