

"When Letty had scarce passed her third glad year. And her young artless words began to flow. One day we gave the child a color'd sphere Of the wide earth, that she might mark and know."

CHASED BY THE FIRE.

In the coal regions of Pennsylvania there are railroads called "gravity roads," over which long trains run without the aid of locomotives.

The tracks are laid on a gentle incline, till they come to steep ascending planes, where stationary engines are placed, either at the head or foot of the slope. Here strong iron ropes are attached to the cars, and draw them to the top of the hills, when they again can run down on the other side, controlled only by brakemen, till other elevations are reached.

These roads have two tracks, not parallel, but sometimes a mile or two apart. The one on which the loaded cars pass is called the "heavy," and the other, where the empty cars return, the "light track." They are built along the sides of the mountains, where the eye a grand sweep over board and beautiful landscapes. Then, gently descending, they follow the mountain curves, sometimes hating over deep ravines, and sometimes dashing through dense forests, where the trees form an unbroken shade over the track.

In the Spring of 1875, John Ward, the hero of this story, was brakeman on one of the coal trains. During that Spring, this part of the country was visited by an unusual drouth. Day after day the sun rose clear, and ran its course over a cloudless sky. But at length a veil gathered over the landscape, through which the sun shone a dull red disk.

The people said that forest fires were raging in the lumber districts north. Near the close of day in the month of May, Ward and two other brakemen, in charge of an empty train, noticed a cloud of smoke at the head of the plane next above them. As they ran down to the engine-house, which was here at the foot of the slope, they inquired if the woods were on fire, but were told that they could shoot by without danger.

The men resolved to try. But when they reached the top of the plane, they saw they had no time to lose. The fire was rushing towards them, and they could feel its hot breath. Loosening the brakes, they stepped down the track with covered faces and suspended breath.

But a few moments sufficed to carry them out of danger, as they supposed. The road then wound round a curve of two miles through dense pine forest. Josh and Dan, the two companions, congratulated themselves on their escape; but Ward felt anxious lest this was but the beginning of their troubles. His home was in the middle of the woods some miles further down; and for the first time he realized what a terrible foe fire might be.

Ward had these thoughts passed through his mind, when he again reached the curve, and there before them was the fire crossing their path. They had gone so far down the plane that they felt they had but a few minutes to return, while there was yet a chance, to the engine-house at the foot of the slope.

But on rounding the curve again, they saw their dismay, that the fire had reached the track behind them, and was aridly burning on both sides. All chance of retreat was cut off. But the forest where they stood was cool and green, and the undergrowth so luxuriant and damp that it did not seem possible that it could burn.

The next moment, however, a burning twig lodged in one of the tall trees near them, and lighting the pine needles, darted out a tongue of flame.

The men now saw that they must push their way through the fire in front or perish. With hearts trembling with fear, they shook off the brakes, and were about to rush down the burning track, when a woman started out from the trees, dragging a little boy by the hand, and screamed to them to stop.

"What do you want with us?" cried the boy, "and take us in?"

Josh McCling shouted back: "We can't possibly," and pointing to a tall tree left standing in the clearing ahead, against which cord-wood had been piled, and which was already in flames, he cried: "We must get out of here, and save our lives!"

Ward pressed down the brake, and ordered the others to do the same, saying: "Would you leave a woman and her child to be burned like rats in a barn?"

"Don't you see we must get by that tree before it falls across the track?" cried McCling in a rage.

"I know," replied Ward, sternly; "but they shall go with us, or we'll all perish together. Quick, quick, my woman! we've no time to lose!"

He dared not leave the front of the train to help her, for he knew the other men, in their fright, would raise the brakes and desert them.

She struggled forward, but when almost up to the cars, she stumbled and fell. With a bound, Ward sprang to her side, lifted her, and handed her to Josh McCling, who stood in the rear of the train, and who, with a firm hand, pushed her down the brake, and ordered the others to do the same, saying: "Would you leave a woman and her child to be burned like rats in a barn?"

