

THE WRECKERS

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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THE WRECKING OF THE WRECKERS

"She is married now, and her husband is still living." For a little I couldn't do anything but gape like a chicken with the tip. It was simply fierce! I knew, as well as I knew anything, that the boss was gone on Mrs. Sheila; that he had fallen in love, first with the back of her neck and then with her pretty face and then with all of her; and that the one big reason why he had let Mr. Chadwick persuade him to stay in Portal City was the fact that he had wanted to be near her and to show her how he could make a perfectly good spoon out of the spoiled horn of the Pioneer Short Line.

There's "The Wreckers" in a nutshell—a railroad story by Francis Lynde; that's enough for anyone. The "Boss" is a first-class all-around railroad man. "Mrs. Sheila" is as lovable as they make 'em. The Pioneer Short Line is a sick road which has been shamefully misused by successive groups of Wall street speculators. And Jimmie Dodds, who tells the story in his own inimitable way, is the "Boss's" secretary and handyman.

CHAPTER I

At Sand Creek Siding As a general proposition, I don't believe much in the things called "chances." But there are exceptions to all rules, and we certainly uncovered the biggest one of the lot—the boss and I—the night we left Portland and the good old Pacific coast. It was this way. We had finished the construction work on the Oregon Midland and were on our way to the train, when I had one of those queer little premonitory chills you hear so much about and knew just as well as could be that we were never going to pull through to Chicago without getting a jolt of some sort. The reason, if you'll call it a reason—was that, just before we came to the railroad station, the boss walked calmly under a ladder standing in front of a new building; and besides that, it was the thirteenth day of the month, a Friday, and raining like the very mischief.

Just to sort of tell us along, maybe, the fates didn't begin on us that night. They waited until the next day, and then proceeded to shove us behind a freight-train wreck at Widner, Idaho, where we lost twelve hours. It looked as if that didn't amount to much, because we weren't anywhere at any particular time. The boss was on his way home for a little visit with his folks in Illinois, and beyond that he was going to meet a bunch of Englishmen in Montreal, and maybe let them make him general manager of one of the Canadian railroads.

Mr. Norcross was in no special hurry, and neither was I. I had been an initial clerk and shorthand man for the boss on the Midland construction, and he was taking me along partly because he knows a cracking good stenographer when he sees one, but mostly because I was dead anxious to go anywhere he was going. But, if it hadn't been for that twelve-hour lay-out we would have caught the Saturday night train on the Pioneer Short Line, instead of the train Sunday morning, and there would have been no meeting with Mrs. Sheila and Maise Ann; no telegram from Mr. Chadwick, because it wouldn't have found us; no hold-up at Sand Creek siding; in short, nothing would have happened that did happen.

It was on Sunday that the jolt began to get ready to land on us. Right soon after breakfast, with the help of a little Pullman berth table and me and my typewriter, Mr. Norcross turned our section into a business office, saying that now we had a good quiet day, we'd clean up the million or so odds and ends of correspondence he'd been letting go while we were tussling in the Midland right-of-way through the Oregon mountains.

From where he sat dictating to me the boss was facing forward and now then an absent sort of look came into his eyes while he was talking off numbers, and it puzzled me because he didn't like him. One of the times he had given me a full grist of numbers and had gone off to smoke when I typed a few thousand lines of my notes to catch up, I made a discovery. There were two people in Section Five just ahead of us, a young woman and a girl of maybe fifteen or so, and the Pullman was a well-dressed kind, with low seat-backs. I put it up that in those abominable intervals Mr. Norcross had been studying the back of the young woman's neck. I was measurably sure that it was the little girl's.

