

more stenographers to his office force.

Now there is to be said of such... a fierce toll of the buffetting...

So it befell that while the newly appointed general counsel of the reorganized Western Pacific was bolting his meals...

Who Mrs. Melissa Varnum was: how she came to be traveling from Midland City to the end of the track on a scalper's ticket...

And at the succeeding term of court, which was the one that adjourned on the day of Kent's transfer to the capital...

It was while Kent's head was deepest in the flood of reorganization that a letter came from one Blashfield Hunnicott...

But first came the whipping-in of MacFarlane. Bucks went alone to the Judge's room on the floor above the parlor suite...

For a large man the Honorable Jasper was usually able to handle his weight admirably; but now he clung to the door-knob until he could launch himself at a chair and be sure of hitting it.

"What's this Hawk's telling me about you, MacFarlane?" he demanded, frowning portentously.

"I don't know what he has told you. But it is too flagrant, Bucks; I can't do it, and that's all there is about it."

"I tell you I can not, and I will not!" A late attack of conscience, eh? sneered the Governor, who was sobering rapidly now.

"It was \$10,000. It is an honest debt, and I shall pay it." But not out of the salary of a Circuit Judge, Bucks interposed.

"You're out of the fees, you make your clerks divide with you. And that isn't all. Have you forgotten the gerrymander business? How would you like to see the true inwardness of that, in the newspapers?"

The Judge shrank as if the huge gesturing hand had struck him. "You wouldn't dare," he began.

"Cut that out, too, and come along," said the Governor, brutally, and by the steady help of the chair, the doorpost and the wall of the corridor, he led the way to the parlor suite on the floor below.

The conference in Falkland's rooms was chiefly a monologue with the sharp-spoken New York lawyer in the speaking part. When it was concluded the Judge took his leave abruptly.

"How much longer have you to wait?" he demanded impatiently, when the hands of his watch pointed to the quarter-hour after 10.

Hawk wriggled uneasily in his chair. He was used to being bullied, not only by the good and great, but by the little and evil as well.

"Well, it's damned badly managed, as far as we've gone," was the ungracious comment. "You say the Judge refuses to confer with me?"

"Ab-so-lutely."

"Where has he gone?" "You followed him?" "Sure. That is what kept me so long."

Hawk hung upon his decision for the barest fraction of a second. Then he gave up and went to the door.

"Hunt up Dr. Macquoid and get him out to the club house as quick as you can. Tell him to bring his hypodermic. I'll be there with all the help he'll need."

And when the young man was gone Hawk smote the air with a clenched fist and called down the Black Curse of Shielghy, or its modern equivalent, upon all the fates subversive of well-laid plans.

A quarter of an hour later, on the upper floor of the club house at the Gentlemen's Driving Park, four men burst in upon a fifth, a huge figure in brown coat, sitting in a corner like a wild boar at bay.

"Hold him still, if you can, and pull up that sleeve." It was Macquoid who spoke, and the three apparitions, breathing hard, sat upon the prostrate man and bared his chest.

"Get me into my clothes—Johnson has the grip—and give me all the time you can," was the sullen rejoinder; and in due course the Hon. Jasper G. Bucks, clothed upon and in a certain way, was enabled to keep his appointment with the New York attorney at the Mid-Continent Hotel.

But first came the whipping-in of MacFarlane. Bucks went alone to the Judge's room on the floor above the parlor suite. It was now near midnight, but MacFarlane had not gone to bed.

"What's this Hawk's telling me about you, MacFarlane?" he demanded, frowning portentously.

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"If you and Hawk have got your papers in good shape, the thing will go through like a hog under a barbed-wire fence."

CHAPTER IX.

The Shocking of Hunnicott. It was two weeks after the date of the Governor's fishing trip, and by consequence Judge MacFarlane's court had been the even fortnight in session in Gaston, when Kent's attention was recalled to the forgotten Varnum case by another letter from the local attorney, Hunnicott.

"Varnum vs. Western Pacific comes up Friday of this week, and they are going to press for trial this time, and no mistake," wrote the local representative. "Hawk has been chasing around getting affidavits; for what purpose I don't know, though Leher tells me that one of them was sworn to by Houlihan, the sub-contractor who tried to fight the engineer's estimates on the Jump Creek work."

