# A·Strange Railroad Wreck

By George Collins

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We ask you to not lend this book; it is published for the benefit of the author, and a copy will be sent by him to any address, postpaid, for 65c. Write to George Collins, Elco, Washington Co., Penna.

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# Introductory Note

**By the Chief Operator of the Monongahela Railroad Co.**

THIS little volume, "A Strange Railroad Wreck," is the product of a former railroad telegraph operator, who is so badly afflicted with a rheumatic trouble that he has not touched his face with either hand for more than nineteen years, and has been compelled to use two crutches during all that time in order to get about. I have often wondered how he managed to work at all; but he was with the Pennsylvania Railroad Company for many years, while I was employed by the same corporation, and I speak from actual knowledge when I say that he was one of the most competent and careful operators on the Monongahela Division. The long hours which railroad telegraphers are compelled to work, however, are more than he is able to bear in his present physical condition,

About two years ago he entered a New York hospital for treatment, with the hope of getting in shape to once more face this world's battles. After being considered a hopeless cripple by many physicians for nearly twenty years, this treatment has made such an improvement in the right arm that he is now enabled to get food to his mouth by using an ordinary fork, instead of one with an extended handle thirteen inches long, which he carried with him all these years. The elbo still refuses to bend enough to permit his hand to touch his face; but there is little doubt if he continues receiving this treatment the arm will eventually become much better, if not entirely well. The treatment was interrupted recently because he did not have money enough to pay the expenses connected with it.

That is why this volume has been published—to help raise the funds necessary to continue this work. The book is interesting from beginning to end; it is well written, and worth all that is asked for it. The main part of the story is true; the railroad wreck actually did occur not far from where the author was working at the time, and he is perfectly familiar with the subject upon which he writes. Many railroad men along the Monongahela valley today, myself included, remember the incident very well, and consider it the most peculiar wreck ever heard of. A pretty romance has been woven through the entire story.

Everybody buys books; make this one of your next purchases, and see how many friends you can persuade to do the same.

D. M. HOPE.

Brownsville, Pa., December 15, 1903.

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# STRANGE RAILROAD WRECK

By GEORGE COLLINS

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# SKETCH

Of the Life of George Collins, the Author of This Work.

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Condensed from an Article in the Pittsburg Sunday Dispatch.

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In a little telegraph office in Pittsburg works a young man who is an object of great interest to surgeons. The young man is George Collins, Jr., who seventeen years ago was attacked with inflammatory rheumatism, resulting in the solidification of the joints of the knees, the right ankle, both elbows, both wrists, both thumbs, and four of his fingers.

This fearful affliction and the untold sufferings he has endured would have wrecked the life and ambitions of any other man, but it is not so with George Collins. Instead of becoming disheartened and dependent upon others, he has made himself a very well-educated man, a beautiful penman, a telegraph oper-

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ator, a typesetter, a job printer, a newspaper correspondent, and the editor, publisher and proprietor of the Roscoe Ledger.

When but sixteen years old, and confined to a rolling chair, Mr. Collins started his first paper with a little leverhand press. The nature of the lad was evidenced in the choice of a name for his paper. He called it "Little Sunshine." His office was in a little news, stationery, confectionery and tobacco store, which he also conducted himself; while he acted as correspondent for a number of outside papers, including some of the Pittsburg dailies.

His busy life was interrupted from time to time by visits to hospitals, for he was always hopeful of relief of some kind, but after months of intense suffering the result was the same.

Finally Mr. Collins took up the study of shorthand and typewriting, and after two months of this work he was induced to become a student in a railroad telegraph office, and after a very short studentship he was given a position. He is a remarkable operator.

Naturally, the rarity of the case is what appeals most strongly to surgeons; but the nerve, the heroism, the patience, the persistency, the cheerfulness, the industry and the intelligence displayed by Mr. Collins

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are what have made and kept friends for him, and to these he will mainly owe the complete restoration of the use of his limbs, if such good fortune be yet in store for him.

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Mr. Collins' publishers feel sure that the story of heroism above narrated will excel in interest even the thrilling story to be found in the succeeding pages.

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# A STRANGE RAILROAD WRECK

"Have you had any experience at railroad work?" asked the trainmaster.

"Never, sir; but I have been about railroads so much, watching the men work, that I feel confident I would have no difficulty fulfilling the duties of a brakeman."

"Where are your parents? You are aware, of course, that we cannot employ you without their consent; you are not yet of age,—that is evident from your appearance."

