

THE IRON WAY

A TALE OF THE BUILDERS OF THE WEST.

BY SARAH T. CLARK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR BROWN

the world. It was a joy to be with Uncle Billy a short late hour every other night when his train was in and his reports made; a joy to know that her presence comforted Sally B., whose heart, despite her busy life, longed for her only child, and grieved for the older child who dogged her footsteps, did her errands, followed her with meek, trustful eyes. The spell of the desert, and her ever deferred hope of seeing Alfred, still held Esther. Gideon was in the town, though he kept out of Esther's way. Sally B. met him abruptly one day, forced a kind word upon him and asked him of his stay; but he evaded her with a half-coherent reply about seeing the railroad through. She mentally substituted Esther for the railroad, knowing it was for chance glimpses of her he hung around the town.

The grading was finished. Engineers, their occupation gone, had already started for new barrens to measure. Bridge builders followed. Men of the pickaxe and shovel, drillers, strikers, teamsters, Chinese, cooks, scullions, camp-movers—a long procession faced westward toward "California, God's country."

It was the morning before George Gregory's great day, the day he was to outdo the Union Pacific feat of laying seven and a half miles of track at one stretch. He had chosen the flat spaces eastward by Kelton, where the grade was easy, culverts and bridges



"Drop That Gun, Pardner!"

few. Everything was in readiness. The iron was coming—on the road—due at the Front that afternoon. All along the line betting ran high. Interest and excitement pervaded town, camp and home; touched even women and children.

The supply train backed, switched, loaded freight brought in the night before; yet did not pull out for the Front as usual, but side-tracked and waited. The iron was coming! It was due at noon.

Hotel patrons had eaten and gone. Bill Bernard was out on an errand; and the house was deserted save for the cook and scullion, and the two women at their late breakfast. The sun had not yet thawed the frost of the night when a shot rang out from Sally B.'s barroom.

She caught her pistol from some near nook and rushed out, Esther flying after her.

"Go back, child!" Sally B. said sternly, from the doorway.

"Not unless you go," Esther returned in a voice as firm.

"Foller still, then," the other whispered, seeing opposition useless; and they entered the barroom noiselessly.

A man with beetling brows and fierce, resentful eyes stood with his back to them, holding a big revolver somewhat unsteadily over Shuck Newbegin, whose hands were high in air. The intruder's clothes were soiled, his boots dusty and cut from much walking over rock. Notwithstanding his vicious, threatening attitude, his body drooped as from intense fatigue.

He did not hear the women; and his savage, low-spoken command showed him dangerously sure of himself.

"Give me ten dollars out of that till. Do it quick, and keep still. And don't try shooting next time when a man asks you for money; you might get your wooden overcoat sooner'n you'd like. Hurry up, there!"

"Drop that gun, pardner!" Sally B. said quietly.

She had waited barely a breath on the threshold, yet Esther had smelled burned powder, seen Shuck's pistol on the floor, his disheveled hair and the bullet hole in the marauder's hat. Shuck had had the first shot. How had the other mastered the situation?

The man wheeled, with blazing eyes, to meet Sally B.'s pistol barrel almost at his head. His own weapon, unconsciously lowered, left him helpless, though he made a slight motion as if to lift it.

"Drop it, I say! Let go!" Her revolver touched his temple, and her black eyes blazed a message that com-

pelled obedience.

He returned her look for an instant, lowered his eyes sullenly, glanced covertly about, and, stooping, laid the pistol on the floor.

"Now, git inter that cheer!"

Again he looked at her resentfully; but only for a breath, when he bent stiffly, and dropped heavily down.

"Tie him, Shuck, to the cheer; an' his hands behind him, an' his feet together. How'd he git the drop on ye? I see ye got the first shot."

"Yes. But I reckoned he was only a drunk, an' wasn't lookin' fur him to fight. I only shot to skeer; but he jumped me like greased lightning!"

