

Messengers

By Calvin Johnston

The group before the fire at the Engineers' Club were listening, every one--though nothing was being said; nor was it the crackle of apple logs or fluttering sails and drowning cries of the northeaster in the chimney that preoccupied them. Rather some still, distant undertone in their own breasts, arresting their conversation, gestures, thoughts--they glanced at one another surreptitiously, uneasily.

"But listen--I am telling you," said old Con O'Connel, the railroad builder, his voice rolling and sweet as the bells of Shandon: "To-night I hear a footfall in the rain--that of Tim Cannon, the messenger."

So that was the undertone which had arrested their thoughts; the rush of footfalls symbolizing to the group, every one, the pursuit of himself by a belated messenger. They settled themselves, relieved and smiling; after all the thing had been naturally suggested to them by the echo of rain on the broad plate windows. And they nodded their heads to Con, still listening.

The footfall of Tim Cannon, a name of ancient days on the P. D. Railroad; but as the story does not concern him except as Molly Regan's messenger I will leave him come into it in his own time and take up with the Regans themselves.

Two of them there were to begin with--young Michael, swinging a lusty pick in a construction gang of the Great Southwest Railway; and Molly, a pretty bride with solemn wondering gaze and air of listening to things which no one else could hear.

Often Mike would smile at her queer fancies that there are things to learn and do beyond the day's work, and after the Great Southwest has been builded and he has laid aside pick and shovel to become track

boss at Turntable Station this queerness of Molly's leads her into playing a great joke on her husband.

For she saves her odd pennies against his birthday and presents him with a book. "A book of higher knowledge, it is," she says, while Mike scratches his head in awe; and she must kiss him for the kind interest he takes and that evening read to him a page in a voice like the song of soldiers marching. Mike toils after in mind with his big fists gripping and forehead glistening in the struggle to remember the journey, but at the end a darkness comes down on him, and the two gaze at each other uneasily and the page is read over again.

But devil a bit can Mike remember of it, so that he sits despairing with his head between his hands. "Do not mind, Molly," he says then; "you shall study on alone at the higher knowledge, having a joy of it which is not for me." He says this, looking up to smile, and yet the big hands hold on to hers as if fearing she was being stolen away.

But Molly answers him back so clear and strong that the song of soldiers marching is nothing to it. "'T is only the joke I am playing. Am I the wife to bother you with learning when you know already so much," she says, "and have the care of the section on your mind, with ties to lay straight and rails to spike fast so that the great railroad may run?" And when he speaks once more of the study she should make of knowledge Molly closes the big book and sets it on the mantel along with the clock.

"'T is for ornament, and now you know why I bought it from the peddler," she explains; "for every household of pretension must have a book."

So they admire the shiny binding and gold letters, and after five years when their new cottage is built it is given a shelf of its own.

Danny is born, the same who in Molly's lifetime shall be an official of the great railroad; and when in the course of time he is turned a sturdy boy of seven, with coal-black eyes and a round cropped head, she would place the book in his hands for purposes of learning. But detecting the fear of Michael as he smokes in the evening with eyes on the shelf, that the mysterious volume may contain matter treasonable to their state and condition, she ignores the higher knowledge completely and is content to send Danny only to the Turntable school.

A cruel one he is to the old master there, inking the pages of his reader and carving a locomotive on his desk; and when he is twelve he has decided against all books and school and is interested only in things of the Turntable yard.

So that one evening he comes home, and when Molly kisses him because he brought all his books as if to study Danny explains, "Mother, I am now a man and have a job calling crews, so study is of no more use."

He stacks his reader and arithmetic on the shelf by the old book, and Michael hearing the news that evening laughs with pleasure that the boy has completed his education so soon and promises to put half Danny's salary in bank in his own name. Time passes and the books fade in their bindings, and are forgotten even by Molly; but the eyes of her shine more clearly than ever as if studying in pages which no one else could see. When Danny is about eighteen years old, and already operator at Turntable, she notices that a habit has come over him of pausing in the doorway at dusk, and there he will stand gazing out into the yards with folded arms till at last his mother asks the reason with timid eagerness.

"T is the lanterns," says Dan. "Beckon they do to things beyond Turntable."

"To things beyond," repeats Molly with hand on her heart. "Turn to me," she says; and Dan does so, grinning at his fancy; but as she studies the black-browed face a fierce frown like the fluff and smoke of powder passes over it, with the white teeth gleaming out.

"Beckon they do, mother," he says steadily, "to the job of trainmaster and superintendent, and even beyond to places high and powerful. And there I must trample my way whoever has to be pulled down to make room."

In that instant she sees him as he is, the Regan of them all; and after a bit she smiles and nods, but never again does she ask about the beckoning of the lanterns.

So time passes again, and Dan goes up to division headquarters at Barlow to dispatch trains, and Michael gives a last order as assistant roadmaster and comes home to his long sickness. And now Molly is alone in the little house, settled down to keep blooming the memories of it along with the hollyhocks of the garden beyond the lattice with the morning-glory vines trailing over. Time fades her face, but 't is still uplifted and lighted, and later she is seen among the flowers till they die in the fall, and winter coming down she sits at her window knitting a shawl as the snow is knitted without.

But deep is her grieving over Dan, who is by this time superintendent, with his policy of pull-down and trample-under, dreaded by all round him. Two or three times a year he will stop his special at Turntable, and seated in the little parlor he seems a glowing metal mass of a man to Molly, standing apart in awe of him. But the time is at hand when she must appeal to him or never at all in this world, so the saints inspire her to speak a message to the man of power and she smiles with shy pride of their confidence in her.

"Faith, I will talk to him as a boy again," she plans; "'Danny,' I will say, 'when the lanterns of the yard do beckon to your ambition is there

not one light above and beyond, brighter than all the others, which beckons the spirit?' Then he will be guided by it," reasons old Molly with her solemn gaze fixed on the future of Dan.

But it chanced that Dan's visit is delayed and Molly feels that the saints are impatient of her worldly lingering.

"I must put the message into writing lest it be lost entirely," she says then. "Anyhow Danny will read it over and over in memory of me, having that tender a heart toward his mother, for all his hardness to others."

So that the message of the farthest lantern is at last about to be written, on an evening when the little cottage with crusted eaves and hoary glimmering windows seems but the bivouac of winter elves in folk story. And as old Molly by the cleared table, with pen in hand and bottle of ink and the paper she bought when Michael died--to write his second cousin in Kildare a letter of sympathy, y' understand--as old Molly makes ready for the writing, after a stick laid on the fire and hearth brushed, the snow drifts solidly to the window but is swept clean of the doorstep, leaving a scratch of firelight under the door on the path beyond.

