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What a Woman Did.

BARSTOW'S SIDING is a small station on the G. S. and Western Railway, and located out on the prairie at the edge of a bit of scrubby woods.

Old Sam Britton, station master, sat by the stove in the middle of the switch-house idly looking at the dull-red coals in the ugly stove. His daughter Mary, about nineteen, sat by the little telegraph apparatus near the window that looked out down the line.

Her father had let fall the paper he was reading. He could not read, for a bitter disappointment kept his mind harassed and troubled. How long was this default of payment to the employees of the railway to continue?

Suddenly, far away on the sea-like horizon, arose a star. The young girl's eyes were on the paper, and yet she saw it rising. She looked out of the curtainless window and watched the star growing bright.

Then came a far away sound through the night. She pulled the bar forward; far down the track the switch moved in the dark, and a great green eye became red.

Samson Gilder sat on his high seat with one hand on the throttle-valve, gazing steadily ahead. A constellation of green and yellow stars had sprung up in his horizon.

The men reluctantly went out to their train, and the lovers met to part at the door. Her eyes were bright with ill-suppressed tears.

"It seems so very long to wait—and all for a little money."

"I know it, dear; yet when the company do pay us we shall have all the more."

Nearer and nearer came the great yellow star that had sprung up in the horizon. From far came the long wailing sound of the express whistle.

lovely in the glow of the great lamp against the sky. It may have been the peculiar effect of the light, it may have been love, for love has finer eyes than unloving mortals.

They came into the switch-house together; she smiling and happy, he pleased and gratified, yet with a shade of care upon his face. In his hand he held a new tracklayer's bar, such as may be used to draw spikes from ties.

"There's a bar for the section-master. I bought it myself. The company seems to be too poor to give its men fit tools—"

"To say nothing of our wages," added the old man, roughly.

"Oh, father, why do you harp on that? The company has a great deal of property. It will surely pay us our dues."

The engineer placed the bar against the wall by the door and then turned to Mary. She led him away to her little desk by the window, and there they sat down together. Presently Jack Cinder and one or two of the train men came and sat down by the stove.

Then one of the brakemen said: "And the president is racing around the country in a drawing-room car."

"I wish he might get tumbled into the ditch," said a deep voice that startled them all.

"Oh, Samson, how can you say that?" said Mary's tremulous tones.

"Because I'm mad. Here we can't—" He stopped and the girl blushed scarlet. "The president can make excursions over the line and disarrange time tables, and yet we are two months waiting for our pay. I think—"

He stopped and looked toward the door; a hideous creature stood before them—a tramp, foot-sore, hungry and homeless, had found the door unclashed and wandered in looking for shelter. The station-master let the man come in and stand by the stove to warm himself, for he was very cold, and the talk was continued in whispers.

Suddenly there came the sound of a distant whistle. The station master looked at the switch bars to see that all was right, and Samson Gilder rose and said:

"That's William's train. I'll go out and wave him a friendly light."

The sound of the approaching freight train came nearer, and the engineer took the lantern from the desk and went out. The others fell into silence as the rumbling train crept past the door. The young girl stared at the head-light in sorrowful silence, hoping, thinking, wishing.

Taking advantage of the noise, the tramp shuffled away toward the door. Just as he reached it he looked hastily around the room, and then slyly took up the tracklayer's bar and vanished. His presence had been a burden, and they paid no heed to his departure.

"The special is in sight, boys. We must be off," he said.

The men reluctantly went out to their train, and the lovers met to part at the door. Her eyes were bright with ill-suppressed tears.

"It seems so very long to wait—and all for a little money."

"I know it, dear; yet when the company do pay us we shall have all the more."

Nearer and nearer came the great yellow star that had sprung up in the horizon. From far came the long wailing sound of the express whistle. The lovers heard it, and held each a tighter clasp. The tracks before the door began to sing. The monster came on in a frightful fury. Sparks shot up in fountains from its stack. The ground quivered, the windows shook.

Ah! a despairing scream from the whistle. An earthquake?

Some one rushed past the girl. She clasped the door for support, not knowing what happened, and looked out into the gloomy night, stunned and terrified.

There was nothing—nothing save a vast cloud of dust, white and ghostly. Ah! a gleam of light. It shone through the curtain of dust as it drifted before the wind. There were hurrying footsteps, cries for help and groans. The dust disappeared, and the end of an overturned car stood out in the bright light. The wreck grew in horrid proportions. Ah! it was on fire.