"He looks holler; I 'low grub ain't ben plenty. Had anything to eat lately?" she asked her prisoner.

He shook his head sulkily.

"I thought so. Watch him, Shuck," she ordered, and after the tying was done to her satisfaction, the two women went out.

They returned shortly, Sally B. with a generous breakfast; Esther, who refused to let her come alone, carrying the coffee. They arranged the food on a chair, and Sally B. took up her revolver again.

"Untie his hands, Shuck."

"You're the beatin'est," Shuck began, obeying her order reluctantly, "to go an' feed a man that's tried to rob ye."

"No matter. He's hungry. I wouldn't turn a hungry dog off without a bone. Get to work, now," she said gruffly to the bandit. "An' while ye're busy, tell what you wanted of ten dollars. Why didn't ye ask fur the hull till?"

"Because I wanted to be white an' take only enough to get out of the country with," Esther thought his face softened a trifle.

"Why don't ye work for it? The Boss wants choppers; an' everybody's flyin' west like ole Nick was after 'em."

"That's my business. I want to leave the country, not chop wood." The sullen look deepened.

"If ye're that partic'lar, you git that grub out o' sight, an' git! I earn my money workin', an' you can yours."

He scowled at her; and no one saw the gleam in his wicked eye as he caught the flash from Esther's solitaire.

It was the only ornament of value she wore in this rude place. She had bought it for protection, and it had served its purpose well. Most people supposed it an engagement ring, a supposition she tacitly encouraged.

The man ate hungrily, and finished with a surliness "Thank you."

"Which way are you going?"

"West."

"We'll take yo' weepin, an' watch ye a piece out on the track. Shuck, you keep an eye an' a gun on him till he gets to the turn. Ye needn't come back fur another meal o' victuals," she continued to the fellow. "If ye do, ye'll find more'n one gun p'inted yore way. Skeddaddle!"

"He's ben layin' round the town fur weeks, that cuss has; but I missed him yesterday," Shuck said as the man started off slowly. "Thought he'd lit out."

Esther watched him with mingled aversion and pity; but Sally B. was already in conference with one of the railroad office boys that "lettered well," getting out a "Warning!" to be posted on one of the town's bulletin spaces. Whatever the reprobate might next undertake could not be done there. The town kept open eyes by night as well as by day.

The iron train was two hours late, and the desert day so alluring that Esther decided to ride as usual. Immediately after the noon dinner her mount was brought to the door; but her kindly knight was missing. This was not alarming. His memory often failed him in the daily routine, when he saddled his horse and wandered alone in the hills hunting for "color," but always returned safe; and on such occasions Esther patiently went without her ride. But to-day she was disappointed. She wanted to get away from the memory of the morning.

"Had any one seen him go?" she asked. And Shuck, hearing her question, told her that "Bill had saddled not a quarter hour ago, an' lit out west down the track."

"I can overtake him, then," she said to Sally B. as she mounted.

"I don't like ter see ye start off alone," Sally B. said; yet she was too fearless herself to suspect danger; and her protest was perfunctory.

"I'll find Mr. Bernard shortly; don't worry about me."

"Look out for that there breakfast guest of our'n. If you met up with him, he might take a shine to you, or yore mare."

"My lungs are good. And section men are too plenty and Swift's heels too nimble for any man on foot to hurt me," Esther replied nonchalantly. "Besides, he'll be far toward Wells by this time. That's his first chance for supper."

It was good to be out in the open this perfect day, to be alone. She

kept on the lookout for her cavalier, expecting momentarily to overtake him. Presently she spied him climbing a high hillside to the north. It looked hot and breathless over there. She knew the succession of ridge and hollow in that direction. No wide, level spaces for gallops, no open vistas. She would have this one long afternoon to herself, listen for voices that spoke only to the solitary ear. She rode slowly, making subconscious notes of the smooth, trodden path beside the track, at places where she would give the mare her head when returning in the cooler afternoon.