"The Farthest Lantern," she writes, as a headline, for 't is certain that Danny before reading will wish to know what it is about; and then pleased with the successful beginning she holds it up to the shaded lamp to read over, then because of the wrinkled hands shaking lays it down on the table, surely as steady as rock.

Divil a thing can she make out except blots and scratches, so that the headline is done over with more care. And only then it becomes plain that what with the rheumatism and palsy Molly has written her last, except scratches, which the most credulous could not accept at all as a message of interest, y' understand.

Now well would it be for old Mistress Regan's memory if she had put aside the message with resignation and thought no more about it. But there is no doubt that the look of solemn wonder flitted suddenly from her face, leaving it haggard and fierce, and that like a stab with a dagger she drove the splintering pen into the desk as into the breast of an enemy. So much is known, for there is little done that can be screened from mortal ken.

As for her thoughts--here no man can tell, for she held her words behind grim set lips. But the guess cannot be far amiss that when old Molly discovered she was destined to die with never a word of warning or counsel to Dan she broke into bitter revolt. Not a word of all the wisdom she had stored with this one purpose could be written or spoken to him--and it never was. Far be it from me to blackguard an old lady fallen in with disappointment but it is a fact proved by witness that her trembling hands upraised and her lips, always so faintly smiling, curled as with a curse--and whether it was launched at the fiend or heaven itself is not for me to say who have no proof that her voice was heard above the howling of the blizzard.

But this I know, that on the instant she hears a summons that breaks the spell of anger as no threat of purgatory would have done. A moment she hesitates, the old hands sink unclenching, the fierceness fades from her eyes, and once again with wondering uplifted look Molly Regan turns to the things beyond, which no one else may see.

At the wide-open welcoming door she stands, peering amid the squall of snow; and there in the center of the blur of light stands Tim the messenger, in aftertime the ruin of Dan Regan's fortunes.

The boy's hands are clasped as those of a frozen corpse, the wind whistles in his rags, but he glowers at her with narrowed brows and a gleam of teeth. Here he is, come to demand retribution for her rebellion against the will of God, and since Molly cannot live to pay it is ordained that she shall give instead into Tim Cannon's hands the

means of trampling under Dan Regan and his fortune. 'T is little we know.

"Come," says Molly, "come in to the fire, and the hot coffee; you are frozen with the wind and snow. Glory be, that I am still here to make comfortable for the waif on my doorstep."

The wisp of old woman in mourning dress, with blown white hair and out-stretched hand; the crackling hearth, and coziness of the room beyond--these are hostess and haven enough to any waif of winter tempest; and Molly knowing it to be so steps aside for him, laughing with eagerness to see him at the fireside, dry and warm in Danny's old clothes, sniffing the steam of his coffee cup.

But this is no ordinary outcast, y' understand, submissive to charity, but an agent of retribution, who stands with frozen folded hands, and wind whistling in his rags, looking on with a threatening manner. And when the moment has come for him to enter, and not until then, he stalks stiffly past the outheld hand to the center of the room and turns slowly in his tracks to study the features of the place, as an agent of destiny should always do. His pinched little face is dirty, his black hair tousled by the storm, which has blown away his cap; and now the lamp-light touching his temple reveals the deep scar there. A wild and awesome waif is this, and Molly studying with startled interest his behavior feels at last that she is entertaining some veteran campaigner of regions beyond Turntable to whom the mischances of earthly wandering in cold and snow are nothing.

Not a word does he say but spreads his stiffened fingers before the blaze, and Molly with the strangest of hopes dawning so soon after her rebellion bustles briskly about the coffee making. And presently it is brewed and Tim Cannon stands by the table drinking and munching toast and cold meat.

"Ye must be seated in the chair," urges Molly, "and be comfortable, and it will seem like home to you."

At this Tim Cannon rubs his scar with remembrance of his drunken grandfather and their home in the city slums. Then he eats the faster till he is done, studying her with peculiar interest.

"You should have seen the money before I began the eats," he says by way of advice on the entertainment of wayfarers.

"Do you mean you can't pay?" asks Molly after a moment's reflection. "Now what am I to do?"

"Throw me out," instructs Tim, with contempt of her ignorance.

"Into the storm? Oh, no!"

"Why not?" he asks with suspicion.

"Faith, I wouldn't treat a dog so," replied Molly.

"Sure, not a dog," agrees Tim; and waiting to be driven out stands arrow-straight in Danny's old clothes, which are too big for him, wondering what the dog has to do with the matter.

"But you can pay," says Molly after a moment. Faintly and eagerly she speaks, her hand pressing her heart to steady it in against the impulse of hope. "You can pay for that and much more--food and drink and warmth all the days of my life--and without money." Tim shrewdly glances his question, but Molly shakes her head for answer.

"To-night I will keep secret and plan how to arrange it--and you may sleep here on the sofa before the fire and dream of good things for to-morrow; and only then"--she nods with mystery in her smile--"I will say what ye are to do."

And Tim gives her a glance of his level eyes, reflecting in the wisdom of experience that here is crooked business to be done for his keep.

"Sure," he answers in a way to inspire confidence, and the bargain being struck Molly says good night, and the guest is soon stretched in sleep on the couch.

After a time the shadows move up closer to him, the fire flickering on the blackened log as the spirit clings to a body dying; the wind falls till only the deep breathing of the sleeper is heard, and the loud ticking of the clock--it strikes two with a crash, and Tim rouses.

As an old campaigner he rises from sleep without recoil or startled look at the cloaked figure standing with ink and paper at the table in the center of the room.

"Whist!" she says, and for a moment marvels at the nature of a boy who rises to the alarm in the middle of the night, awake and ready; the indifference with which he buttons his coat whilst hearing the snow he has just escaped snarl threateningly against the window. "Whist!" says Molly, hesitating to tell the reason for her coming at that hour, lest it shock or frighten him. But the bearing of the meager boy and the level glance of the untamable blue eyes once more assure her that he has not been sent here from beyond Turntable to fail her at extremity.

"Y' understand, Timothy, that I am an old lady who may die any time--perhaps to-night, having such warning in the unsteady beating of my heart--and so I am come at once to explain matters and have you settle my affairs for me on earth. Do not be afraid----"

"What of?" asks Tim.

"First," resumes Molly eagerly, "I have planned to explain to you a moment--that 't is a duty I promised myself to do and have long neglected."

"What is that?" asks Tim.

"A duty? Why, the same as made me take you in this night."

"How did it make you?" asks Tim, and listens with skepticism to her explanation.

"'T will be the same with you, settling my affairs on earth," says Molly in conclusion; "if you promise to do it 't is then a duty, and of course you would not fail--through storm and hardship and fear, you would go----"

"A duty," says Tim with reflection; "if you die you'll never know whether I 'tend to it."