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In a moment more he opened the door on a bright family picture. The table was set, and his children were gathered round it, except the little twins, who were all ready in their cribs, while in the midst of them sat the old grandmother, smiling placidly at their lively chatter.

Ward gave Mrs. Stacey a seat, and placed the boy on her lap; then, after introducing her to his mother, he asked anxiously for his wife.

She was in the kitchen, looking tired and worried. He saw this, as he began in a low tone to explain to her who their visitor was, and her claims upon their hospitality.

But in a loud angry voice she interrupted him, saying, "Now, John that's just like you—taking the food and clothing from your own family to give to beggars. Here I am slavin' and worryin' from mornin' to night to take care of these children and your old mother, yet you bring me two more ye've plucked up, and expect me to feed and provide for them!"

"But, wife, I couldn't leave the poor woman to perish in the flames, or remain homeless and superfluous this chilly night."

Mrs. Ward was not a heartless woman. She was thrifty, and anxious to get ahead, and had much to try her. It distressed her to find that she could not do as she pleased, and she could, she could hardly keep John out of debt. Just then she laid it all to her husband's charity to others. Therefore, seeing only her side of the argument, she said to her husband:

"Why must you always be saddled with such people? They see you are easily imposed upon, and so we have to bear the consequences."

Mrs. Stacey could not help hearing the conversation. Putting down her child, she walked to the kitchen door, and opening it, said, in a faltering tone:

"Mrs. Ward, I'm no begger. This morning I was my own home. This afternoon the fire came and I had to flee before it. My house and everything in it were burned to ashes. Mr. Ward saved my life and my boy's at a risk I don't dare think of. May the Lord reward him for his kindness. He asked me to his house to pass the night, but I'll not stay where I'm not wanted, nor be the cause of strife. May the devious flames never leave you as homeless and friendless as they have left me."

These words touched Mrs. Ward. As Mrs. Stacey turned away, she sprang towards her and said, earnestly:

"Oh, forgive me! I did not think what you had done. You shall stay, and I'll give you the best of the house. Come, let's all sit down to tea. Then, John you must tell us everything about the fire and your escape."

She turned pale and trembled as she listened to his account of the fearful risks they had run.

"John," asked his old mother, "will the fire reach us?"

"I think not. It is not spreading in this direction, and I trust we are perfectly safe."

Yet with fear in their hearts, that night, before retiring, John Ward and his wife went out and climbed a high rock, near the house, where they could see the danger threatened. But around them was only the green, dewy night, and above, the clear, peaceful starlight. Feeling relieved, they sought the rest both so much needed.

The next morning, a messenger came to the village to say the fire was spreading with rapidity, and that help was needed to fight the track.

The men of the village responded to the call, and all day and nearly all night, in company with the larger force, they fought the fire with great exertion.

But, fanned by a strong west wind, although baffled and driven back at one point, like an unrelenting foe, the fire pushed forward its columns in another, and often, before the ground was reached, the flames of the battle turned, and themselves almost surrounded by the flames.

Ward at last became alarmed for the safety of his family, and returned home. He found the excitement prevailing in the village. The fire had attacked the other side of the mountain, and they feared it would sweep over and come down upon them.

Ward saw that the wind was still carrying the flames in an opposite direction, yet he led his wife to dress the children in thick, woolen garments, so they might be prepared for any emergency. Then, completely exhausted, he lay down to rest.

He had slept but a few hours when Mrs. Stacey came running in, with a report from the lower houses that the fire was approaching from another point. They were in danger of being hemmed in, and must make their escape at once.

Old Mrs. Ward begged her son to leave her, urging that her life was nearly ended, at best, and that she would only retard their flight.

But the two children, and catching up the two trunks, while his wife took the rest of the household goods, they all started to follow the rest of the inhabitants. Mrs. Stacey had taken the baby and with her own little boy was already in the street.

For over a mile the old mother walked, aided as much as possible by her son; but of necessity, their progress was slow. The exertion proved too much for her. She sank to the ground exhausted. Her son assisted her to rise, and urged her to make an effort to keep up a little longer; but she begged him to leave her and save the rest of the family.