A patch of brilliant desert flowers in a small nook where the melting snow had been gathered and held caught her capricious eye. She would be hidden from the town here, yet not far from the track and passing trackmen. It would be quite safe. Dismounting, she gathered a great bunch of the sun-colored blossoms, and tucked them in her hat and habit front. She uncoiled the Mexican hair rope from beneath her saddle flap; and, giving Swift 40 feet of freedom, sat down, back to the track, to memories and day-dreams—day dreams that prolonged time unheeded, till the iron train thundered past.

Eyes that caught the vision of beauty in horse and rider silhouetted against the gray hillside lighted with sudden appreciation; and one pair flamed up curiously, watched eagerly till the vision vanished, then gloomed above set teeth and clenched hands.

Esther remounted and resumed her ride, still slowly. The mood for a speed had not come. A short distance farther on she came to a deep, curving cut. Instantly on entering an uncanny sensation possessed her, a presentiment of danger. Yet she derided herself, and touched Swift to a lope. Had not the train just passed? What menace could arrive in ten minutes?

Along the banks were a few cave-like depressions cut for some purpose by the graders. As Esther rounded the curve a fleeting glimpse of a horseman coming toward the cut from the other end was interrupted by the voice of a man who sprang from one of the little holes and caught her bridle rein.

"I'll trouble you for that sparkler, miss; and don't take too much time getting off your glove. Keep them rube lips shut, too, I might add by way of friendly advice."

Esther was looking into the barrel of a pistol held by the man she had that morning served with coffee. It was not courage that came quicker than reason to her; rather, a swift anger that this creature should presume to molest her.

"How dare you?" she cried fearlessly, striking the hand on her bridle a stinging blow with her whip. In the instant of surprise and pain that made him release her, she whirled the mare on two feet and was off.

Three shots rang out behind her. She heard the whizz of a bullet perilously near, yet raced wildly on, every sense alert to keep her horse's feet from pitfalls. No sounds followed her. She knew the man would not dare show himself, would probably hide from the other rider if possible; and the mare was putting the miles behind her in marvelously few minutes.

Esther began to breathe more freely. Near the town she slowed to a walk and looked back. Neither miscreant nor horseman could be seen. She stopped to put herself to rights. Her heart was beating fast, yet as much from the rapid riding as from fear, she told herself. All had happened so quickly, it now scarcely seemed real. Dread of making a scene was stronger than fear for what had passed; and it nerved her to ride quietly up to the hotel.

Sally B. met her at the door in great excitement. "Mrs. Gregory an' Mrs. Harmon both telegraphed you to come on an' see the show terrormer. I been hopin' ye'd fly in 'fore the train left. I got yer things all packed!"

The iron stood on the track less than a stone's throw distant, its time just up. The conductor came forward as Esther dismounted.

"Will you go, Miss Anthony? I'll hold her ten minutes for you."

"Thank you. Yes, I'll go. Five minutes will do."

With Sally B.'s help she changed to another gown and sped downstairs.

"You're lightning, sure!" the conductor said with respectful approval, as he took her bags, helped her into the high boxcar, made her as comfortable as he could, and went about his train work.

Following a half-hour behind the iron train, the little engine struggled noisily along for a time, dragging its string of loaded cars, when it came to a sudden halt on a mountain-side grade. Around a curve and just beyond, the track left the mountain and crossed a gorge over a trestle. The forward brakeman came running back with blanched face and a ghastly message.

"The trestle's gone down! the iron train's wrecked and plied up down there!" he finished, pointing with a trembling finger forward.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Ambrosia in Arcadia.

Passengers and trainmen went forward to investigate. Left alone, Esther leaned far out of the door and peered forward, but could see nothing of them. In front the train curved out of sight around the shoulder of the mountain. An undulating sweep of white sand and gray sage brush stretched on either side to the horizon—that was all. Breathless and apprehensive, she waited. She could hear the steady hiss of escaping steam, an occasional shout far beyond; for the rest, desert silence.