Along in the forenoon I made an excuse to go and get a drink of water out of the forward cooler, and on the way back I took a good square look at our neighbors in Number Five. The young woman was pretty enough to stop a clock—only "pretty" was just the word, either; there wasn't any word, when you come right down to it. And the little girl was a peach—a nice, downy, rosy little thing, chunky, round-faced, sunny-eyed, jolly; with a neat little turned-up nose and big sort of boyish laughter that fairly dared the world. At the second call to dinner Mr. Norcross told me to strap up in the Pullman and put the files away in the locker, and we'd go eat. He was pretty breaking out once, in the meat locker, to tell me that he'd just had a wonderful telegram from an old friend that would stop us off for a while in Portal City, the headquarters of the Pioneer Short Line. Along, pretty well into the afternoon and black coffee, he came to life and asked me if I had noticed the young woman and the girl in the Pullman section next to ours.

When I told him I had, and then, because he never knew him to bother his secretary for two minutes in succession, he gave me a woman, he gave me a

shock; said they were ticketed to Portal City—and to find that out he must have asked the train conductor—adding that when we reached Portal it would be the neighborly thing for me to do to help them off with their hand-bags and see that they got a cab if they wanted one.

"Sure I will," says I. "That is, if the lady's husband isn't there to meet them. Her suit case has her name, 'Mrs. Sheila Macrae,' on it."

The boss has a way of making two up-and-down wrinkles and a little curved horseshoe line come between his eyes when he is going to reach for you.

"There are times, Jimmie, when you see altogether too much," he said, sort of gruff.

"Macrae," you say; that is Scotch. And so is 'Sheila.' Most likely the names, both of them, are only hand-downs. She looks straight American to me."

"She is pretty enough to look anything," I threw in, just to see how he would take it.

"Right you are, Jimmie," he agreed. "I've been looking at the back of her neck all day. There are so many women who don't measure up to the promises they make when you see 'em from behind. You catch a glimpse of



Just as if They'd Been a Couple of Sacks of Meal.

a pretty neck, and when you get around to the face you find out that the neck was only a bit of bluff."

If I had been eating anything in the world but ice cream I believe it would have choked me. What he said led up to the admission that he had been making these face-and-neck comparisons for goodness knows how long, and I couldn't surround that, all at once. You see, he was such a picture of a man's man in every sense of the word; a fighter and a hard-hitter, right from the jump. And to a man of that sort women are usually no more than fluffy little side-issues, as Eve said when they told her she was made out of Adam's rib.

That ended the dining-car part of it. The sure-enough, knock-out round was fought at the rear end of our Pullman, which happened to be the last car in the train. As we walked back after dinner Mr. Norcross gave me a cigar and said we'd go out to the observation platform to smoke. When we reached the door we found the young lady and the girl standing at the rear railing to watch the track as the train rolled under the trucks. The young lady was wearing a coat with a storm collar, but the girl had a fur thing around her neck, and her stocky, chunky little arms were elbow deep in a big pillow muff to match, though the April night wasn't even half-way chilly.

The boss stepped out on the platform to close the side trap door which, with the railing gate on that side, had been left open by a careless rear flagman. Just then the big "Pacific type" man, just then the big "Pacific type" man, that was pulling us let out a whistle screech that would have waked the dead, and the air-brakes went on with a jerk that showed how beautifully reckless the railroading was on the Pioneer Short Line.

Mr. Norcross was reaching for the catch on the floor trap and the jerk didn't throw him. But it snapped the young woman and the girl away from the railing so suddenly that the little one had to grab for hand-holds; and when she did that, of course the big muff went aboard.

young woman shrieked after her, "Maise Ann!—come back here—you'll be left!" and then took her turn at disappearing by the same route; and, on top of it all, the boss jumped off and sprinted after both of them, leaving a string of large, man-sized comments on the foolishness of women as a sex trailing along behind him as he flew.

Right then it was my golden moment to play safe and sane. With three of them off and lost in the gathering night, somebody with at least a grain of sense ought to have stood by to pull the emergency cord if the train should start. But, of course, I had to take a chance and spill the gravel all over the tablecloth. The stop was at a blind siding in the edge of a mountain desert, and when I squinted up ahead and saw that the engine was taking water, it looked as if there were a bit of promenade under the stars. So I swung off and went to join the muff hunt.