It is a peculiar feature of American life that new and unexpected circumstances are always met and controlled by a spirit of organization that creates out of the men and material at hand the mastery of events. In half an hour after the first crash, as the train left the metals, the frightened passengers were comfortably housed in the empty cars of the freight train.

Darkness and silence fell on the lonely way station, and, save where the black wreck lifted its mangled bones against the sky, there was nothing to mark the disaster except the pale faces of the men who gathered around the stove in the switch-house. For a long time nothing was said. There are times when speaking seems impertinent.—Events become too big for words. At last one of the men spoke and said:

"They did say it was the president who was killed in the forward sleeper."

Mary Britton glanced at Samson Gilder. He was silent and self-absorbed, and his face gave no indication that he heeded this remark. At that moment the door opened and Jack Cinder came in, bringing in his hand a new tracklayer's bar. He brought it to the light and held it before them all.

"Do you see that, boys? I found it under the broken sleeper. It's a new bar, and—"

The men looked at the bar a moment in apparent indifference, and said nothing. The keener feminine mind sprang to intuitive conclusions. Her thoughts leaped from a terror to defense in a minute of time.

"It was the tramp. He stole the bar and wrecked the train."

"Mebbe he did, and mebbe he didn't. This I do know. Samson Gilder was a-wishing the president into the ditch. This is his bar, and he was out on the line just before it happened."

The coroner's jury called to consider the death of Thomas Starmore and others, killed at Barstow's Siding on the night of the 24th of February, met at the switch-house and heard the evidence of the persons who were known to have been present at the time of the disaster. Even the tramp had been captured. He was seen prowling in the woods near the line, and had been caught by the section-master and his men. Every one said the tramp did it, but the tramp had in his hand another bar, just like the one found under the train. He admitted having stolen the bar from the railway company. He had seen the disaster from the woods, and had run away, lest he be caught. After some time he had come back to find the bar he had dropped in the woods in his flight. He had the bar with him when caught. He could prove all this, because the bar was rusty from lying in the snow.

The reporters of the Centreville papers who were present called Mary Britton to the telegraph that a message might be despatched. One of them placed a paper before her: "A tramp has been found who admits having stolen the bar, but it is plain that he did not use it. All the evidence goes to show that the engineer wrecked the train, out of spite to the president."

These words Mary Britton sent off by wire to the whole United States, while her lover sat near, already in the

shadow of advancing calamity. The operators who read off these words in distant cities heard every word distinctly, little knowing the terrible trial under which they were despatched. Never in after life did she forget that message.

"Gentlemen," said the coroner, "this case seems to warrant me in referring the whole matter to the grand jury for further examination."

Weeks passed, and then the trial came on at the court-house at Centreville. Samson Gilder had been committed to answer a charge of wilfully wrecking a train.

Mary Britton lived years in those few weeks. She could not believe that Samson had committed so great a wrong. Yet everything was against him. Tracklayers' bars were abundant enough. He could easily have found one about the place, and with it have drawn the spikes from a rail. Her mind went backward and forward over this a hundred times in search of something to prove him innocent. She still attended to her duties at the station, sending and receiving messages. One morning, as she sat thinking bitterly of the sorrow which had invaded her life, her eyes fell upon an old newspaper fallen under her desk, the Iron Trade Review. She picked it up, opened it, and turned to the second page. Ah! why had she forgotten those pictures! Strange black figures, etchings of iron, nature-printed. Given this slight clue, her mind leaped to a brave resolve. She would bring science to her lover's rescue; how, she could not tell. She had a vague idea of what might be done, and, asking her father to attend to the telegraph, she ran hastily out on the line and down the road toward the village. Stopping at a certain little house, she found a young girl who was a good operator, and at once hired her to take her place at the station.

Before night she had taken every dollar she had in the world from the savings bank, and was on her way to the city. The cars seemed to drag too slowly. Why had she lingered so long and Samson in danger?

The day of the trial came on. All the testimony that we knew and much more of less importance had been offered by the prosecution. The defense set up the previous good character of the prisoner, and that seemed all that could be said. Mary Britton had given her testimony early in the trial; she had more to say, but was not yet ready to speak. All the morning she had sat in the crowded court-room, watching the clock and waiting for one brave defender to come to her assistance. At the last moment she spoke to the counsel and asked for a slight delay. There might be yet other witnesses. The defense began to talk against time, and a messenger was sent to hasten the lagging aid.