It was late in the afternoon, yet the

sand reflected the heat in pulsing waves, burning her cheek. She climbed down after a little and walked forward, meeting one of the brakemen.

"Go back, Miss Anthony! It's no place for you—it's not—"

"Oh, what is it?" she interrupted anxiously. "Is any one hurt? Can't I help?"

"No; not now, anyway. No one can help one poor fellow; he's passed in his checks. We're trying to dig the other out before he dies."

Esther felt faint, yet kept pace with his hurrying steps.

"Miss Anthony, won't you please go into that car next? It's rough, but we'll need this for—for—" They were beside the rear car now.

"Yes, yes, I will—I know. But can't I do something? Won't you—"

"No, you can help most by staying right here—the conductor said so. But it may be hours—you'll roast in the car—"

"Never mind me. Don't wait—I'll manage."

He passed her and hurried into the car. In a moment he ran by again with blankets, a basin, and a bucket of water.

The car he had designated was partly filled with a great pile of cabbages, and looked rather impossible. Esther sat down on the end of a tie in the shade of the train and waited. Resourceful and efficient, the woman's part was especially distasteful to her. Yet here obedience was evidently the best service. Still, the hours were long.

But while the sky was yet red, welcome voices broke the spell. Four men came around the curve, holding carefully by the corners a blanket litter supporting a torn, bleeding form. Esther stepped between the cars, and with averted eyes waited for them to pass. With gentlest care they lifted him into the car. The sufferer moaned unconsciously, and Esther tried to believe that he knew nothing of his pain. Four more men appeared with a laden blanket; this was a winding-sheet. The men spoke no word, and were uncovered. Their burden, too, they bore on to the last car. Three more followed, one walking feebly, supported by the others, the conductor and brakeman of the supply train. He was pale, hatless and coatless, with a scarlet stain on neck and collar. Yet he was conscious, speaking freely.

"Don't mind me," he was saying.

"Alfred!" Esther sprang toward the trio, and caught one limp hand swinging by his side.

He straightened with sudden vigor; a wave of color warmed his pale



He Was Pale, Hatless and Coatless.

cheek. "Stella! Stella!" he repeated, and stood still, gazing at her.

"Put him in here!" she cried, now awake, and ready for action. "I'll take care of Mr. Vincent—make him comfortable."

"I'm not hurt," Alfred interrupted, "it's scarcely a scratch! I must help the boys in the other car. They—"

The conductor interposed. "Obey orders, Vincent. You're used up. We've help enough in there. You've done your part."

The two men, not heeding his protest, lifted him into the cabbage-car.

"Now, Miss Anthony, let me help you in."

"No, not now, thank you. I've something to do first. You're not ready to start, are you?"

"No, it will be a half-hour anyway; we must make one more trip to the wreck."

"I can get in by myself. Don't think about me." Even the conductor, accustomed to command, yielded to the finality in her voice, and hurried on.

"Can you sit against the car side a few minutes, Alfred? You won't faint?"

"Faint?" he scouted. "Indeed, no. But where are you going? Don't leave me, Stella!" he called a little wildly as she stepped back a pace.

Perplexities, embarrassments, were forgotten. In this solemn moment of tragedy they resumed their old relations, unquestioning.

"I'll be back in a minute. Here! You may keep this for me!" She tossed him her hat. "A hat is a pretty sure anchor for a woman, isn't it?" she said, smiling up at him, and was out of sight around the end of the train.

She could not help the gayety in her voice. The world was alive once more. Life was beautiful in spite of the grewsome sights in the car beyond. Since she could do nothing for them she would not think of them. Alfred was here; hurt, yet, but not unto death, not even to great pain. For one little moment she would selfishly hug her joy.