Amongst them, they had found the pillow thing before I had a chance to horn in. They were coming up the track, and the boss had each of the two by an arm and was telling them that they'd be left to a dead moral certainty if they didn't run. They couldn't run because their skirts were too fashionably narrow, and there were still three or four car-lengths to go when the tank spout went up with a clang and a clatter of chalus and the old "Pacific type" gave a couple of hisses and a snort.

"They're going!" grunted the boss, sort of between his teeth, and without another word he grabbed those two hobbled women folks up under his arms, just as if they'd been a couple of sacks of meal, and broke into a run.

It wasn't a morsel of use, you know, Old Hercules himself couldn't have run very far or very fast with the hand-cup the boss had taken on, and in less than half a minute the "Pacific type" had caught her stride and the red tail lights of the train were vanishing to pin points in the night. We were beautifully and artistically left.

When he saw that it was no manner of use, the boss quit on the hand-cup race and put his two armfuls down while he still had breath enough left to talk with.

"Well," he said, in his best rusty-hinge rasp, "you've done it! Why, in the name of common sense, couldn't you have let me go back after that muff thing?"

It was the young woman who answered the boss.

"I—I didn't stop to think!" she fluttered, taking the blame as if she had been the one to head the procession. "Isn't there any way we can stop that train?"

The boss said there wasn't, and I know the only reason why he didn't say a lot of other things was because he was too much of a gentleman to say them in the presence of a couple of women.

So far as we could see, the sure soundings consisted of a short siding-track, a spur running off into the hills, and the water tank. The siding switches had no lights, which argued that there wasn't even a pump-man at the tank—as there was not, the tank being filled automatically by a gravity pipe line running back to a natural reservoir in the mountains.

By this time the boss was beginning to get a little better grip on himself and he laughed.

"We've all earned the leather medal, I guess," he chuckled. "It's done now, and it can't be helped."

"But isn't there anything we can do?" said the young woman. "Can't we walk somewhere to where there is a station or a town with people in it?"

I saw Mr. Norcross look down at her skirts and then at the girl's.

"You two couldn't walk very far or very fast in those things you are wearing," he grunted. "Besides, we are in one of the desert strips, and it is probably miles to a night wire station in either direction."

We trailed off together up the track two and two, the boss walking with the young woman. After we'd counted a few of the cross-ties, the girl said: "Is your name Jimmie Dodds?" And when I admitted it: "Mine is Maise Ann. I'm Sheila's cousin on her mother's side. I think this is a great lark; don't you?"

"I can tell better after it's over," I said. "Maybe we'll have to stay here all night."

she told the boss, "I shan't mind it in the least."

The boss lighted his cigar. Then there was more talk, in which it turned out that the young woman and her cousin were to have been met at Portal City by somebody she called "Cousin Basil," but there wouldn't be any scare, because she had written ahead to say that possibly they might stop over with some friends in one of the apple towns.

Then Mr. Norcross said he wouldn't miss anything by the drop-out but an appointment he had with an old friend, and he guessed that could wait. I listened, thinking maybe he would mention the name of the friend, and after a while he did. The forwarded Portal City telegram the boss had gotten just before we went to dinner in the dining-car was from "Uncle John" Chadwick, the Chicago wheat king, and that left me wondering what the mischief Mr. Chadwick was doing away out in the wild and woolly western country where they raise more apples than they do wheat, and more mining stock schemes than they do either.

We had been marooned for nearly an hour when I struck a match and looked at my watch. Mr. Norcross was doing his best to kill time for the young woman, and he was just in the exciting part of a railroad story, telling about a right-of-way fight on the Midland, when the little girl grabbed my arm and said: "Listen!"

I did, and broke in promptly, "Excuse me," I called to the other two, "but I think there's a train coming."

The boss cut his story short and we all listened. It seemed that I was wrong. The noise we heard was more like an auto running with the cut-out open than a train rumbling.

"What do you make it, Jimmie?" came from the boss' end of the timber.