"Also, there is a story going the rounds that the suit is to be made a blind for bigger game, though I guess this is all gossip, based on the fact that Mr. Semple Falkland's private car stopped over here two weeks ago, from 2 o'clock in the afternoon till midnight of the same day. Jason, of the Clarion, interviewed the New Yorker, and Falkland told him he had stopped over to look up the securities on a mortgage held by one of his New York clients."

Kent read this unofficial letter with a frown. "It's a capitol-gang deal of some sort to hold us up; and Duvall is willing to sell out his fellow conspirators if the price is right."

"Have you any notion of what it is?" Kent shook his head.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm opposed to the method—the bargain and sale plan—and I know you are. Turn him over to me if he comes in again."

When Kent had dictated a letter in answer to Hunnicott's he dismissed the Varnum matter from his mind, having other and more important things to think of. So on the Friday when the case was reached on Judge MacFarlane's docket—but, really, is it worth operator, and adjured him by all that was good and great not to delay its sending.

It was just here he made his first and only slip, since he did not stay to see the thing done. It chanced that the regular day operator was off on leave of absence, and his substitute, a young man from the train-dispatcher's office, was a person who considered the company wires an exclusive appanage of the train service department.

At the moment of Hunnicott's assault he was taking an order for No. 17; and observing that the lawyer's cipher "rush" covered four closely written pages, he hung it upon the sending hook with a malediction on the legal department for burdening the wires with its mail correspondence, and so forgot it.

It was 9 o'clock when the night operator came on duty; and being a careful man, he not only looked first to his sending hook, but was thoughtful enough to run over the accumulation of messages waiting to be transmitted, to the end that he might give precedence to

minutes sufficed for the writing of a telegram to Kent; and he was halfway down to the station with it when it occurred to him that it would never do to trust the incendiary thing to the wires in plain English.

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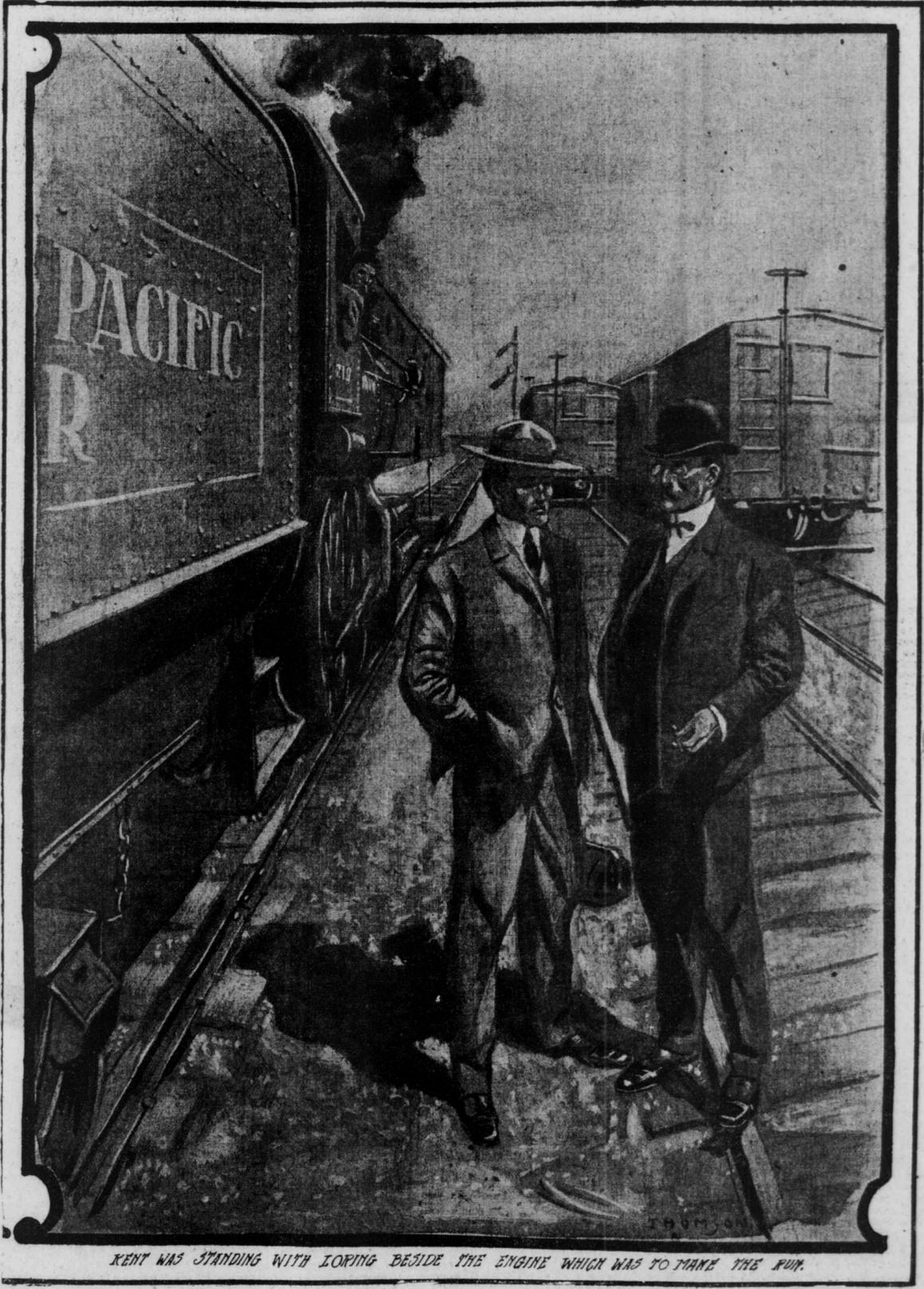
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KENT WAS STANDING WITH LORING BESIDE THE ENGINE WHICH WAS TO MAKE THE RUN.