Down in a little swale, just before they had halted, she had noticed the bunch grass growing long and rank. She flew at it, tore it up, handful by handful, till she had a high pile, which she gathered in her arms and carried to the car. Pitching it in, she was off again, heedless of Alfred's protest. Three times she made the short journey, pausing at the door after the third load to catch her breath.

"Aren't you coming in this time? You must let me help you," he said, partly rising, but falling back.

"No, no! Don't move! You aren't able to; and if you do I won't come!" she replied emphatically, though her face was shining. "Turn your head away, and don't look till I say 'Here!'"

"I can't turn away from you, Stella!" he said whimsically, yet tenderly; and her eyes dropped. Still, she did not move.

"Oh, come, dearest, won't you? Don't wait so long. I'll—I'll turn—My true love sent me a letter to turn back my head. Did you ever play 'Green Grave' when you were a little tad? My head is 'turned back.'"

Esther never knew how she managed the climb through the great, gaping door, yards above the sloping ground; still, she was there, standing before him.

He spoke no word, but gazed up into her tender, bending face. Light speech that had bridged the first tense moments was impossible now. Pain, misunderstanding, pride, prudence, even the years, fled. She loved him, loved him! Nothing else counted.

"Lean down, Stella, sweetheart!" he whispered at last, his eyes drawing her with his words.

She knelt beside him. The long separation melted into the land of the unremembered.

The engine whistle startled them shortly, and a brakeman came with a blanket for Alfred, his coat, and Esther's bags and cloak.

"Will the fireman live?" Alfred asked, while Esther helped him into his coat.

"We think so, but can't tell surely, of course. Poor fellow! He's conscious now." The sympathy in the man's tones brought Esther's tears.

"Could I do anything? Some—"

she began haltingly.

"I'm sure I can," Alfred exclaimed, half rising again.

The brakeman waved him back. "Miss Anthony, don't let him! He had a pretty good shaking up himself; but that's nothing to what he did. No one knows how he ever pried that wheel off from poor Dooly's leg; but he did, and held it free till we came, the sun broiling him like a beefsteak, and Dooly begging all the time to be put out of his misery. That's enough for one day. You keep him right here."

Alfred tried vainly to stop the story. The brakeman finished, prompted by Esther's eager, appreciative face. Yet he left them shortly, and the train started. Then Esther turned toward the cabbages.

"What in the world—" Alfred began.

"I'm captain now," she interrupted. "I'm going to make you comfortable before the last shred of daylight goes."

"It won't be dark; there's a moon."

"Much light a four-days-old moon will give!" she scoffed.

"But I'm comfortable now, if you will only come and sit beside me."

Headless of his importuning, she continued piling the cabbages away till one forward corner was bare.

"What's that for?"

"You must sleep; and it will be bitter cold. This is—"

"Sleep! Sleep to-night, with you here? Never!"

She smiled at him, yet persisted, throwing the soft grass in the corner, smoothing it carefully. "Come. Let me help you over here. It is too cold there by the door."

"Dear tyrant!" He smiled happily, and pulled himself up by the door-handle. But he was unsteady, and would have fallen had she not supported him. For once she was grateful for her strength.

"Lie down. I think you'll find that a tolerable substitute for a hair mattress."

"The worm turns. I won't! I'll sit down, though, and in that corner, if you'll sit beside me."

She demurred, to indulge him finally; and, seated side by side on the floor, with cabbages tumbling about their feet, they wandered in Arcadia. Amabel, Esther's hiding, Alfred's capture and illness, his search for her, college and business life—it was a tale of the years told by the light of the thin desert moon.

But Gideon's part in the story Esther modified, allowing Alfred to believe that her flight from Colfax had been the impulsive result of fear for him, as was her wild race to Virginia City.

Life begins now where it forsook us years ago when Amabel Hamilton asked me to button her shoe in the Colfax parlor."

"No. Life does not forsake, it tests us," Esther replied.

The engine wheezed, puffed ineffectually, and stood still.

"Oh, can there be some new trouble?" cried Esther.