"Motor car," I said, pointing in the darkness toward the east.

My guess was right. In less than a minute we saw the lights of the car. It stopped a little way below the water tank and about a hundred yards north of the track, or maybe less, and four men came tumbling out of it. If I had been alone on the job I should probably have called to the men as they came tramping over to the side-track. But Mr. Norcross had a different think coming.

"Out of sight—quick, Jimmie!" he whispered, and in another second he had whipped the young woman over the big footing timber to a standing place under the tank among the braces, and I had done the same for the girl.

What followed was as mysterious as a chapter out of an Anna Katherine Green detective story. After doing something to the switch of the unused spur track, the four men separated. One of them went back to the auto, and the other three walked down the main track to the lower switch of the short siding, which was on the same side of the main line as the spur. Here the fourth man rejoined them, and he had gone back to the car for.

"He has lighted a red lantern," she whispered. "I saw it when he took it out of the auto."

I guess it was pretty plain to all of us by this time that there was something decidedly crooked on the cards, but if we had known what it was, we couldn't very well have done anything to prevent it. There were only two of us men to their four; and, besides, there wasn't any time. The lantern-carrying man had barely reached the lower switch when we heard the whistle of a locomotive. There was a train coming from the west, and a few seconds later an electric headlight showed up on the long tangent beyond the siding.

It was a bandit hold-up, all right. One of the men stood on the track waving the red lantern; we could see him plainly in the glare of the head-



"Out of Sight—Quick, Jimmie!" He Whispered.

light. There wasn't much of a scrap. There were two or three pistol shots, and then, as near as we could make out, the hold-up men, or some of them, climbed into the engine.

to sight and hearing in less than a minute.

It was not until after the train was switched and gone that we discovered that two of the bandits had been left behind. These two roset the switches for the main track, leaving everything as they had found it, and then crossed over to the auto.

I was just thinking that all this mystery and kidnaping and gun play must be sort of hard on the young woman and the girl, but, though my half of the allotment was shivering a little and smuggling up just a grain closer to me, she proved that she hadn't lost her nerve.

"Did you see the name on that car when the engine went past to get in behind it?" she asked.

"No," said the boss; and I hadn't, either.

"I did," she asserted, showing that her eyes, or her wits, were quicker than ours. "I had just one little glimpse of it. The name is 'A-I-e-x-a,'" spelling it out.

Mr. Norcross started as if he had been shot.

"The Alexa? That is Mr. Chadwick's private car—they've kidnaped him!" Then he whirled short on me. "Jimmie, are you man enough to go with me and try a tackle on those fellows over there in that auto?"

I said I was; but I didn't add what I thought—that it would probably be a case of double suicide for us two to go up against a pair of armed thugs with our bare hands. The young woman put in her word.

"You mustn't think of doing such a thing!" she protested; and she was still telling him all the different reasons why he mustn't, when we heard the creak and grind of the stolen engine coming back down the old spur.

After that there was nothing to do but to wait and see what was going to happen next. What did happen was as blind as all the rest. The engine was stopped somewhere in the gulch back of us and out of sight from our hiding-place, and pretty soon the two men who had gone with her came hurrying across out of the hill shadows, making straight for the auto. A minute or two later they had climbed into the machine, the motor had sputtered, and the car was gone.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Chadwick's Special

Of course, as soon as the skip-out of the four hold-up men gave us a free hand we knew it was up to us to get busy and do something. It was a safe bet that the Alexa was carrying her owner, and in that case Mr. John Chadwick and his train crew were somewhere back in the hills, without an engine, and with a good prospect of staying "put" until somebody should go and hunt them up.

"We've got to find out what they've done with Mr. Chadwick," Mr. Norcross broke out. And then: "He can't be very far to where they have left the engine, and if they haven't clung to it—" He stopped short and slipped a question at the two women: "Will you two stay here with Jimmie while I go and see what I can find in that gulch?"