This conversation took place between Trainmaster Tuckle, of the M——— Division at Pittsburg, Pa., and a pale, dark-eyed boy who was applying for work on the road. It was at a time when brakemen were very scarce and work on the Division at its best, requiring all the extra crews possible to keep the yards clear. At such times many vacancies are filled by men who might have found it difficult to secure employment when business was not so brisk.



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A look of pain passed over the youth's face. His eyes partly filled, and he said:

"I have been in this country more than a year, sir, and it has been a struggle for bread ever since I left Italy. The things I can do best seem to be over-run with applicants; and without friends or recommendations to help me, it is difficult to get a foothold in any city. I was told you were very much in need of brakemen, and concluded to try and obtain work here. There is no danger of any relative interfering, for I have none in this world who care."

Mr. Tuckle looked at the boy compassionately, and said:

"Badly as we need men, I dislike sending you out on a freight. You are but a boy, and know nothing of the dangers of this work. Can you get nothing else? By-the-way, how old are you?"

"I shall be twenty-one in two months, sir. And if you only knew how I have tried to get employment, I believe you would give me a chance."

"Twenty-one! You look more like seventeen. Are you sure you are telling me the truth?"

The boy's face flushed slightly, as he answered:

"If I had chosen to tell you what was not true, I should have said I was past twenty-one. I know my face looks young for that age, but I am telling you the truth; I was born in 1878."

"You were educated in Italy, then. You speak

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English very fluently for one who has been here but a year."

"Part of my education at home was to learn something of the English language. I was kept at school until—until a short time before I left my native country. Music is my chosen profession, but it does me little good where I am unknown. I trust you will give me a trial at this work." His look was pathetic, his attitude pleading.

"Oh, I was talking entirely for your own good. We need brakemen, and I shall be glad to have the yardmaster put you to work at once, if you are determined to go at it. But you are pretty frail looking for this kind of a job. Are you always so pale as you are now? You seem——" Then, as a sudden thought came to him, he broke off quickly:

"Have you been eating regularly?"

The dark eyes of the Italian boy half closed to hide the pain in them; but he replied steadily:

"Candidly, sir, I have not."

"When did you eat last?"

"I had some crackers yesterday morning."

"And it is now four o'clock! Well, you cannot go to work this evening, then. I will send you down to Mrs. Sullivan's boarding house, and you will get a good, substantial supper. By tomorrow you will feel better, when you can come back and talk to the yardmaster and learn where you are to work."

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"But I have no money to pay the landlady."

"This note will fix you all right; she will wait till payday for your board bill. Come around at eight in the morning; the yardmaster will take care of you and give you final instructions."

Arriving at Mrs. Sullivan's, the stranger presented Trainmaster Tuckle's note to the landlandy. After reading it, she said, heartily:

"Why, sure, my boy; come right in, and we'll try to make you comfortable."

"A very strange boy," said Mrs. Sullivan to her cook and maid of all work, as they returned to the kitchen a little later. "He seems too good for a railroader. I hope the boys won't tease him because he is so different from them."

Next morning, a little before eight o'clock, Joe Fleming—for that was the name signed to the application blank—appeared before the trainmaster, ready for work.

"Well, young man, I am glad to see a little more color in your face this morning. Did you find accommodations at the boarding house I sent you to?"

"I did, sir; a very good-hearted woman is Mrs. Sullivan."

"You will find your name marked up on the board downstairs. I told the yardmaster you were inexperienced; he will attend to placing you with the crew who can teach you the work. Yesterday you

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told me, after filling up the application blank, that you never used intoxicants. This fact places you far ahead of many men who now work for us, for your own safety and also in the line of promotion. Stick to that principle, no difference how you may be ridiculed for it, and you will come out all right."

Joe Fleming, though frail and apparently unfit for the rough and dangerous work of brakeing on a freight train, soon convinced the conductor and others of his crew that his brain was far superior to that of many new brakemen. He never forgot an order. The work, being entirely new to him, was confusing for a few days; but he observed so closely and listened so attentively, that within a week he was able to do everything required by his superiors without instruction. His conductor happened to be a rough, profane man, accustomed to giving orders in a loud voice, accompanied by a string of oaths, and at first he had treated the young brakeman with contempt. A new brakeman is always unwelcome to a freight conductor; one who has had no previous railroad experience, doubly so. And if to this is added a pale face, soft hands and a low even voice, as in this case, the new man is likely to have a hard time of it for a while. But all the rebukes and tyrannical orders from the conductor were met by young Fleming with such a quiet look of surprise, with never a word of protest or reproach, that he soon changed in his treat-

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ment of the "green hand," and was heard to remark to his engineer that he was "beginning to like that boy; could trust him to do anything he was told to do, without following him around and seeing that it had been done."

