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Wild Race With Death.

The Thrilling Adventure Which Had its Start in the Little Station on the Mountain Side While the Operator Slept at His Post.

By J. Percy Barnitz, in the Argosy for March.

With the approach of spring had come the long threatened outbreak on the Navajo Indian reservation.

A large party of bucks had started on an expedition of murder and robbery in the direction of the San Francisco Mountains, closely pursued by several troops of cavalry from Fort Defiance.

Orders had been issued that additional cavalry from Fort Wingate be sent by rail to Flagstaff in an endeavor to head off the hostile redskins, and, together with the troops already in pursuit, surround and drive them back upon the reservation.

Flagstaff, then a lonely little station on the Atlantic and Pacific railway, is situated on the eastern slope of the San Francisco Mountains, the road descending by a series of long, sweeping curves to the broad plateau stretching away to the Continental Divide.

Although but early April, the weather had been oppressively warm for several days. Standing at the window of his little bedroom over the station, late one afternoon, Frank Barton, the night telegraph operator, was abstractedly watching the heated air rising in dancing waves from the brown Arizona plain below the mountains.

He was mentally deprecating the circumstances which had forced him to take a position in that almost wilderness. But he consoled himself with the thought that he was yet young and one of the best railroad telegraphers to be found anywhere.

Besides, had it not been for his dissipated habits, he would now be filling a responsible position with the great railway company in the east which had finally dismissed him from their employ after repeatedly warning him of the danger of his course.

He would quit this infernal whisky drinking; there was nothing in it but trouble. He would brace up, be a man, and see whether full application of his abilities would not put him again upon the main line of success from which he had sidetracked himself.

But he was so nervous this evening; he must have something to steady him. He would go over to the board shanty bearing the euphonious name, "The Cattle King's Rest," and take one drink before going to work.

An unusual number of rough, rollicking fellows were in the little frontier saloon, and before he was aware of it,

Barton's one drink had been multiplied many times.

It was quite dark when he started back to the station. The day man had the lamps lighted and was impatiently awaiting his coming.

"Same thing over again," he savagely muttered as Barton came through the doorway. "Are you going to keep me here waiting for you for hours every night, Frank?" he added. "I'm getting tired of it, and if you continue it much longer I'll make a complaint at headquarters. Look out for orders for Forty Six; there's a troop special coming west from Wingate, and the passing point will likely be between here and Canyon Diablo. Keep the instruments adjusted; a storm is moving up the mountains, and the wires are working bad. Good night."

And Barton found himself alone before he could reply to the day man.

As the storm drew nearer, the night air became suddenly cold and damp. Barton shivered, closed the door, and prepared to build a fire in the stove.

He had hardly finished this work and settled himself in the chair before the instrument table when he heard train Forty Six—the famous Overland Flyer—reported forty minutes late.

Shortly afterwards the telegraph rattled out his station call of "F. S.," and he received the following order from the train dispatcher at Winslow:

"Order No. 14.
To Conductor and Engineer train Forty Six, Flagstaff:
Train Forty Six and troop special Sixty One will meet at Cosnino. Forty Six will take siding."
(Signed.) "Harwood,
"Dispatcher."

Barton signed O. K. for the order, and lighted the red lantern.

The storm had broken over the mountains in all its fury, and when he opened the station door to hang the lantern on the signal arm outside, a rush of cold air extinguished the flickering flame.

"Curse it!" he said to himself. "Who can keep that battered old lamp lighted in a storm like this? Forty Six can't make up any time on the grade between Williams and the top of the mountain. I'll flag her when I hear her coming."

He closed the door with a bang, re-lighted the lantern, and threw himself into a clumsy rocking chair beside the stove.

The wind dashed the sleet and rain against the window panes with great force. The telegraph wires sighed, moaned and shrieked alternately, as the blasts of wind struck them with greater or less violence.

Occasionally the faint, far away howl of the coyote broke weird and mournfully through the raging of the storm, causing Barton to shift uneasily in his chair.