They both paid me the compliment of saying that they'd stay with me, but the young woman suggested that it might be just as well if we should all go up the gulch together. So we piked out in the dark, the boss helping Mrs. Sheila to hobo along over the cross-ties of the spur, and the little girl stumbling on behind with me. We had followed the spur track up the gulch for maybe a short quarter of a mile when we came to the engine. As we had feared it might be, the big machine was crippled. There was a key gone out of one of the connecting-rod crank-pin straps; one miserable little piece of steel, maybe eight inches long and tapering one way, and half an inch or so thick the other; but that was a plenty. We couldn't make a move without it.

I thought we were done for, but Mr. Norcross chased me up into the cab for a lantern. With the light we be-

gan to hunt around in the short grass. I had been sensible enough to show the little girl the other connecting-rod key, so she knew exactly what to look for, and it did me a heap of good when it turned out that she was the one who found the lost bit of steel.

"I've got it—I've got it!" she cried; and sure enough she had. The hold-up people had merely taken it out and thrown it aside on the extremely probable chance that nobody would be foolish enough to look for it so near at hand, or, looking, would be able to find it in the dark.

It didn't take more than a minute or two, with a wrench from the engineer's box, to put the key back in place. Then, with one to hoist and the other to pull, we got our two passengers up into the high cab. I threw a few shovel-fuls of coal into the firebox and put the blowers on; and when we were all set, the boss opened the throttle and we went carefully nosing ahead over the old track, feeling our way up the gulch and keeping a sharp lookout for the Alexa as we ground and squealed around the curves.

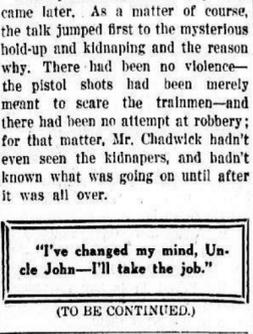


"I've Got It!" She Cried.

It must have been four or five miles back in the hills to the place where we found the private car, pushed in on an old mine-loading track at the end of the spur. The other members of the crew were off and waiting for us; and standing out on the back platform, in the full glare of the headlight as we nosed up for a coupling, there was a big, gray-haired man, bareheaded and dressed in rough-looking old clothes like a mining prospector.

The big man was "Uncle John" Chadwick, and if he was properly astonished at seeing us turn up with his lost engine, he didn't let it interfere with our welcome. Mr. Chadwick seemed to know Mrs. Sheila; at any rate, he shook hands with her and called her by name. Then he grabbed for the boss and fairly shouted at him: "Well, well, Graham!—of all the lucky things this side of Mesopotamia! How the dev—how in thunder did you manage to turn up here?" And all that, you know.

The explanations, such as they were, came later. As a matter of course, the talk jumped first to the mysterious hold-up and kidnaping and the reason why. There had been no violence—the pistol shots had been merely meant to scare the trainmen—and there had been no attempt at robbery; for that matter, Mr. Chadwick hadn't even seen the kidnapers, and hadn't known what was going on until after it was all over.



"I've changed my mind, Uncle John—I'll take the job."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CIVIC ORDINANCE IN JAPAN

All Houses Have Tablet Telling Name of the Responsible Dweller Within the Walls.

In Japan you can learn a good many things about the resident of a house merely by looking at his door. According to police regulations, says a writer in Chambers' Journal the entrance to every residence must have a small wooden tablet affixed to it. This tablet has the name and the number of the house on it, and on another tablet is the name of the responsible householder, who in many cases is an infant, a younger brother of a relative.

Sometimes, though rarely, the names of other inmates are placed over the door, but there is no police regulation that requires it, except in the case of boarding houses, which have to place their boarders' names outside for all to see. A person fortunate enough to possess a telephone always has the number proudly displayed over his entrance. Near it you will often see a quaint enamel or tin disk. That is the fire insurance mark. Every fire insurance company has its own special metal plate, which it nails to the lintel when it insures a house.