One morning Joe Fleming found his name marked up in the yardmaster's office for a "road run"—that is, he was to work on a train running the full length of the Division, which was about seventy miles. By this time he had become so well acquainted with the crew and yard where he worked that the new order was a disappointment. Upon asking the yardmaster if it were really necessary for him to leave the yard crew, he was told that all brakemen were expected to work where they were placed, until employed on the road long enough to be given a regular run, or a steady yard job. Joe was melancholy that evening, for he thought of having to associate with a different set of men, perhaps more profane and rough than those he had been working with.

Returning to his boarding house, Joe went to his room and took up the companion which he loved better than anything on earth—his violin. A few minutes later as Mrs. Sullivan walked through the hall she heard the mournful strains of the instrument and remarked to one of the boarders:

"That boy can play the saddest pieces I ever heard; there seems to be tears in them sometimes. I wonder

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why he never plays lively tunes only when asked? He's the best player on the piano I ever heard, too—but always them sad pieces. And no one ever heard a word about his past, only that he came here from Italy a year ago; that his parents are dead, and he has no relatives in this country."

Next morning Joe started out on his first "road trip." He was just a little bit nervous as the train thundered along at forty miles an hour, over trestles, through deep cuts and around sharp curves. Being what is known as "front brakeman"—that is, the one nearest the locomotive—he had to jump off and run ahead of the moving train to throw switches at points where his train was ordered to take siding. This duty was not very dangerous during the mild October weather; but he wondered how it was possible to do it with safety when the track and ground were covered with snow and ice.

Reaching the end of the "run," after being on the road for twenty-two hours, the young brakeman was tired and hungry. He had asked another member of the crew about a boarding place at the terminus of the road, and was told that they all slept in the "caboose"—a small red car attached to the rear end of all freight trains.

"Saves paying board and room rent at both ends of the road," the brakeman said. This suggestion did not suit Joe Fleming, however, and a room was finally

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secured at the home of Mrs. Barr, in Unionville, who had two rooms in her large house which she rented by the week to those who could bring satisfactory references. It was necessary for Joe to bring a telegram of recommendation from his yardmaster at Pittsburg before he was given the room; but he liked the appearance of the surroundings at Mrs. Barr's home so well that he did not hesitate taking this trouble.

Before a month had passed the friends of the Barr family were speaking of this very young and handsome brakeman as a wonderful musician. He was an artist on either the violin or piano, and many of the music lovers of Unionville called at the Barr homestead frequently to hear him play. Among them was Mercedes Morris. It was not her beauty alone that won her so many friends, but her personality was so charming, her intellect so much above that of the average pretty girl, that men whose admiration went beyond merely physical attraction, found an unusual pleasure in her companionship. She was a busy girl, being employed by a commercial telegraph company as telegrapher.

Mercedes came to the house one evening shortly after Joe's arrival and he was presented to her by Mrs. Barr, who noted the mutual interest and the animated conversation into which the usually quiet boy entered with such eagerness and apparent pleasure

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that when one of the guests wished him to play, he arose reluctantly and asked Mercedes what it should be.

"'Narcissus' is something I never tire of," she replied.

After listening to Joe Fleming's rendition of this beautiful composition, Miss Morris felt that she had never really heard it before. The player followed this by a more difficult composition, one of Liszt's famous Hungarian raphsodies, and then arose from the chair and walked across the room to where Miss Morris sat. Mrs. Barr expressed her surprise, as her roomer usually sat at the piano at least an hour every time he was asked to play; in fact, he had always seemed to enjoy music more than conversation. But it was evident that the girl was more to him that evening than anything.

Later, when the guests were leaving, Ethel Barr, who was a particular friend of Miss Morris, met her in the hall and remarked teasingly:

"A case of love at first sight, isn't it, Mercedes?"

"He has a beautiful character, unless he is an adept at acting, and I don't believe he is," Mercedes said.

"You might also add that he has a strikingly handsome face, as well as a beautiful character," laughed Miss Barr.

"Yes, that is true; in fact, I do not think the word

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handsome expresses it so well as pretty. It seems a shame to waste such a face on a man."

"From what I have observed this evening, it does not seem to be entirely wasted!"

"Now, you know from the past, Ethel, that a handsome face does not effect me in the least unless there is character with it. But Mr. Fleming is certainly one of the most pleasing young men I have met for a long time. What do you think of him?"