The flames were crawling nearer. They could hear the cracking and crash of the great trees as they fell. He tried to persuade the children to run on by his side; but terrified by the awful scene, they clung screaming to him, and refused to move. For a time, in his advance, he tried to carry them all.

But the fire was advancing so rapidly, he saw that he must abandon his mother, or the whole family perish. She now earnestly pleaded with him, for the sake of the little ones, to put her down and flee for his life. She was not afraid to meet death. It would be but a moment's pang, then heavenly joy forever.

They could bear. For they hardly dared hope that they would escape alive. From this position they were aroused by the oldest boy shouting: "Oh father, the sky is on fire, too!"

Ward looked up and saw a broad flash of lightning, set out of a dark cloud that was rising rapidly in the west.

"Thank God!" he cried, "the rain is coming at last!"

Soon the heavens were overcast. The lightning darted wick and forth, heavy thunder overhead, the increasing wind fanned the flames below till they raged with redoubled fury as if seeming to realize that their power would soon be gone. Then came the blessed rain, not a gentle shower, but in heavy torrents, that poured incessantly on the hissing steaming forests, till they lay drenched beneath it.

John Ward drew his family close under the rocks to keep them dry, but caught in his hat the cool drops to quench their thirst. As the night wore on and the violence of the storm passed by, they all found some rest, save the mother, who mourned for her mother as she lay weeping.

The next day dawned clear and beautiful, the air washed pure from blinding smoke, and as soon as they had risen and thanked God for his mercy, they started to make their way back to the settlements.

It was a tedious, difficult journey. When almost back to the site of their old home they heard voices approaching. Ward went to see, and found a crowd of men.

In a few moments, a dozen of his companions gathered round, congratulating him on his escape, and anxious to hear his story. They had just started in search of them; but as they saw the wide sweep the fire had taken their fears for their safety were greater than their hopes.

John Ward and his wife now found that the kind acts done for these neighbors in the past were returning, for many days. They had bread cast upon the waters. The men lifted the children in their arms, and all proceeded to the homes that had escaped the fire. Here each went with the other in making them feel their escape, they started to make their way back to the settlements.

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any reply to the gallant, straightforward speech, in which her lover had risked his all of hope.

"He ought to do penance for the pretty way he managed his tongue. He's all together too calm to suit me." And Sophie shook her curly head meaningly, holding her fan before her for a screen. Did she forget what he had been saying? "I wonder if I could snore the way Uncle Jones used to in church?" she soliloquized. "Wouldn't it be fun? and wouldn't it plague Harry, if he thought I had been asleep while he was talking?"

Sophie's blue eye danced with suppressed merriment as she gave two or three hearty breathings, and followed them up with a nasal explosion worthy of an orthodox deacon. It was well done—and theatrically done—and poor Harry sprang bolt upright, surprised, mortified, and charged. Humane nature could stand it no longer, and Sophie gave vent to her mirth in a burst of triumphant laughter.

"You little witch—you mischief—you spirit of evil!" exclaimed the relieved Harry as he sprang to her side and caught her by the arm with a grip which made her scream. "You deserve a shaking for your behavior!" Then lowering his voice he added, gravely:

"Will you never have done tormenting me? If you love me can you not be generous enough to tell me so, and if you do not, am I not at least worthy of a candid refusal?"

Words sprang to Sophie's lips that would have done credit to her womanly nature, for the whole depth of her being was stirred and drawn toward him as never before had been toward any man.

But she could not quite give up her rafter then. She would go one step farther from him ere she laid her hand in his, and tell him he was dearer to her than all the world besides. So she checked the tender response that trembled on her tongue and flinging off his grasp, with a mocking gesture and a ringing laugh, darted across the room to the piano.

So she seated herself, ran her fingers gracefully over the keys, and broke out in a wild, brilliant, defiant song, that made her listener's ears tingle as he stood watching her, and choking back the indignant words that came crowding to his lips for utterance.