The knight arrived. A pale, thin-faced young man in glasses appeared and demanded to give his testimony. Behind him came a mysterious array—men with strange tools, lanterns of singular construction, bars and rods of iron, and a number of gentlemen who seemed to be prosperous merchants and manufacturers. There came also a German Jew and a farmer from Barstow's. The young man spoke to Mary Britton with the utmost deference, and she consulted him for a moment and then presented him to Samson's counsel.

There was a slight murmur of surprise at this demonstration, and then Samuel Mayer was duly sworn. He testified that he was an expert in metals. He had examined the bar found under the wrecked car, and was prepared to prove that though it was used in wrecking the train, it was not the one purchased by Samson Gilder. With the permission of the court, he would like to have the room darkened, and with the aid of a lantern he might project some nature-printed pictures of the iron used in making the bar.

The prosecution objected. What scientific jugglery was this? The old lantern dodge familiar in cases of forgery. The court overruled the objection, and the young man produced some pieces of cloth, which his assistants spread over the windows till the room became quite dark. A gas jet was lighted, and in the dim light other men set up a screen and lime-light lantern as for lantern projections. In a wonderfully short time there appeared on the white screen a

strange figure—a cloud or blotch of blackness.

Samuel Mayer then testified that at the request of Miss Britton he had planned one side of each of the two bars till a smooth surface had been obtained. A portion of this surface on each bar had then been etched with acid, and from this etching had been obtained nature-printed copies of prints in ink. This well-known method of etching gave prints showing the disposition of the particles of the metal and also its quality. These etchings and a number of others taken from other bars and rods made by the different iron makers of the country, had been photographed for lantern projections, and, with the permission of the court, some of these would be exhibited to the jury. The projection now on the screen was from the bar purchased by Gilder and stolen by the tramp.

Every eye was fixed on the singular picture on the screen, and a murmur of applause filled the room. Suddenly the picture was removed and another put in its place. It did not require much attention to show that this represented an entirely different sort of metal.

"This, gentlemen," said the young man, "is a nature-printed etching from the iron bar found under the car. I have compared these two etchings with a number of others obtained in the same way from bars made by all the iron men in the country, and I find this one corresponds exactly with the etchings of the Moorlow Iron Company's metal. My assistant will place a sample of the company's iron beside this."

At once, another picture sprang up beside the one on the screen. The two were alike.

Another witness took the stand—the president of the Moorlow Iron Company. He testified to the facts of the experiments and to the results that had been obtained.

Another witness was called—the buyer of the railroad company. He testified that the company had never used the Moorlow Company's iron. The bar Gilder bought had been obtained of Ross, Duncan & Co., of Pittsburgh, from whom the railroad bought all its tools.

Another etching was projected, then another. The two were exactly alike.

"The picture on the right," said Mayer, "is Ross & Duncan's iron. That on the left is the etching shown first, and obtained from the bar purchased by Gilder."

The judge rapped smartly on the desk. This applause could not be permitted again. The daylight was readmitted and the picture faded away. Photographs of the etchings were handed to the jurors and the various samples of iron from which the etchings had been obtained were exhibited.

Samson Gilder sat with face averted. How could he deserve such love? It was too divine a gift. Why had he not known of the mastery of mind and will that could accomplish such results, and all for him? He did not deserve so great a blessing.

Some one else was testifying. A farmer living at Barstow had passed a man on the road, just before the accident, who muttered to himself:

"I'll have my revenge whoever may suffer."

Abraham Samuels testified that he had bought the old junk and refuse from the wreck, and had found a coat much torn, probably belonging to a passenger. In the coat was a part of a threatening letter addressed to "John Morley."

"He was killed in the wreck," said Mary Britton, eagerly.

"Silence! Let the witness proceed." This letter threatened John Morley with death for some past injury, and warned of impending disaster. It was signed "Fred Smythe."

There was a sudden movement at the end of the court, and every one turned to see what it meant. A man was pushing roughly out of the seats, as if eager to escape.

"By sixty!" said the farmer from Barstow, "that is the feller I saw jest afore the smash."

"It was a remarkable case," said the judge to his colleague, after the trial. "The woman must have been a person of extraordinary mind to have planned the scheme, and to have won all those scientific people over to her side. I understand she had no money, and could pay them nothing. Women will do anything for love."