"Well, I have known him for more than a month now, and I think he is the best boy I ever knew; he seems to be disgusted with the conduct of the average man, and the way he treats us girls borders on reverence. But as for myself, you know the very good boys never did appeal to me very much. I like men with 'a past'!"

"That is where we have always differed," replied Mercedes, with the faintest trace of contempt in her voice. "You may as well tell me a woman with 'a past' is to be admired."

"But it always seems so different with men," replied Miss Barr, rather weakly.

During the next month Mercedes Morris and Joe Fleming met often, and a friendship sprung up which many of their acquaintances predicted would end in something dearer. Miss Morris had many admirers, but none seemed to be favored as was the brakeman-musician. One day Ethel Barr quizzed her about it,

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and won the confession that she "liked him a little better than she had ever liked any one before." But when she attempted to "pump" Joe Fleming along the same line, she met his usual quiet smile, but there was no flush nor sign of confusion to indicate a tender feeling, when Miss Morris' name was mentioned. The questioner had something of the match-making tendency in her nature, and was disappointed at the coolness with which the handsome railroader spoke of her girl chum. There was something about the young man which puzzled her very much; so much that she frequently found herself looking intently at him and wondering why he seemed so different from any man she had ever known, what there was about him that had won the confidence and trust of her mother and self in a few weeks?

* * * * * * * *

"Did you hear that I am to work on the M——— Division, Ethel?" asked Mercedes Morris a few weeks later.

"Why, no; why do you leave the Postal Company?"

"Higher salary, and a vacation each year under pay. Employees also get transportation to go away during vacation."

"But think of the long hours, dear, and, oh, the awful responsibilities telegraphers have on a railroad!"

"Yes, I have thought of all that, but Mr. Fleming

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says I may get an eight-hour position after awhile, and then the extra money, you know——"

"Oh, I see! Mr. Fleming is your legal adviser now! Of course being employed as telegraph operator on the road where he is working will be very nice indeed!"

"Now, you know that I will seldom see him except here at home as usual; for when a train does stop at a telegraph office it is only for a few minutes, and then no person but the conductor and engineer go inside to sign orders."

"And you will be working at night, too, will you not?"

"Yes, for a while; all telegraphers have to take their turn at night work. But the railroad company pays almost double what I am receiving now from the Postal Company, and I think this difference in salary makes up for all the disadvantages of the new position."

"Well, I am sorry to see you go—I do not like the responsibilities which you will have upon you. Several of our roomers have told me about the dangers of railroading on single track, and how much their lives and the lives of passengers depend on the telegrapher. One little error in receiving a train order, the failure to deliver one after it is received—which is possible when you have a number on your desk at one time—or going to sleep even for five

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minutes during the night, might cause the death of many people. Still, I know when you decide to do a thing it is useless to try to persuade you to give it up, and I can only hope for the best."

* * * * * * * *

Lewistown is the name of a station on the M——— Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, about forty-five miles from Pittsburg. At the time these incidents occurred, the telegraph office was located in the station building, like all the others on this Division. It was here that Mercedes Morris was assigned to duty, after a few weeks work as "extra" operator at various stations. The hours she worked were from seven o'clock in the evening until seven the next morning, and every night when the train on which Joe Fleming was employed passed through the town, his lantern was waved in the darkness to the pretty telegraph operator, who always acknowledged the signal by waving her hand at the window. On one or two occasions, when he did not go out on the run she expected he would, and the night passed without this little salutation, she found herself wondering why the time dragged so much. Mercedes Morris loved Joe Fleming; she acknowledged this to herself. But whether he cared for her in the way she hoped, was still a mystery. He was more attentive than many lovers are, and he never seemed to care for other girls' companionship when she was near; but, as

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Ethel Barr had once said, his friendship was so different from that of others, and she could never feel sure that what she hoped might be love was only a warm brotherly affection.