"Sophie, listen to me!" said at length, as she paused from sheer exhaustion. "Is it generous—is it just to trifle with me—to turn into ridicule the emotion of a heart that offers to you the most reverent affections? I have loved you, because beneath this volatile surface character of yours, I thought I saw truthfulness and simplicity, purity of soul, and a warm current of tender, womanly feelings that would bathe with blessings the whole life of him whose hand was so fortunate as to touch its secret springs. You are an heiress, and I only a poor student; but it is that the reason why you treat me so scornfully, you are less the noble woman that I thought you."

Sophie's head was averted, and a suspicious moisture glistened in her eyes as Harry ceased speaking. Ah! why is it that we sometimes hold our highest happiness so lightly—carrying it carelessly in our hands, as though it were but dross, staking it all upon an idle caprice.

Then she turned her countenance toward him again, the same mocking light was in her eyes, the same coquettish smile breathed from her lips.

"Speaking of heiresses," said Sophie, "there's Helen Myrtle, whose father is worth twice as much as mine. Perhaps you had better transfer your attentions to her, Mr. Ainslee. The difference in our dowries would no doubt be quite an inducement, and possibly she might consider your case more seriously than I should."

Like an insulted prince, Harry Ainslee stood up before her—the hot fiery indignation blood dashed in a fierce torrent over his face—his arms crossed tightly upon his breast, as if to keep his heart from bursting with uprising indignation—his lips compressed and his dark eyes flashing.

Not till he had gone—gone without a single word of explanation, leaving only a grave "good-bye" and the memory of his pale face to plead for him—did the thoughtless girl wake to a realization of what she had done. Then a quick, terrible fear shot through her heart, and she would have given every curl on her brown head to have him beside her one short moment longer.

"Pshaw! what am I afraid of! He will be back again within twenty-four hours and as impudently as ever," she muttered to herself, as the street door closed after him; yet with a sigh that was half a sob, followed the words, and what she had seen through the parted blinds with such a wistful look as he disappeared, it might have been his turn to triumph.

In spite of Sophie's prophecy, twenty-four hours did not bring back Harry. Days matured into weeks and still he did not come, nor in all that time did she meet him. And now she began to think herself quite a martyr, and acted accordingly. In fact, she did almost what any heroine would have done under the circumstances—grew pale and interesting. Marianna began to suggest the delicacies to tempt Sophie's palate. "The poor dear child was getting so thin." In vain Sophie protested that she had no appetite.

In vain papa brought dainty gifts and piled up costly presents before his pet. A faint smile or abstracted "thank you" was the only recompense. If sister Kate suggested that Harry's absence was in any manner connected with her altered demeanor, Sophie would toss her ring-letted head with an air of indifference, and go away and cry over it hours at a time. Everybody thought something was the matter with Sophie—Sophie among the rest.

Her suspense and penitence became unupportable at last. Sister Kate who had come so near the solution of the mystery—she knew all, so said Sophie; perhaps she could advise her what to do, for to give up Harry seemed every day more and more of an impossibility.

"Will you go into the garden with me, Kate?" she asked, in a trembling voice, of her sister one day, about a month after her trouble with Harry; "I have something of importance to tell you."

"Go away, darling, and I will be with you in a few moments," replied Kate, casting a searching glance at Sophie's flushed cheeks and swollen eyes.

Running swiftly along the garden paths, as if from fear of pursuit, Sophie flung herself down on a low seat, buried her head among the cool vines, and gave herself up to a paroxysm of passionate grief. Soon she heard steps approaching, and an arm was twisted tenderly about her waist, and a warm hand was laid caressingly on her drooping head.

"Oh, Kate, Kate!" she cried, in the agony of her repentance, "I'm perfectly wretched. You don't know why, though you have come very near guessing two or three times. Harry and I—"

Here a convulsive sob interrupted her, and the hand upon her head passed over her disordered curls with a gentle, soothing motion.

"Harry and I"—another sob—quarrelled two or three weeks ago. I was wilful and rude, just as was natural for me to be, and he got angry. I don't think he is going to forgive me, for he has not been here since."