The liquor he had drunk began to take effect. His eyes slowly closed, his head dropped upon his breast, and he breathed long and regularly.

"F. S. F. S.," rattled the sounder upon the table, first with clock-like regularity, and finally with quick, nervous jerks.

The sleeping operator never moved; his head had fallen farther forward upon his breast, and his arms hung listlessly toward the floor.

Far up the mountain side, shining through the gloom like a twinkling star, appeared the headlight of the locomotive drawing the Overland Flyer. Larger and brighter became the light; presently a low, distant rumble, gradually increasing into a roar, then a long, sharp whistle which the howling winds gathered in their arms and smothered, and train Forty Six swept past the station of Flagstaff.

Frank Barton gave a start, rubbed his eyes, and, as his practised ear caught the familiar call of "F. S.," quickly stepped to the instrument and answered it.

"Forty Six there?" asked the dispatcher at Winslow.

"Not yet," replied Barton; and just then his eyes fell upon the clock dial. The hands pointed to 10:25. His face grew ashy pale, and a strange numbness crept over him as his sleepy brain recalled the roar of a passing train a few minutes before.

Seizing the lantern, he reeled out upon the station platform, peering into the darkness.

Staring out of the night at his white and haggard face were two red tail lights of the rapidly disappearing train.

He was dazed as the horror of the situation dawned upon him.

There was no telegraph station between Flagstaff and Canyon Diablo, and, as Cosnino was but fourteen miles east of Flagstaff and twenty-two miles west of Canyon Diablo, the troop special had already passed the latter place and was hurrying toward the meeting place.

Leaning heavily against the side of the building, Barton gazed down the stretch of wet track until it was lost to view in the darkness beyond the yellow path of light which streamed from the station window. He could hear the distant rumble of the train rushing to its certain disaster.

held our own. Now that we've done with Dry Fork trestle and hit the level, I'll pull her wide open, an' I'll go you a week's pay we make Winslow on time. Hello! See that—"

"Bang!" came the warning crack of a torpedo from beneath the heavy wheels.

Murray quickly reversed, shut off steam, pulled out the sand lever, and, throwing on the air brakes, stopped the train with a suddenness that brought the passengers excitedly to their feet.

Conductor Blake jumped down, and, running forward, met the engineer.

"Go back!" shouted Murray; "there's something wrong. A riderless horse, saddled and bridled, dashed across the track not twenty feet ahead of the engine, then came a torpedo signal to stop, and a dark object rolled out from the rails."

Several hundred feet behind the train they came upon the form of a man lying on the wet ground. He was hatless, covered with mud, and his face smeared with blood, which oozed from a cut on the head.

Blake held his lantern close to the man's face, while Murray wiped away the blood with a clean bunch of waste he took from his jumper.

"Why, great God! It's Barton, the night man at Flagstaff!" he cried as he looked at the white, set countenance. "He has papers in his hand; what's it mean?"

Tearing the crumpled sheets from the unconscious operator's grasp, he held them up to the lantern and read the orders to meet train Sixty One at Cosnino.

For a moment the two men stared at each other, speechless. Then, tenderly picking up the injured man, they carried him into the baggage car.

"Forgot the orders! Tried to head us off down the mountain, and did it, to! But how he did it, God only knows, I don't!" exclaimed Blake.

"Hustle now, Murray," he continued, as they laid Barton on some seat cushions on the car floor. "we've no time to lose, or we'll lay Sixty One out at Cosnino. Close shave that! If we'd passed Cosnino ahead of Sixty One there'd a-been more whites killed than the red devils'll get a chance at in a month, eh, Murray?"

The train steamed on to Cosnino, reaching there just as the special rounded the curve beyond the siding.

The soft May breezes were blowing across the New Mexican "mesa," when Barton, sitting in an invalid's chair on the veranda of the Albuquerque hospital, told an interested audience of railroad men the story they had so anxiously waited to hear.