"Why, that would make no difference. You would 'tend to it because you promised. You would follow the Farthest Lantern, as I will explain presently."

Queerly he looks round, studying the flicker of fire, the cozy room, even the clothes he is wearing; then the uplifted old face under the white hair with its expression of listening to things he cannot hear.

"I promise," he says, and laughs in a fierce puzzled way--the only laugh ever heard from him. And he has forgotten and Molly has forgotten to name the price to be paid for his trouble.

"Here is a pen you may fit in the broken holder," she says; "write what I cannot for the palsy in my hand. Now, as I tell you--'t is the letter of the Farthest Lantern--the lantern which beckons to duty."

But Tim fumbles the pen. "I never learned how," he explains, "to write the letters"; and on the instant feels the hand at his shoulder tremble and clutch, looks up a moment to see two great tears roll down her cheeks--and curses with a mighty smother in the breast of him.

"You need not curse," says Molly faintly; "'t is the will of the saints after all."

She nods, listening, and then the boy watches her glide from the room, and for a long time sits on the hearth before the fire, his chin locked in his hands.

So after all it has come about that the message of the Farthest Lantern is never written at all. And neither is it spoken, for Tim scratching on the door of Molly's room at daybreak receives no cheery word of greeting; and after a moment's reflection entering with the lamp he finds her silent forever.

Without reverence he stares at the face on the pillow, having no knowledge of death's ghostly significance; and scowling he brushes away the cold beads which gather on his forehead. 'T is certain that an outcast in a strange house with a dead person will be marked for suspicion by the neighbors; and Tim Cannon has had cause enough to avoid the police. Yet queerly enough he sets the lamp, shining brightly, by the bedside, and sometimes seated and sometimes moving about, but never leaving the chill room for the warm fireplace next door, he keeps her company.

One neighbor hears of Molly's death from a vagabond at her door in the morning and runs to call to others "Come, Aunt Molly is dead." On their way to the Regan cottage they agree that the vagabond is a suspicious character and look about for him. But Tim has disappeared; nor do they see him again until entering the room where Molly lies,

with lamp burning brightly and grim little sentry returned to await them.

Later when questioned he explains his presence in a few words. "I'll be on the way," he says then.

No one offers him shelter or money or food, being a suspicious character. Indeed all the company approve when a man stops him to examine the package in his pocket. But as it is found to consist of only an ink bottle and some paper with a broken pen he is permitted to go.

"It is suspicious," they agree. "What can the likes of him want with letter writing?"

But they are broad-minded people of Turntable, and let him go on condition that he stay away.

And 't is on this same day Dan Regan catches the stride that shall make destiny for railroads, and lands his great job with the P. D. System.

All of two months after Molly's funeral--in fact the very morning of Dan Regan's departure from Barlow and the Great Southwest Railroad to take his position as general manager of the P. D.--a ragged gossoon with a scar over his temple peeps from the box car of a through train halted for a change of engines near the depot platform. It is Tim Cannon, surprised every morning at waking to find himself out of the den of the city slums, where morning, noon and night his grandfather--being in liquor at the time--would drive him out to steal some trifle good for a drink at the pawnbroker's saloon. And having no knowledge that a living is to be gained by a more honorable profession than crime he peeps out with suspicion on the open streets and yards, where it is impossible to hide from a patrolman.

But hunger drives him out into the open, snarling under his breath; and presently toward the depot lunch stand, groaning under the weight of sinkers and pies, Timothy is making his way by fits and starts and glancing suspicion in every direction. So that he is overcome with chagrin when in spite of all his caution a young man steps from behind the car unnoticed and taps him smartly on the shoulder.

Quite an elegant young gentleman, in pink shirt and gay suspenders, who says: "See Dan Regan, yonder, up the platform, who is now off from his old job as superintendent here to become general manager of the P. D. All the luck he has, and myself with a headpiece of solid gold knocking at Opportunity, who has on her door 'Nobody Home,'" says the young man in gloom.

To the switch engine signaling down the yard he gives the high sign in answer that he will be there in the course of time, and as Tim prowls round the corner of the station he follows after to see what is meant by it.

"What, are you not going out again in the box car, young hobo?" he asks.

"It is a fine home if you have but the bread," says Tim.

"A home?" repeats the other. "Mr. James Craney, I am," he informs with dignity; "chief clerk to the general yardmaster, who has no other but me. Is it reasonable, young hobo, as man to man, that you can jolly me along?"

He peers round the corner, and for the first time Regan, a towering figure of a man, turns so that Tim can see his face. The bell of the special rings faintly as the sweep of his glance takes in Mr. Craney and the vagabond boy; then he steps on board and in a moment the glittering brass spark of the car amid the flying dust cloud flings Regan's last signal to the G. S. Railroad.

But the towering black-browed man lingers in the mind's eyes of Timothy; a giant who has stepped out of the unknown and swept him with slow smoldering glance and then stepped back again.

Thus they meet and part, and the great man holds no more memory of the vagabond than if he had never been; but in the bony little breast under the rags the heart leaps high, and on the instant Tim takes up the trail which Destiny, a far-sighted old creature, has long since blazed out for him.

"He is the big boss," says the boy with awe, gazing after the spangle of the flying train.

"I would not envy Regan if I were you," advises Craney. "See how he has gone--with no friend to bid him godspeed because of the way he has kept us all under."

But the boy still gazes after the spangle in the dust. "Divil a bit will Regan care whether he be godspeeded or not," he says, so boldly that Craney considers him with respect.

"I see that yourself has ambition along of the rags," he says with meditation. "Then I know a job where you may use the ambition freely and never a chance to part with the rags," he says. "A job which is the equal of Regan's in every way, only on a smaller scale, you understand; where you will be general manager of a railroad and all the other officials to boot, including your own pay-master. Do I interest you?"

Tim nods in respect to the big words and Mr. Craney instructs him: "Whist! Arrange your running time to meet me passing the yard-limit post yonder at six one P.M."

And to make it official he scribbles a train order in his note-book for Tim to sign with his mark, as his drunken grandfather has educated him to do.

Then Mr. Craney strolls away to answer the signals of the engine that there are cars to be weighed, and Tim prowling professionally past the lunch counter in the waiting room, steals a banana and a sandwich, which he has for breakfast in the shade of a pile of ties. There he watches the making up of trains, the flying switches, the flatheads scuttling along packing the journal boxes; and far beyond he can see the machine shops with the forked tongues of blacksmiths' forges and the blink of brasses in the roundhouse.

A great groan of iron and steam and toil swells in the smoky light, and the bells call to him so that he begins prowling everywhere from end to end of the yards. The noon comes with blowing of whistles; and hungry again he goes back to the lunch counter while the waiter is busy and sandwiches are easy prey. But instead of stealing them he comes out on the platform with empty hands and stares back, not understanding why it is so, till the groan of the work hour swelling again calls up the memory of black-browed Regan who has been big boss of it all.