One Sunday evening, neither being at work, they were alone in the parlor at the Morris home. Mercedes' impulsive nature made it almost impossible for her to conceal the truth when she cared particularly for any one. Perhaps the young railroader noticed it more than usual this evening. He was very attentive and affectionate, yet more melancholy than he had ever been. He seemed to have something to tell her which was difficult to say, for two or three times he started to speak and stopped suddenly, as if afraid to go on. Later in the evening he seemed to bring all his resolution to the front, and sitting down close to Mercedes he placed an arm about the girl's waist and drew her to him, saying with a strange look of compassion:

"Mercedes, I have something to tell you, which should have been told months ago; but I have enjoyed being with you so very much—it is a happiness which is hard to think of giving up. I do not try to conceal the fact that I love you, dear; and I do not think I am mistaken in thinking you care for me. You show it in every action. If it could go on like this always, I should care for nothing more on earth. But the very fact of you learning to care for me in the way I

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think you do, makes it all the more important that you should know the truth now. Mercedes, there is—oh, how can I say it the way I would like?—there is an absolute, positive barrier against my ever marrying any girl, no difference how much I may care for her. It is something I cannot explain even to you, much as I trust you. And the barrier is not one that can ever be removed. Believe me, Mercedes, this is not an imaginary obstacle. I love you, and for that reason I am telling you this—something I never dreamed of telling another. But if I should marry you, there would be nothing but hate in your heart for me when you learned the truth about me, which you would be sure to do. There is no stain on my character"—as she partly drew away from him—"please do not think that. Some day you will know all; for the present, let us forget everything but the fact that we have each other, and live for today."

While her lover was speaking, the face of the girl gradually whitened, and when he had finished it was like marble, her lips trembling.

"Don't you think it would be best for us to not see each other again?" she asked in a low tone.

"Perhaps it would," he assented gravely. "But it will be very hard." Then, as he saw the pain expressed in her eyes, he broke out, appealingly:

"Forgive me, dearest—please forgive my seeming heartlessness. I did not intend to ever make you

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suffer; heaven knows I would bear any pain or humiliation to keep you from suffering. When I first learned to care so much for your companionship it never occurred to me that you might learn to love me. I have tried to tell you this for a month, but was sure it meant pain for both of us, and could not find words to tell you. Yet I knew all along that it was my duty to do so. Say that you forgive me."

Mercedes Morris looked long and earnestly into the eyes of her lover. Perhaps she thought to read the true reason for this strange ending to her happiness. Then she said, very slowly and painfully:

"I do not want you to tell me anything which you think you should not; but are you very, very sure there is no way of overcoming this barrier, as you call it, to our marriage? Have you thought of it in every way? Sometimes a woman can see things in a different light, you know—particularly when it concerns the man she loves."

"If there had been any way on earth to overcome it, I would not have spoken as I did just now."

She was silent for several minutes, then impulsively asked:

"Will you answer me two questions?—it will help me bear the pain of a separation."

"If I can do so they shall be answered."

"Are you already married?"

"No."

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"Do you love me?"

"More than I ever loved anyone before—more than my own life, Mercedes."

"Then why, oh, why do you talk like that? Nothing on earth should come between us if this be true. Love me! You do not know what love is! Oh, the humiliation of acknowledging that I care too much for you! And then you can sit there and tell me that you actually feel sorry for me! And yet you want matters to go on as they are now; this, I presume, is because you pity me a little! Well, I want to tell you right here and now that I never want to see you again! Leave me at once, and never dare to speak to me!"

Joe waited until the storm of indignation had passed. Then he got up very quietly and walked toward the hall; taking his hat from the rack, he turned and said:

"Dearest, I have never pitied you; all that feeling was reserved for my poor self. I do not blame you in the least for the resentment you express at my treatment of you. I should have stopped coming here long ago; but I will admit I did not have courage enough to end it. I will resign my position on the railroad and leave this part of the country. Some time, as I said before, you will know all—then you will pity me."

Hat in hand, he opened the door to the street and

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was about to step out, when a voice from the parlor stopped him:

"Joe!"

"Yes, I am here."

"Come back; I want to talk to you."

Returning to the room, he was met by the affectionate, impulsive girl, who clasped his hands and held them tightly.

"No, no! You must not leave like that! I will never talk to you in such a manner again. I do not ask you to tell me anything of your past—I only care to know that you love me. Stay here; do not go away."

It was two hours later when the final good night was said, and Joe Fleming walked slowly home. Arriving at his room, he took a small but heavy iron box from his trunk and opened it with a strangely shaped key attached to a chain at his belt. Lifting some folded papers, he picked up a long envelope which was sealed with wax. Upon its face was written "Miss Mercedes Morris, Unionville, Pa." Placing it on top of the other papers, he closed and locked the iron box, returned it to its place in the trunk and retired. His regular "run" did not leave Unionville until nine o'clock the next evening, so he slept until late. Miss Morris left home on train No. 19, at 4:20 in the evening, to assume her duties for the night at Lewistown office. She had passed a sleepless night

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after the departure of her lover, and all day Monday wandered aimlessly about the house, unable to rest or to interest herself in anything. All that seemed worth living for had passed out of her life, and she did not care very much what happened now. A feeling of lethargy seemed to be crushing all the vivacious spirit out of her young life; it was noticeable to her mother, but the latter made no comment, knowing that if the trouble did not disappear her daughter would tell her all about it before many days.