There are always several small pieces of paper pasted over the door, placed there by the police. One is to certify that the periodical oshoji, or great cleaning, has taken place. Another paper tells us, perhaps, that the sanitary conditions are satisfactory. What others stand for is known only to the police themselves; that they give secret information about the inmates is certain.

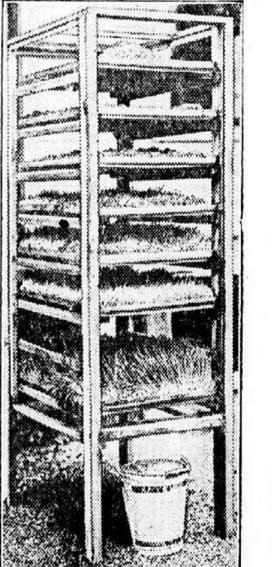
POULTRY FLOCKS

FEEDS FOR GROWING CHICKS

In Addition to Furnishing Right Amount of Feed, Fresh Water and Shade Are Necessary.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

In addition to furnishing a sufficient quantity and the right kind of feed to make flesh, muscle and bone, and supply energy for the growing chicks, clean dry quarters, green feed, fresh water and shade should be provided. The coop should be kept clean, which can be facilitated by keeping sand on the floor and raking of the droppings at least twice a week, and often if possible. The roof should be tight so



Sprouted Oats Help Materially in Furnishing Fowls With Needed Green Feed.

that the house will always be dry. Green feed is very essential for the growing chickens, the ideal condition being to allow them free range on good grass land. Alfalfa makes an ideal range. Where the chickens have to be confined to small yards it is very essential to supply green feed daily. Freshly cut lawn clippings and short pieces of any growing grain crop, such as oats, wheat or any quick-growing crop, such as rape, make splendid green feed. Where these growing feeds are not available, sprouted oats may be used and will help materially. Where a hen is kept with a brood of chickens and the chickens confined to a small covered pen, move this coop and pen every two or three days to fresh grass and never let the grass be killed or eaten down where the run is placed. Provide fresh, clean water daily and see that the receptacles are thoroughly cleaned and the chickens never without water. The water should be kept in the shade in as cool a place as possible. Using a stone crock for watering fountains will help to keep the water cool. Where the chickens are confined to yards or have free range, shade should be provided. Trees and low shrubs make ideal shade, but if not available a corn patch or rows of sunflowers will help materially. Where no growing crop or trees of any kind are available it will pay to put up an artificial shade, making a framework two or three feet high and covering this with the branches of trees, weeds, straw or any waste material that will furnish shade.

BUILD UP PROFITABLE FLOCK

Possible Only by Continuous Selection for Health and Vigor to Get Egg Producers.

Only by continuous selection for health and vigor is it possible to build up a flock which will produce fertile eggs, strong chicks capable of making quick growth, and pullets with sufficient stamina to withstand the strain of heavy egg production. The appearance of a bird is not always a sure indication of its vigor, but appearance and action taken together are a fairly reliable guide for picking out vigorous birds.

GREEN DUCKS IN BIG DEMAND

Vast Market Waiting to Be Developed for Fowls Throughout Most of the Country.

There is a vast market for "green ducks" waiting to be developed throughout most of the country and the man or woman who takes the trouble to develop it need not fear being unable to sell all that can be produced.

TABLE PICKINGS FOR FOWLS

Run Through Bone Cutter All Vegetable Parings, Bones, Potatoes and All Other Scraps.

Run all the vegetable parings, bones, small potatoes, dry bread and other scraps through the bone cutter each day. However, don't allow more than a quart of this mixture to 15 hens in any one day, or it may result in looseness of the bowels.

Ideal Dusting Place.

Hens will take care of the louse evil if given a good dusting place. Newly plowed land is an ideal dusting place, so provide a place as nearly like it as possible.

Green Feed.

Give the baby chicks any tender green stuff, such as lettuce or sprouted oats. They should be supplied constantly with fresh water.

High Egg Production.

High egg production is half breeding and half feeding.