"T is sure he would never run and hide from a policeman," says Tim, and ponders how Regan would act in his place. "He would go hungry if he was not strong enough to take what he wanted to their faces--that is what Regan would do," he says; and despising sandwiches and sinkers which have to be stolen in secret he struts proudly about with his rags and hunger till the six o'clock whistle blows and Mr. Craney meets him at the yard limit.

Now be it explained that just below this spot the Great Southwest had built its first freight house, abandoned as the village of Barlow grew away from it into a big town. Long ago the foundations have been wiped out, but in Regan's time it still stands, a ramshackle ruin on the

edge of the right of way, which some official with economy has leased out instead of tearing down.

"This is the Terminal Building," explains Mr. Craney as they come up, "of the Barlow Suburban Railway." And he points out the sagging track of rust-eaten rails which wanders away across the town's outskirts. "In here," he explains, escorting Tim up the incline of the platform and through the sliding door of the wareroom, "we have a stall for the motive power, which is a horse, and in the corner a cot for the general manager, who drives him. 'T is only three runs must be made daily across pleasant hills and fields and then a hearty supper when you collect fares enough to pay for it, and an infant's sleep here rocked by the trains as they pass. Then up in the morning in jolly good time to get the limekiln workers on the job by seven. Observe, young hobo," he says, "that I keep nothing up my sleeve. The job is here for you to take or leave, for better or worse; and I throw in this cap with the gold braid," he says, unwrapping one of the bundles he carries.

"Gimme it," replies Tim with decision; and the suburban car arriving at the moment, the driver turns in thirty-five cents as the day's revenue, and Mr. Craney pays him seventy cents as wages and discharges him with thanks.

"You are now installed, young manager, and so on," he tells Tim; and after presenting the cap with gold braid, which comes down over his manager's ears, he shows him how to reverse the horse and work the combination of the harness, which is woven of wire and rope and old trunk straps.

"All aboard, Barlow Suburban!" he calls then, so quickly that a young lady passenger must run the last few steps and be assisted into the car by himself.

"You will be most active as superintendent of motive power," he shouts to Tim as he dusts the bony nag with the reins, and the battered

little car bumps along. "Old Charley is an heirloom who has come down to me along of the cursed railway," he explains.

"Do not frighten away the gadfly which is his train dispatcher or he will sit down in the track till the whistle blows."

Further instructions he gives also, and they have gone about a mile out into the fields when the young lady passenger having dropped her fare into the box rings the bell and is helped off at a wild-rose bush where a path leads over a hill to a farmhouse.

"Sweet creature," says Mr. Craney with gloom. "Drive on!" And never a word more does he speak till they reach the end of the line and the house where he lives alone. "We are total strangers," he explains then, "though she has boarded at the farmhouse half the summer and is named Katy O'Hare and is telephone lady in town."

When Tim asks why Katy O'Hare and himself do not become acquainted: "'T is the fatal circumstances of me," he answers; and invites his official to dinner, unwrapping his other bundle.

The cheap old cottage is also fallen upon fatal circumstances, with shutters and panes broken and seams of its walls opening to the weather; the barns and sheds are but heaps of boards, and the crooked, rusty switch seems but a fork of lightning which has so wrecked and blackened the whole Craney homestead that Tim's rags are an ornament to it. And yet Mr. Craney snaps his fingers and dances a jig. "Now ruin and mortgage may swallow you as it has me," he says with ridicule, and knocks some splinters from the house to build a fire in the yard between four bricks which he knocks from the chimney.

He brings the coffeepot from the kitchen and then kicks it away that he may boil the coffee in an old can as a courtesy to the young hobo; and sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs he sets out from his bundle.

"Never can we become acquainted," resumes Mr. Craney; "because how could I ask her to be mine and all the time about to be swallowed up," he says, "by the Barlow Suburban, which has already swallowed my father who built it, and his estate and my own earnings for five years?" And now he makes plain that he is seizing the opportunity to travel away in search of fortune, having found a manager in rags who can afford to live on the dividends of the Suburban.

"We are not engaged; far from it," he says; "yet never would I desert her to walk such ties as the Barlow Suburban, more cruel than the ties which bind us together." So he makes out a time card. "In the morning she goes to work, and back at evening; and some day she may be minded to ride at noon for the sake of the exercise which is to be had on the B. S. car." He gives Tim this time card and the key to the box which the nickels are dropped in. "Good-by; I can trust you." He points up to the sky. "Do not leave her walk; you solemnly promise! Good-by!"

And having turned his coat wrong side out he twists a red handkerchief round his neck and is gone. And as he becomes smaller with distance Timothy feels his own body swell larger with importance; having tried the key in the fare box he leaves the nickel there as a come-on, and kicks the horse to his feet as he has seen the truckmen do in the city slums.

After a bit the lime burners arrive from the kiln half a mile away, and Tim drives them to Barlow. All the way he thinks of the smoky yards with the groan of toil rising from them, where all have dwelt so long, afraid of Regan.

"Myself will rise up to be big boss," he says.

Well the gossoon understands, with the scar on his temple and body still marked from the drunkard's blows that no one can rule except by fear, so he speeds up Charley with slaps of the reins, and after

unhitching at the terminal chases him up the incline and into the stall with a stick. "Never let me see you staggering or sitting down on the job," he warns in kindly caution, so that Charley may save himself some of the beatings.

With a smolder in his eyes and drumbeat in his bony little breast Tim sits on his pallet below a lantern hung to a beam, listening whilst the old building rolls and pitches to the passing trains and loose shingles hoot in the blast above. And 't is worthy of note that spiders swing down from cobwebbed rafters to glare at him with interest as a comrade weaving a web of his own; and the mice do not come out at present, but scurry all to set their nests in order and be ready for the part they are to play in the history of Tim the messenger. 'T is little we know.

In a few days Tim has made a study of the Suburban's affairs; six or seven of the lime burners ride with him on weekdays, and also Katy O'Hare; but on Sunday he has no passengers, the kiln being closed down so that the burners may convalesce from riding on the Suburban, and Katy choosing to walk along the path by the rosebush with sidelong glance and blush lest the elegant young gentleman with whom she is not acquainted be on the car platform. In the evening Tim dines at the lunch wagon across the track for a dime, and morning and noon munches a loaf with indignation of Charley, who draws a hatful of oats three times a day.

But soon after he has cut the ration to two hatfuls Charley sits down on the track, indifferent to the gadfly and all the beatings, till they compromise on two and a half hatfuls, Tim rubbing his scar with remembrance.