When she alighted from the train at Lewistown, after an hour's ride, the agent was astonished to see the pale, listless girl enter his office and take her place at the telegraph table. Usually so winsome and jolly, the contrast could not go unnoticed. When ready to leave for the night he spoke to her kindly, saying she looked unwell, and added:

"If you desire it, Miss Morris, I shall be glad to work tonight and allow you to return home on number sixteen. You look as if you needed rest."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Tomlinson, but I could not think of allowing you to do such a thing, after working all day. I do need rest—I feel that very plainly. Not being able to sleep any last night or today, I am naturally very tired now. But I will not permit you to work. Morning will soon come, with a good book to pass away the lonesome hours. Good night."

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"Good night."

* * * * * * * *

Train No. 49 on the schedule was a mixed freight, leaving Unionville at midnight and being due at Lewistown passing siding at 3:04 A. M. As all railroad men know, scheduled freights on a single track system are not on time once in six months. They invariably run on special orders, owing to work and other delays along the road keeping them far behind their scheduled time. On the night in question, however, No. 49 left Unionville with but ten cars of freight, and had no work south of Lewistown, which made it possible to be on time for once, providing nothing of an unusual nature happened to prevent it.

Mercedes thought she never knew a night to be so long. She found her book dull, the evening paper was unnoticed, and at last she attempted to while away the hours writing letters to friends, but gave up in despair.

"Oh, what's the use—what's the use of anything?" she murmured, laying her head on both arms as she leaned upon the telegraph table.

She was aroused by hearing the report of a train being sent to the dispatcher at Pittsburg, and in a moment was all attention. It was No. 47—the train which left Unionville at nine o'clock—the train upon which the man she loved was employed—and it would pass Lewistown in ten or fifteen minutes. These

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minutes dragged slowly by; one would think she was about to walk to the altar with the man of her choice, instead of merely seeing him pass on a freight train, and in the dark, too. But the waving of his lantern, and a glimpse of his face as the light flashed in the darkness, gave this girl more pleasure than the attentions of all other men. So she waited anxiously for the train to come. Hearing the engineer's signalling whistle, a few minutes later, she pulled a semaphore lever and changed the north bound signal from red to white; then raising a front window of the office to its full height, she waited for the coming of her lover.

The train went thundering by at the rate of thirty-five miles an hour, and several lamps were waved by brakemen who were always anxious to win a smile from her; but she knew that none of the lanterns were in the hands of Joe Fleming. She knew his way of swinging the lamp, and he always held it close to his face, as she had requested him to do. Smothering her disappointment, she lowered the window, took hold of the lever which changed the signal light outside, and threw it rather heavily back to its old position, to show a red light. She was heartsick, and almost tired of life itself. On this particular night, the disappointment at not seeing him seemed to weigh more than usual upon her tired mind.

Reopening the book, Mercedes once more tried to

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read, but the unshed tears prevented her seeing the print. Looking at the clock she noticed that it was 2:51.

"Forty-nine is due in thirteen minutes," she said slowly. "But I never knew it to be on time. Wonder if it has left 'WB' yet? Believe I'll ask."

Reaching across the table she placed her hand upon the telegraph key and called "WB" half a dozen times. This was a junction point eight miles south of Lewistown. Receiving no reply, she closed the key, glanced instinctively at the semaphore levers, to further assure herself they were set to show a red signal.

"I'm not sleeply tonight, but I have the strangest feeling of languor. I wish Forty-nine had gone. If it gets much behind schedule time it may make lots of work for me, and I don't feel like taking train orders now. I wish Joe had waved to me when his train went by; it seems strange that the very first night after—after I learned of the awfully lonesome life I shall have to live, he should neglect to be out when his train passed here. I cannot understand it. Yet there must be a reason, for he is the best boy in the world—the very best boy in this world." This soliloquy was whispered as her head slowly dropped upon her arms folded on the table, and in a few seconds she was sound asleep.

* * * * * * * *

Engineer George Whiteley had charge of Engine

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471 hauling Forty-nine that night. Leaving "WB" junction on time, he had orders to meet No. 40 at Allenburg passing siding, which was two miles north of Lewistown. The run of eight miles from "WB" junction to Lewistown was made in about twenty minutes, and as he neared the latter place he saw that his train would be right on time, and care had to be taken that they did not pass this siding ahead of their scheduled time. While yet within a mile of the telegraph office, he shut off steam and "drifted" slowly through the town.