CHAPTER X.

Without Benefit of Clergy.

At ten forty-four on the Saturday morning Kent was standing with the general manager on the Union station track platform beside the engine which was to make the flying run to Gaston.

Nine hours of sharp work lay between the hurried conference in Loring's bedroom and the drive to the station at a quarter of seven. Boston had been wired; divers and sundry friends of the railway company had been interviewed; some few affidavits had been secured, and now they were waiting to give Boston its last chance, with a clear, hanging cloud over the operator in the station telegraph office to catch the first word of encouragement.

"If the Advisory Board doesn't send us something pretty solid I'm going into this thing lame," said Kent, dubiously. "Of course, what Boston can send us will be only corroborative; unfortunately we can't wire affidavits. But it will help. What we have secured here looks direct."

"New-seerity," said Loring. "But I'm banking on the board. If we don't get the annuities before you have to start I can wire it to you at Gaston. That gives us three hours more to go and come on."

"Yes, and if it comes to the worst—if the decision be unfavorable—it can only embarrass us temporarily. This is merely the preliminary hearing, and nothing permanent can be established until we have had a hearing on the merits, and we can go armed to that, at all events."

The general manager was looking at his watch, and he shut the case with a snap. "Don't you let it come to that, as long as you have a leg to stand on, David," he said, impressively. "An interregnum of ten days might make it exceedingly difficult for us to prove anything. Then, as the telegraph office watches cases, the door here a heavy head as a sign that Boston was still silent: 'Your time is up. Off with you, and don't let Oleon scare you a good run, and you have a clear track.'"

Kent clambered to the footplate of the smart eight-wheeler. "Can you make it by 2 o'clock?" he asked, when the engineer, big-boned, blue-eyed Norwegian, dropped the reversing lever into the corner for the start.

"Ay tank maybe so, ain't it? Must you climb on dat odder box. Yester Kent, and half you hair on, be gone to mail to dat time, ala' ve preak someidins, ja!" and he sent the light engine spinning down the yards to a quickstep of forty miles an hour.

Kent's after-memory of that distance-deavouring rush was a blurred picture of a plunging, rocking, clanging engine bounding over mile after mile of the brown plain; of the endless dizzying procession of oncoming telegraph poles hurtling like great steel flying projectiles past the open windows; of now and then a lonely prairie station with waving semaphore arms, sighted, passed and left behind in a whirling sandcloud in one of the ceaseless heartbeats. And in the central figure in the picture, the one constant quantity when all else was mutable and shifting and indistinct, the big, calm-eyed Norwegian on the opposite box, hurrying his huge machine doggedly through space.

"It's a put-up job from away back," he grunted. "If I'd had the sense of a packmule I should have been on the lookout for such a trip as this. Look at the date of that message!"

"The general manager did look, and shook his head. 'Received, 3:35, P. M.; Forwarded, 9:17, P. M.' That will cost somebody his job. What do we do?"