"Sure, the horse is like I used to be with my old man; when I was hungry I was afraid of being starved and kicked; but after I had been starved and kicked I was not afraid of going hungry or of the old man either."

'T is live and let live we must, so he feeds Charley just little enough to keep him afraid of getting still less, which is the secret of all contented relations between employer and employed, y' understand.

Only a short time afterward Tim raises the car fare to ten cents, recking little of the lime burners' wrath and the high glances of Katy O'Hare at the hard little face and hunched ragged body as he drives on, clenching the reins in his fists. Divil a bit does he seek their goodwill or anybody's, knowing that there is profit to be made only from the fear that people have of him as they have of Regan.

At evening when he makes bold to stroll through the yards among the roadmen some tale of Regan will send him scurrying back light-hearted to the old terminal to count his money, hidden in a can behind some loose bricks in the wall.

"Buy and sell and trample them all, I will, some day," he says, and dances a banshee dance with shuffling feet and flinging arms. The spiders--who are all misers--glare down on him with a poison joy, and hasten to spin a web over the cranny where the can of treasure is buried. "No thief will suspect what is hidden there now," says Tim; and opens another deposit in another cranny, where a spider with golden spots mounts guard. But the mice having set their nests in order only look on at all this, so as not to take their part in his history before it is time.

Drafty and echoing and chill the old terminal is that same night, and for the first time the boy sitting cross-legged with his tattered toga of old sacks wrapped round him is aware of the loneliness. In a sort of vision a cozy room with sparkling hearth rises to mind, and the old woman welcoming him on the snowy doorstep; the hard lines at the corners of his mouth melt away, a dimple coming into the brown cheek, which had never known dimple before, and he curses softly with a gleam of white teeth.

"Sure, the old dame had a message to send, and I could have carried it," he muses; "because," he admits uneasily, "'t was a promise."

And hereupon by the arrangement of Destiny the mice having all in order take their cue and come out boldly into his history. In the corner along of Tim is a rubbish of old records upon which he has thrown the package brought from Molly's cottage--thrown it the first evening of his coming, with no thought of it since, being preoccupied with the business of pull-down and trample-under. But now the mice gnawing at the string open the package, and the little bottle of ink comes rolling across the floor directly before his eyes. And this appearance of the ink bottle being so timed to his mood the boy reaches for the rest of the package and laying aside the pen unfolds the sheets of paper.

One of them he examines curiously, placing it between his elbows under the lantern as he stretches flat on the floor. He knows very well 't is Molly's beginning of the message of the Farthest Lantern, and though he is not an educated person--often cursing the printing in books which makes them so hard to understand--it is certain that Tim Cannon alone of all the world can read what is written here. The eagerness of things beyond, which had been Molly Regan's, the falter of disappointment when discovering that she could not reveal them to Dan, the fierce bitterness of her rebellion--all are written plainly in the cramped scribbling and broad hideous scratches. The huge black blots were threats and prophecies of death, struck from the pen in her hand by a Providence impatient of her lingering.

The vagabond raises his eyes, his body flat and motionless. "All she wanted," he says sullenly, "was to write a page 'cause it was duty." It was another duty which had made her take him in that freezing night. He is resentful toward some thing or power--he does not know what--that Molly was prevented from writing this message.

"I might have stayed till I learned how to write it for her," he says; and all at once is tremendously sorry that it is too late to do this; too late to knock on the cottage door and be welcomed by the old dame to the cheerful room; to show he would keep his promise; too late to leave pull-down and trample-under behind him and begin all over again.

Just this far Tim Cannon lets his musings lead him; then fiercely, in a scorn of his own musings and loneliness, rouses up to sit a while, cross-legged, darting deliberately the untamable blue eye to the dark corners, and listening, as if daring all these bright memories, which would lure him from his purpose of being boss like Regan, to come out in the open and halt him.

Presently in cold defiance of them he tears across the page of yellowed writing; no doubt, remembering Dan, a spirit looks wistfully down upon the vagabond with the scroll in his fist. Again and again he tears deliberately. The very scratches of Molly's message are tatters. Tim Cannon is himself again.

And the great door at the end of the building rolls back and a towering figure stands whipping in the storm; slowly he comes up to the lantern; the visitor is Regan.

"Where is Craney, who owns the car line?" he asks.

"He is gone; I am the manager," says Tim, rising. And after he has explained, "No matter," nods Regan.

At the great man's feet lies his mother's message, and as he muses with resentment and wonder that circumstances should drive him here to parley with a ragged boy on the highway of his destiny the last tatters drift away on the draft which has followed him in from the storm. 'T is a ghostly way Fate has with things neglected.

"The car line could be made to pay," begins Regan craftily, "and I might risk a few dollars to buy it in."

"Craney would sell if he was by," replies the boy.

"No matter; you can put through the deal as his manager, making all the money for yourself. Perhaps fifty dollars," says Regan, careful not to overbid and make Tim think the deal of too great importance.

There is a tone and movement to the air round Regan which electrifies his companion, and at once they are conspiring together.

"You will abandon the run; suspend the service," says Regan, deliberating; "and because your regular passengers might take hold and operate it themselves you shall drive the horse away into the woods with one trace broken and his side plastered over with clay as if he has been in an accident--having first wrecked the car."

Tim nods, his own eyes glittering red, as Regan makes plain how it is to be done. From the top of the high hill at the end of the line the car is to be turned loose with brakes unset, so that it will leave the track where it curves at the bottom.

"There it will take the plunge of thirty feet into the creek bed," he says; "and when it lies in splinters at the bottom you will be handed the money."

"And how will wrecking the car make the road belong to you?" asks Tim.

The man of power smiles at his shrewdness, and is frank with information so that he will not be tempted to ask someone else. The Barlow Suburban has an agreement with the state which is called a charter, he explains, which will be forfeited if cars are not run for a certain number of days. "So I can buy in the property from the state

officials that I know," he adds, "and operate it with new cars." He does not say with steam cars, though by the foresight of old Craney the builder this is permitted by the charter.

The conspiracy is now complete and as Regans puts on his raincoat Tim makes bold to tell him: "Some day I will be boss like yourself, Mr. Regan."

"So you may," nods the other with rare good humor, and departs for his car.

And Dan can afford to be good-humored this night, having found a way of escape from difficulties which have threatened to ruin his new career at its very beginning. For a line of the P. D. building into this territory has been held up by the Great Southwest, which warns openly that it will bankrupt and destroy the town of Barlow if its competitor is granted right of way or terminals. To avoid long delay in the courts Regan himself, with the prestige of old command in this territory, has been sent to open the way. But never a friend has he found in his old headquarters town; the politicians whom he once ruled with a rod of iron are in fact rejoiced to break one of their own across the head of him. Not a loophole is left open to the P. D.