"White," called Fireman McDonald, as the semaphore signal came in view, before the engineer had time to whistle.

It was a dark night, and a dense fog had settled in the valley, making signals hard to see and railroading generally very ugly. Slowly the train crept down the track, making very little noise. Being just one minute ahead of time was the cause of this. The north end of the passing siding was a quarter of a mile below the telegraph office, and it was here that freight trains had to wait for their time to leave. As the short train was passing the station, every member of the crew looked through the bay-window of the telegraph office and saw the tired girl as she leaned upon the table.

"I believe for once we've caught our pretty operator

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asleep on duty," grinned the fireman to the front brakeman, who sat on the seat beside him.

"Well, it's the first time I ever heard of her being asleep in her office," replied the brakeman. "We'll have to tease Fleming about it. He's back in the caboose, isn't he?"

"Yes, but you can be sure he'll see her; he never passes here without waving his lantern. He didn't know he was going to work on Forty-nine till he got down to the yard tonight; Forty-seven's his regular run, you know. Wonder if his sweetheart wasn't mad because he didn't wave to her off Forty-seven?"

Joe Fleming, who was now what is known as "middle" brakeman, being a promotion from "front" brakeman, was standing on the platform at the rear of his caboose, looking toward the telegraph office, as the fireman predicted. Seeing Mercedes in the position described, he murmured:

"Poor girl! She has worn herself out through loss of sleep and worry. Let her sleep; she can ask the next office north of here what time we passed, as many operators do, and in that way fill in her train sheet. I wish I could be there to talk to and comfort her when she awakens. I wonder if she was disappointed very much at not seeing me on Forty-seven? She will not know that the yardmaster changed me to Forty-nine till I get back to Unionville." He kept his eyes fixed on the window as long as it could be seen, then

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turned slowly away and walked into the caboose.

The train lay at the north end of the passing siding but one minute, waiting for the hands on the engineer's watch to point to 3:04, when it steamed quietly away, gaining speed rapidly as the train reached the town limits.

Mercedes was awakened by hearing her office call, "LC," being repeated rapidly; the train dispatcher at Pittsburg was calling her. Arousing herself she answered at once.

"No. 49?" asked the dispatcher.

"Not yet," she replied. Then, leaving the key open, she glanced up at the clock. It was exactly 3:05. The iron levers which throw the signals, she made sure, were set to show a red light. Before closing the key, however, she got up and walked to the door, looking up and down the track. At the top of the semaphore tower, she noticed that the lamp was burning; but the fog was so dense she could not see many yards from the office—nor could she see the wooden arms of the semaphore signal, although standing almost under them. But as the lamp was burning, and the levers were set to show red, which meant "stop," she was assured that a train could not have passed during the fifteen minutes she slept; yet a strange feeling that something was wrong prevented her closing the key for fully a minute, as she knew when it was closed an order would probably be sent

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for her to deliver to No. 49. But all human reason told her the train could not have passed. The signal was set to show a red light; it was only one minute after the scheduled time of the freight, and no person had ever known Forty-nine to be within an hour of that time. Then, too, it was a mild night in May, and every window in the office was partly open, nothing but the iron grating being between her and track, which was within twenty feet of the office windows. Surely a train passing would have awakened her! Of all these things she depended most upon the semaphore signal. To notice all this took but twenty or thirty seconds. Convinced by all visible signs and by her own reason, that she was doing nothing except that which was perfectly safe, she returned to the telegraph table and said to the dispatcher:

"No sign 49 yet."

"Hold them for orders," he replied, and then the following telegraphic train order was sent:

"Superintendent's Office,
Pittsburg, Pa., May 18, 1898.

"To C. & E. No. 49,
Lewistown.

"No 49 and No. 40 will meet at Lewistown instead of at Allenburg. D. H. L."

After receiving and repeating the order, she took up a square hand lantern, in which there was a red globe, and going outside of the station building hung it on a hook provided for that purpose. This red

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light is always used as an extra precaution after a train order has been received.