Sophie felt herself drawn up in a closer embrace, and was sure Kate pitied her. "I would not have owned it to anybody if it had not been just as it is," she continued rubbing her little white hands into her eyes; "but I think I almost love him almost as I do you and father and mother."

A kiss dropped on Sophie's glossy head, and tighter was she held. She wondered that Kate was so silent, but still kept her face hidden in the vines. "He asked me to be his wife," she continued, "asked me as nobody else ever did—in such a manly way, that he made me feel as though I ought to have been the one to plead instead of him. I could not bear to do that, and I answered him as I should not. He thought it was because he was poor and I was rich; and all the time I was thinking I would rather live in a cottage with him than in the grandest palace in the world with any other man, only I was too proud to tell him so to his face. What can I do? Tell me, Kate, you are much better than I am, and you never get into trouble. I am sure I shall die if you don't." And Sophie wept away.

So she seated herself, ran her fingers gracefully over the keys, and broke out in a wild, brilliant, defiant song, that made her listener's ears tingle as he stood watching her, and choking back the indignant words that came crowding to his lips for utterance.

"Sophie, listen to me!" said at length, as she paused from sheer exhaustion. "Is it generous—is it just to trifle with me—to turn into ridicule the emotion of a heart that offers to you the most reverent affections? I have loved you, because beneath this volatile surface character of yours, I thought I saw truthfulness and simplicity, purity of soul, and a warm current of tender, womanly feelings that would bathe with blessings the whole life of him whose hand was so fortunate as to touch its secret springs. You are an heiress, and I only a poor student; but it is that the reason why you treat me so scornfully, you are less the noble woman that I thought you."

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Like an insulted prince, Harry Ainslee stood up before her—the hot fiery indignation blood dashed in a fierce torrent over his face—his arms crossed tightly upon his breast, as if to keep his heart from bursting with uprising indignation—his lips compressed and his dark eyes flashing.

Not till he had gone—gone without a single word of explanation, leaving only a grave "good-bye" and the memory of his pale face to plead for him—did the thoughtless girl wake to a realization of what she had done. Then a quick, terrible fear shot through her heart, and she would have given every curl on her brown head to have him beside her one short moment longer.

Prairie fires at Swan River, destroyed over a mile of fence. Wild geese are occasionally shot in the vicinity of Dundas, Rice county. The woods are full of hunters, says the Hokak Blade, and they all seem to come home loaded with game. It is reported that 100 tons of hay have been burned in Two Rivers, Morrison county, caused by prairie fires. The Presbyterian church edifice in Le Roy, Mower county, was struck by lightning a few days since and considerably damaged. In Benson, Swift county, Ole Thorson, of Swift Falls, in a scuffle in Knudson's saloon in Benson, had a leg broken just below the knee. The Blue Earth county fair is pronounced to have been a complete success financially and in other respects. The attendance was large. The weather was so wet, rainy, and unpropitious at Preston, Fillmore county, as to entirely destroy the fair appointed for that place. The other night two horses were stolen from the farm of E. Scamell, two and a half miles east of Watonwan. A reward is offered. John Doyle, of Anoka, was hooked in the right eye by a cow, and yet is likely not to lose the sight of the eye. The injury was a very painful one. The general complaint throughout a portion of the State that the ground was too dry and hard to plow, has been ended by the late copious rains. From a threshing machine accident a few miles south of Lanesborough, Fillmore county, Owen McDonald had a leg broken in several places, and received other injuries. The summer kitchen of James Lee's house, at Watonwan, west of the river, was destroyed by fire. The fire was extinguished before any serious damage was done to the main building. Two boys in Crookston, Polk county, were amusing themselves with a revolver, with the usual result—an unexpected explosion. One of the boys carried home a bullet in his leg. Beaver Falls (Renoville county) Times: Prairie fires begin to illuminate the horizon. The grass is unusually rank this season, and every precaution should be taken to guard against disaster. Imperative orders have been received to remove the land office from Detroit, Becker county, to Crookston, Polk county. The office will close at Detroit Oct. 12th, and be opened at Crookston, Nov. 12th. A cold winter is predicted from the style of architecture adopted by the muskrats