"'T is a wall of China," thinks Regan, "and what will my new directors say of a manager who cannot persuade or bribe his old fellow citizens to receive him with a new railroad in his hands?"

"Our new line will be the fortunes of Barlow," he has argued, but the citizens in control laugh at him.

"The G. S. will do better by us, with new machine shops, and even build a branch into your own territory," is the answer he has taken back to his car from the final conference this very night.

As his first repulse the man of pull-down and trample-under has not known how to take it, pacing his car like a madman who mistakes his own fits for the destruction of the world. The lanterns which beckoned from a boy at Turntable blinked now in mockery; suddenly across the yards his eye, as dark as the stormy sky, steadied to a single spark--the beam of Tim Cannon's lantern through the dingy window.

"T is in the old freight house, leased to the Barlow Suburban!" he thought aloud. "The Barlow Suburban!" And already he was into his stormcoat and on his way to parley with the ragged boy posted like a sentry on the highway of his destiny. So Regan discovered the only unguarded gateway into Barlow.

Now the scheme is brewed and Tim settles down to count the gain in money and in the interest he will make with Regan; the old building reels and shingles whirl away like bats in the gale, but he only laughs dourly, the scrawny little breast hurting and straining with the ambition to be mounting on bigger storms than this. By dawn he is as drunk with scheming as ever his old grandfather with whisky, and yet his nerves do not tremble as he goes about the business of the day, kicking Charley to his feet and hitching with a scowl to the limekiln crew.

With deliberation he drives into the sheeted rain, and his look into the gulch at the bottom of the last hill, where the wreck will presently lie, is calculating and steady. In action Tim does honor to himself and to the great men who are of his company this day; the horse is plastered with clay and stoned far out into some woods, the brake thrown off for the plunge from the crest of the hill--and then as the car starts rolling and Tim grins boldly up into the black tumbling sky a dazzle of light strikes through his plotting little brain.

And in this instant the little vagabond who has arrived at Barlow and his tremendous partnership with Dan Regan by the route leading through Molly's cottage on a stormy night--in this instant with the car

rumbling on its way to wreck itself and the Suburban, Tim Cannon understands that the thing will not do at all. The tremendous partnership is not, nor ever can be.

Such a revelation has come to many an ambitious man about to commit a crime or betray a trust. Cowardice or conscience may unnerve him; or on the other hand he may be fearless and willing, and yet not able to go on, realizing suddenly the thing will not do at all. It is not destined. And then remorse or dread seizes on the coward, and disappointment on the bold who would have gone on if it had been so destined.

But devil a bit does remorse seize on Tim Cannon, being a person of no moral convictions whatever; and as for dread and disappointment--one moment he steadies his darkling blue eyes on the aspect of them, and the next is racing after the car, swinging aboard, and setting the brakes, though the wheels lock and coast on down the rails, slippery with rain. For it is not the nature of him to falter or to parley with fortune--when she declares against him he takes his loss though it be that of life or limb, and quits the game.

Y'understand that perhaps his knees quake and buckle and a yelp of terror is driven out of his bony breast--beating so high with ambition but a moment before--but the spirit does not quail as he releases the brake, sets it again slowly, carefully; the wheels revolve and begin to feel the grip of the brake shoe. Still the car seems streaking to such a wreck as will mangle him with broken rods and torn sheet steel at the bottom of the gulch. Instead, by a miracle it takes the curve with only a roar and crash of glass. Tim Cannon has held the car to the rails and the Barlow Suburban to its charter.

The storm deepens and darkens round the lonely little car and its driver, who stands erect and still with hands on the brake considering his treason to Regan's ambitions and his own. The cause does not have to be searched for.

"Sure, I had promised Craney to manage this railroad till he got back," says Tim Cannon as a matter of course.

He has it in mind to hasten and explain to Regan, but lingers a moment in musing, unusual for him when business is to be done.

"'T was a wise old dame," he says; and recalls what Molly had stated as a matter of fact. "If you promise--then 't is a duty." She had said that; and: "Through storm and hardship and fear you would go-- because you promised."

"Sure!" agrees Tim, disgusted that he has not remembered this before making the deal with Regan. "I will explain to him," says Tim, "that I promised Craney."

All of a sudden a vast respect fills him--not reverence, for he has none, but a respect for this wise woman who knew what was in a man so much better than he knew himself.

Then stepping down he plunges into the depths of storm on his way back to Barlow.

The great man laughs at his tale that the job is not done.

"You are a boy of brains, and I am not surprised at the news you bring," he says. "How much is the price risen, you little robber? A hundred? Go," he says, "and finish quickly. I am not the man to haggle, be it five hundred and a job on my railroad to boot."

And as Tim shakes his head: "What now, I ask you?"

"After starting the car down to the wreck I won't let it get away from me, but catch it and set the brakes and ride it wild to the bottom."

"Why be such a fool as that?" demands Regan.

"'T is on account of promising Mr. Craney to manage the Suburban till he gets back," explains Tim.

It strikes home to Regan that this is the crisis of his life, and Tim feels his wrath as the toss of tempest. 'T would be an easy matter to kidnap the boy here an' now, and send his own agent to wreck the car, but even then the scheme is blocked. Tim must be accounted for afterward. The boy must see his passengers and tell of the accident or there will be search made for him under the wreckage, and talk in the papers, reminding the town of the Suburban's existence, and Regan's enemies that a charter is about to be forfeited.

"Hold!" says Regan to Tim at the door. "My word I'll not touch you again," and the boy drops his hands from his neck, all but wrung by a shake of the madman pacing the car. Yet his gaze lies level and clear and there is a steadiness to the bedraggled front which baffles Regan, such assurance being beyond nature in a boy.

"Whist!" he says warily, understanding somehow that nothing is to be gained here by argument or threats; "since you were fool enough to bind yourself with a promise, hold your tongue till I can find Craney."

"'T will hold," promises Tim.

Down past the terminal and out the Suburban track, bedraggled and undaunted, stalks the vagabond along the way of knowledge. Nor does he look up till coming on faithful old Charley, who has found his way back to the car and stands waiting to be hitched. Tim halts, surveying him knowingly.

"Faith, Charley, she was a wise one," he says.

From that hour he takes up the plod of duty, keening in that little minor whistle which all car drivers pick up from the wind and drumming of hoofbeats on frozen ground. And he is always on time in every weather, so that presently the lime burners relent and joke him, and Katy in pity for the outcast would pat his cheek friendlily--but never an encouragement do they receive from Tim standing at his brake and speaking sternly to Charley, meager and windbitten but unconquerable by humor or kindness as he has been by threat and danger.