"I guess by the sound they've only stopped for kindling wood," Alfred surmised.

Esther looked out. Men were running here and there about in the brush, more discernible by ear than by eye. They filled their arms with towering loads of sage and returned with them to the engine, crushing the pungent stuff into the firebox. Slowly the wheels began to turn. The men kept alongside, piling the tender high, till the summit was reached. Three times they had thus to reinforce their small stock of green Sierra wood be-

fore the journey was ended.

The night grew colder. When the car stood still, the biting air swept through and chilled the two in spite of the glow at their hearts. Esther bustled about, chafing his hands, protecting the wound in his head with her handkerchief, and tucking in the blanket more closely, while he surreptitiously pulled it loose, that it might be tucked again. A vagrant lock of her hair brushed his face as she leaned over him.

"Tell me, Stella, what have you done to your pretty hair; something's turned all its gold to—dark, autumn-tinted brown. It's lovely, though."

"Not I, but the salt Pacific, turned my gold to rust. It treats nearly all desert gold so, especially if the gold is on young heads."

At last they touched more serious things.

"But don't you know how you came to be liberated from that awful place?"

"No," Alfred replied to her question; "nor how I came there. I only know that after Cadwallader, Gideon and I had looked over Gideon's prospect we climbed down the mountain to where the horses were tied. Mine was gone."

"Only yours?"

"Only mine. We'll look up your nag," Gideon said; "you stay here." Cadwallader came back alone a little later to see if my horse had returned; but it hadn't; and Cad went away again. It was nearly dark then. Perhaps it was only minutes, it seemed hours, that I wandered around, when something hit me on the head. The next I knew I was in an old tunnel, chained to the heavy timbers."

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.)

Dr. Spofford is at the Rushford Hotel, Thier River Falls, the 9th; Windsor Hotel, Warren, the 10th; Park Place Hotel, Argyle, the 11th, of every month. Fitting glasses is his specialty.

MORTGAGE FORECLOSURE SALE.

Notice is hereby given that Default has been made in the conditions of a mortgage executed by James McCann, a single man, mortgagor, to the First National Bank of East Grand Forks, Minnesota, mortgagee, dated the 16th day of April, A. D. 1903, and recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds in and for the county of Marshall and State of Minnesota, on the 11th day of May, A. D. 1903, at Nine (9), o'clock A. M., in Book 32 of Mortgages, on page 133 thereof, that the amount claimed to be due on said mortgage at this date is Three Hundred Sixty-three Dollars, (\$363.00). That the premises described in and covered by said mortgage are as follows, to-wit:

The southwest Quarter (SW $\frac{1}{4}$) of the northeast Quarter (NE $\frac{1}{4}$) of the south west Quarter (SW $\frac{1}{4}$) of Section seventeen (17), and the east half (E $\frac{1}{2}$) of the northeast Quarter (NE $\frac{1}{4}$) of the Southwest Quarter (SW $\frac{1}{4}$) of Section seventeen (17); all in Township one hundred fifty-six (156), North of Range Fifty (50), west of the Fifth Principal Meridian, containing thirty acres (30 A.), situate in the County of Marshall and State of Minnesota. That by virtue of the power of sale contained in said mortgage, and pursuant to the statute in such case made and provided, such mortgage will be foreclosed by the sale of said premises at public venue to the highest bidder for cash, by the Sheriff of Marshall County, Minnesota, at the front door of the Court House, in the City of Warren, in said County and State, on Monday, the 22nd day of June, A. D. 1903, at Ten (10), o'clock A. M., to satisfy the amount then due on said mortgage together with costs of such sale and Twenty-five Dollars, (\$25.00), attorneys' fees as stipulated in said mortgage.

First National Bank of East Grand Forks, Minnesota, Mortgagee.

F. C. Masseur, Attorney for mortgagee, East Grand Forks, Minnesota, First National Bank Bldg.

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