"Told how he had performed the seemingly impossible feat of beating an express train down the rugged sides of the Rocky Mountains, astride an Arizona mustang—the story of his wild race with Death."

shoot out my miserable wasted life. It seems now like a horrible story I'd read instead of reality.

"Well, just as I was about to do that very thing, something—I don't know what it was, I guess it was the Almighty—but, anyhow, something said to me, 'Sanford ranch! Quick! Sanford ranch!' and just that quick I said to myself, 'I'll try it; I might's well die trying to save 'em; yes, a blame sight better that way than dying the worthless wretch I've been lately.' And try it I did, winning out against death by about twenty feet.

"There's a trail from the Sanford ranch to Flagstaff which runs at right angles with the railroad and crosses the track three miles west of Cosnino. This trail is so steep that it is used only in coming up the mountain, and I've heard the boys say that have come up there that anyone who couldn't ride a horse when it was walking on its hind legs had no business to try to climb it.

"The distance from where the trail crosses the track to Flagstaff is three and one half miles, while the distance the train had to run to meet that point was eleven miles. Bucking Bill Harmon, with his roan bronco from the Sanford ranch was up at the Rest with a lot of other cow punchers, making a night of it. Bill and his roan had crawled that trail more times than any other fellow in that section, and I figured that his horse could do so alive.

"So I grabbed the torpedo and the train orders and ran over to the front of the saloon where the horse was picketed, cut the lariat, and, mounting the brute, started for the trail on a mad run.

"Over the edge of the trail went the roan with a leap; I closed my eyes and threw my arms around the beast's neck. The animal gave a loud snort of fear and tried to stop, but it might as well have tried to stop the world turning around—the impetus was awful.

"I did not experience the sensation of flying that night; I don't think anyone else ever has. Why, I'm sure that bronco took leaps over a hundred feet in length, and when its feet would strike ground again I felt like I was being hit on the spine with a sledge hammer."

"The breath was knocked so completely out of me that a terrible choking sensation seized my throat. The growth of greasewood clutched at my legs and nearly pulled me out of the saddle. My heart felt as though it would fly out of my mouth, and I thought I was dying.

"Suddenly the frightened steed slackened, and I knew we were getting on more level ground.

"A low, distant, hollow rumble, followed by a locomotive whistle, reached my ears. It was Forty Six crossing the Dry Fork trestle!

"The headlight loomed out of the night, and I could tell that the engineer was increasing speed by the quickening exhaust of the engine. It was still a quarter of a mile to the railroad.

"'Oh! God,' I prayed, 'let me beat the train!' I yelled, 'Go! Go!' at the now crazed mustang, and my voice sounded to me, weak, faint and far away.

"I peered steadily ahead in the darkness. There was the track now almost before me, and the rails, reflecting the glow from the headlight, looked to my burning eyes like fiery serpents.

"I pulled with all my might on the bridle reins and slid from the saddle, reaching out my hand with the torpedo, I felt its spring catch clasp the cold steel, and then the heat from the locomotive firebox scorched my face. I felt an awful shock, and knew nothing until I recovered consciousness here in the hospital."

"Here, Barton, take a nip o' this; you look weak," said a ruddy faced conductor, offering the invalid a flask.

"What! Booze? No more for me, Cooper; no more for me. Read this—read it loud to the boys."

"The Central Railway.
"Office of the General Manager.
April 28, 1884.

"Mr. Frank Barton,
"Albuquerque, N. M.
"My Dear Frank:

"My private car, in which my family were returning from Los Angeles, was attached to A. and P. train Forty Six the night of April 7th. If you will come to my office when you have recovered from your injuries and will take the pledge, I will give you immediate employment. After you have kept the pledge for one year, I will re-instate you in the position you held when required to leave the service of this company. I believe I can make a man of you yet. Will you do it?"

"Sincerely your friend,
James A. Corder,
General Manager.

"Boys," said Barton, straightening up in his chair with an effort, "I'm going to do it."
And he did.

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