All day a bright rage chars the bony breast; at evening it smolders as if having no more fuel in the wasted body. Yet Tim sits cross-legged with old sacks folded round him, staring unwaveringly into the loneliness. And from his boyhood's ashes he resurrects with terrific will and fearlessness the great things which had been born within him; in fact he craves and will have no company but them, torment him as they will. He reflects with derision that the lime burners and Katy do not understand what goes on within him. But Regan would understand! How the great things in that man would have raged if he had bound them tight and fast with a promise. Regan was not such a fool.

"Never again do I promise the duty," says Tim.

The wise old woman had warned him that what a person promises that must he do, but like a fool he had not profited by the warning.

Even in his ignorance the vagabond understands much of Molly. In his first musings on these subjects the night of Dan's coming to bargain with him for the wreck of the car he had foolishly torn up the page she had written over.

He had torn up that fragment of message because the memory of the cozy room and hearth fire had tempted his thoughts away from these hardships and loneliness; he resented Molly's smile and welcome as

an attempt to lure him from the way of ambition, much as the pity of Katy and good-humor of the lime burners would do. Now he understood that Molly offered no such temptation; that to herself the fire and comforts were as nothing; far away and beyond these had dwelt her thoughts in some place as lonely and echoing as the old terminal. There in wisdom and sorrow she had pondered her duty; how to keep the promise she had made. "Dam' luck, she had," Tim Cannon swears roundly. Of course she had also been a fool to bind herself with a promise; but to die before she had found a way to keep it was harder still, somehow.

As for himself--his only duty is to manage Craney's road till he returns. After that the things within him can be let loose, and many exploits be expected of them.

"And if Craney does not come back! Sure," sneers Tim to the dark and loneliness, "I'll be no worse than the old dame who died on the job!"

One day Katy speaks of returning to town for the winter, and he tells her sternly that the road is run for her convenience and she is expected to ride on it.

And so she continues to do, without further argument about returning to town; and he is mildly interested in the journeys she makes after that, on Sunday afternoons. To the old Craney homestead she journeys and sits on the doorstep, sometimes speaking of the young man who has left his railroad to be run for her sake, and then wandered away with his coat wrong side out in search of fortune.

"Never a bit of encouragement did I give him," she will always conclude, with blushes; "but when he returns his welcome will not be the same I would offer a stranger."

Once she thanks Tim for attending his trust so faithfully, but he does not reply. It is not worth while; she could not understand--that he does

this thing because it is promised and inevitable, not because he relishes it.

As Craney's orders are to arrange the Sunday schedule to Katy's convenience he sits erect on a stone, watching from a distance till she starts toward the car. The things within him burn and torment, and keep him company; he will not let them go or even quiet them by promises of what he will achieve when this duty is done and off his hands. Instead he holds them at bay, coldly.

Till one Sunday afternoon a message mutters out of the northern sky; from Regan it comes, shaking the very ground which the vagabond, as if understanding it, grips in his nervous fingers. "T is like the guns in battle," he says, and that night strolling among the men up the yard learns that the roar is that of dynamite where the construction gangs of Regan's new line are breaching the distant hills for entrance into Great Southwest territory.

Regan is coming on, undaunted by the refusal of Barlow to let him through; day by day the iron rumor swells in the northern sky, and Tim sleeping or waking presses close after the vision of a giant of bronze with half-lidded smoldering eyes who juggles men and steel in the burning dusk beyond the construction camps.

Defiant of the winter winds, even to refusing the jacket which Katy buys for him, he shivers with the chill of exhaustion, for now he must struggle the more fiercely with ambition, night and day. Yet on he plods, keening in that strange little whistle. All this bleak stretch of his history he crosses, in a sort of delirium loading the battered old car with company of the make-believe kind whom he has watched the children in the city parks playing with long ago. The ghost of a jack-in-the-box which he had once dragged away from a playground and murdered with a stick in his den appears by night in the terminal building. It smiles forgivingly and he frowns back.

When the snow falls he marches ahead of Charley, a shovel on his shoulder, storming the drifts. A rope round his body keeps the whipping rags together, and he wears an old sack for a waistcoat. The limekiln closes down and there is no passenger left but Katy, so Tim breaks into the treasure holes in the wall to buy oats and bread. Once again the Barlow Suburban is devouring its master. And now the rumble of dynamite sinks lower and lower like the death rattle of Regan's destiny and one afternoon dies away entirely.

That night Tim sits cross-legged on his pallet by his rusty little stove, awe-stricken, as if somehow a battle waited on him. And out of that dread stillness under the northern sky Regan comes to him, streaked red with the clay of the camps.

"Craney is lost or dead," he says. "I have searched high and low; now it is up to you."

The boy listening intently agrees with Regan. "'T is too bad I promised Craney and have the duty."

"You are far from a fool," says Regan; "look out of the window here with me." And as they stare up the yards, awink with the colored lamps of the switch stands: "Do you see the giant black engines and cars, and the shops beyond with their roaring mountains of machinery; the tracks stretching thousands of miles, all swarming with trains and men? Such are the playthings of me; have you a game which can beat that? Listen." He holds up his hand, and out of the simmering dusk rises the groan of iron and steam and toil. "It is marching music like the bands of armies," says Regan. "D' you understand? You must; you can feel it! Such armies I command and will bring you up in the way of commanding if you but keep the bargain you made."

"Is it walk off the duty, you mean?" asks Tim astonished.

"But listen again, as man to man," says Regan, patient and crafty and desperate. "I have no way into Barlow, bold as I have been in building to its very walls. A few crooks who run the town keep me out. My end of track is now a mile from the Barlow limits on the north, and there as if I had given up hope I have bought land for depots and set engineers to work laying out yards, and masons raising foundations. By building in from the north I have not called my enemies' attention to the Suburban, which enters from the southeast; nobody has even thought of it as my means of breaking in. But if you will carry out the deal you made with me," says Regan, "I will own the Suburban and throw my rails from the present end of track to the Suburban right of way and into this town in a single night! Think over it well; on this spot where you sit among tumbledown walls you will raise up"--the man's tones thrilled like a prophecy--"you will raise up a station of stone and glass. The sounds in here, instead of running mice and the pawing of the old horse and your own curses on poverty, will be the footsteps of hurrying people, their laughs and cries of welcome and godspeed. Ah, Timothy," breathes Regan, "think well!"

But Timothy, wilder and gaunter than ever, sets his teeth. "'T would be walkin' off the duty."

Dan Regan grinds out the word after him. "Duty! What is this, I ask of you, but duty? The duty to thousands of people who want this road in Barlow, instead of duty to one man, Craney, who has set you to guard a thing he does not want and has deserted himself? He will never come back. Now ask what you want of me. The price, whatever it is! And where do you come by this false notion of duty?" he demands with an inspiration.

"'T was an old woman--she was the wise one," says Tim, and explains, as in confidence, about his visit to the cottage on that snowy night. "She was putting it into a message," he says, "but her hand was too old and shaky--and I did not know my letters to write it for her. She had a beginning all blotted and scratched--I brought it away, and

tore it up the first night you came here. The Farthest Lantern, it was. Here is the pen she broke by stabbing into the table, she was that mad!"

The Farthest Lantern!

Remotely Dan Regan hears the word, with a little shock, as a challenge whispered in darkness; he shrugs his shoulders.

"Come, Timothy," he urges.

Now memory has seized on the word, sending it echoing through his brain; but he goes on, impatient of the start which Tim has given him, and not yet realizing how it was done.

"Will you help those crooks of Barlow against myself and all the good people of the town? Will you cheat Craney of the price of his road in case he ever comes back? Is this duty? I tell you, no!" And in a flash of afterthought: "The wise old woman herself would cry 'No' from the grave of her. I tell you as one who knows. For she was Regan's mother, and her message of the things she saw beyond the day's work at Turntable--was to me!"

With terrible fascination Tim gazes at the man racked by the old powers of pull-down and trample-under, which Tim himself holds imprisoned in Regan's breast. And as the last words drive home the vagabond answers, high and clear: "Sure, you must know then. Tell me true, Mr. Regan--'t will not be breaking the promise?"

Through the dingy panes in the corner wink the lights as did those of Turntable long ago; but they do not beckon.

"I will ditch the car now," says Tim.

"I might be mistaken----" Regan's voice is hollow; the memories of a lifetime cloud his vision. "Perhaps you would do well not to trust me," he says; the warning of a hypocrite to satisfy his startled conscience as once more his gaze lifts bold and far along the road which lies through the corner guarded by this scarecrow of a boy.

"Sure, I trust you," answers Tim in that singing voice the likes of which was never heard out of him before, and ties his tatters round him against the cold outside. The promise has been kept, the duty done, he is at last on the road with Regan.

The man holds the pen in his hand--the pen his mother had tried to write her last, her life's message with, and failed. Fearfully he gazes on this gaunt campaigner of destiny, delivering his unspoken message by deed and bearing and duty done, through storm and danger, indifferent to bribe and threat.

But now this Tim Cannon nods and is on his way like any credulous boy to clear the highway of fortune for Regan, by the wreck of the Suburban car.

"Hold!" Regan's head is bowed and he is listening. "No, I cannot pass here," he answers in thought, and in a strained, quiet voice tells Tim: "You trust me too late."

The miracle of Molly's messenger has not been worked in vain.

Light had broken in flashes from the vagabond's countenance since the great things within him were set free to join this mighty partnership. Halted now in his tracks he listens too, gloomily, wrathfully hearing in fact what Regan does not--a quickening footfall, the tug at the latch, the rumble of the door. Craney comes in.

He is almost as gaunt as Tim and covered with the grime on the road.

"What? Are you not yet swallowed up by the cursed Suburban?" he asks, astonished. "Then you will give me word of Katy O'Hare, and I am gone by the through freight. Fortune was not in the direction I took," he adds by way of explaining; "so I am beating up west and south; 't is a far search and leaves me little time between trains."

"There is time enough!" Regan has him by the arm. "You are Craney of the Suburban. Come!"

And so terrible is the grip he is fallen into that Mr. Craney is dragged out and through the dark with hardly perceptible struggle.

Tim Cannon watches them out with ghastly nonchalance; once more fortune has declared against him and he takes his loss, biding only Craney's return to throw up his job and be gone.

The night passes and a faint iron rumor drifts down from the northern sky where the P. D. construction gangs are breaking camp; then a boom of dynamite. The campaign is on again; no need of concealment now, the Suburban has passed safely into Regan's hands.

The red coal in the rusty stove crumbles, the lantern smokes out.

"I was just too late; 't is little I know," thinks Tim Cannon.

A burly battered man enters the door and leads out the horse; the gang at his heels attack the old building with pick and bar; to a ripping of shingles the dawn twinkles through; the battle which the outcast had halted so long is passing over his body.

The battered man shakes the iron bar in his hand, pointing it significantly at walls and roof tumbling about; Tim looks at him scornfully, and the gang tear at the flooring with picks and axes.

Why it is so, I cannot say, who make no pretense of sorcery, but 't is certain that the mice linger and spiders swing low from the rafters with presentiment of tragedy as Tim Cannon stands his last guard in the corner of the doomed old terminal. Twice he catches glimpses of Regan without, compelling this storm of men and steel.

The floor is now torn up to his very feet; the far end of the building, roof and walls, has been scattered like chaff. Indifferently Tim watches the battered man point to him with the iron bar and waits calmly to be dragged away by the gang.

Mr. Craney running lightly along the last remaining girder to Tim's corner presses some folded bills and a paper into his hand.

"Salary and honorable discharge," he explains; "and invitation to the wed----"

And his voice being smothered by a great crash within and without he signals with his hands that not a moment is to be lost in saving themselves alive.

Above all the uproar is a shriller yell, a rush of staggering men past the end of the terminal, a heavy clang of steel; fighting. "Regan is crossing the Great Southwest main!" shrieks Mr. Craney over his shoulder.

In fact the P. D. frog for the main-line crossing is set in only after a sharp skirmish with a G. S. force rushed up to prevent it. And then Regan, threatened with police and military by his gathering enemies, passes them the court order obtained during the night. By this order they are enjoined from tearing up the frog, even before it has been laid down! Such is the forethought of genius.

Regan's special, ordered out since midnight, stands drumming up the line, and Tim lurking in his corner sees the signal he gives as he

crosses the track. The special glides down between them, and once more the vagabond watches through the flying dust clouds the flash of Regan's car, signaling farewell.

Now he is free to pick and choose where he will, but Tim Cannon girds his rags with fierce regret; the great things within him cling to this spot; he cannot break away, and he curses in a cold agony of disappointment.

"I was too late. Never again will I promise the duty."

"You gang boss!" crashes a voice behind him; "breach me the wall at the corner."

And the battered man and his crew fly at it with pick and bar.

With twisted face and hand clenched on his breast the boy stares at Regan, who has just sent his car home without boarding it at all.

"My path lies through this corner; last night you blocked it; to-day I will pass."

'T is a poor sort of triumph over the vagabond, whose body straightens and stiffens proudly.

"Which I never could do with you on guard! Come; first through the breach, Timothy! 'T is your right. Now we are through--catch stride here in fortune's highway. You are on duty with Dan Regan!"

This queer sentimental thing the man does in honor of his mother's messenger, and never again through all the years is the spell broken which draws the man of pull-down and trample-under away and upward to the things which the pretty colleen of long ago saw beyond the day's work at Turntable. 'T is little we know.