Returning to the office, she sat down at the telegraph table, opened her book and tried to read, while waiting for Forty-nine. After ten minutes she called "WB" office and asked if they had left there. "D 2:35, and no work to LC," came the reply—meaning the train had departed at the time mentioned, and had a through run to Lewistown. Mercedes began to look anxiously at the clock, as the hands pointed to three-thirty, then three forty-five, and finally to four o'clock; yet she did not hear a sound of Forty-nine. It was not unusual for the train to be so late, as it was often six or seven in the morning before it reached Lewistown; but knowing they had left the office south of her an hour and a half before, with no work to do along the road, it should have passed right on time—3:04. Her nerves were at the highest possible tension; the telegraph instruments were quiet for perhaps five minutes, and everything about the place was still as death. Mercedes stood in a listening attitude in the center of the office; she had ceased to look up the track for the lost train—something seemed to tell her it would not come.

Suddenly, the "train wire" instrument began to click; it sounded almost like the report of a rifle to the excited girl, breaking as it did the deep silence of the night. She hurried to the table and sank in a

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chair, listening intently to every word as it came from the telegraph sounder. It was the agent at Allenburg, the first station north, calling the dispatcher's office at Pittsburg. There was no night operator at Allenburg, and Mercedes knew at once that something was wrong. Clasping her hands, she waited.

"No. 49 and 40 came together just south of here; both engines demolished."

"Any one hurt?" came the question which is always asked first at a time like this.

"Yes," replied the agent at Allenburg, who had been awakened by the train crews to report the wreck; "three men killed, five badly injured. Conductor Long asks for extra surgeons at once. Only one in this town."

Poor Mercedes Morris! She was wringing her hands frantically and crying in anguish as she paced the floor of her office.

"Oh, how did that train ever pass the red light?" she moaned. "Three killed! Oh, isn't it awful! I wonder who the poor fellows are?"

The next hour was a busy one for her, and she had little time to pay any attention to what was being said on the "side wires" by the other operators, who talked of the wreck. Orders and long messages of importance kept the "train wire" clicking. At the end of that time she was in such a state of nervous excitement that she nearly collapsed. But the words

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"accident report" coming from one of the telegraph sounders attracted her attention, and she quieted herself long enough to listen. It was the regular telegraphic report of the accident signed by the conductor of Forty-nine, being sent from Allenburg office to Pittsburg. She almost held her breath when the sending operator came to that part of it where the names of the killed and injured were given. The cold, relentless brass sounder would not spare her; it continued to speak—

"The killed: Fireman James McDonald; Brakeman Charles Green; Brakeman Joe Fleming——"

With a scream the frenzied girl jumped to her feet, and running to the office door, rushed outside. Dawn was just breaking, but the little town of Lewistown was still asleep. Pacing up and down the track in front of her office, the unfortunate operator acted like one mad.

"I killed him! I killed him!" she sobbed. "If I had not slept I should never have taken that order! And I thought Joe was on Forty-seven! Oh, how did that engineer get by a red light?"

Then, as the thought came to her suddenly, she ran up the track a dozen steps and looked at the top of the semaphore tower. It showed a white light! Yet the breaking of day showed the wooden arm in a perfectly horizontal position, indicating danger, and

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the light should have been red. Gasping with fear, she sank upon the track in a swoon.

Fifteen minutes later the wreck-train, running at a high rate of speed to reach the scene of the wreck at Allenburg, nearly crushed out her life as she lay helpless between the rails. By reversing the engine and using sand freely, the engineer managed to stop the train within a few feet of the prostrate girl. Three surgeons were on the train, ready to take charge of the wreck victims, and carrying the unconscious operator into her office, they gave her every attention, but were unable to restore consciousness.

"Dr. Gibney, if you will remain here with this patient, we will hurry on to the wreck," said one of the physicians.

"We cannot leave here until the telegraph operator changes the signal," said the wreck-train conductor. "No other person has authority to touch the levers."

"She is recovering now," announced Dr. Gibney. A few minutes later Mercedes opened her eyes and stared at the faces near her. Then, laughing hysterically, she got upon her feet, saying:

"Well, what are you all glaring at me for? Do you think there is any danger of me causing a wreck?.... Just think! It is almost two years now since Forty-nine and Forty collided, and poor Joe was killed!"—her voice sank almost into a whisper—"killed, and I have never been able to find where they buried him!

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But some one must have broken the red glass in my signal and—poor Joe! I wonder where he is buried?"

The physicians and railroad men looked at each other in horror as they began to realize what had happened.

"Conductor, you will have to get your train to that wreck without the help of this poor insane girl," Dr. Gibney said in a low tone. "I fear she will never deliver another train order."

"I'll send a man ahead with a flag—it's only two miles north of here," replied the conductor, hurriedly.

Mercedes was taken to a hotel and cared for until later in the day, when she was removed to her home.

The wreck was one of the most disastrous ever known on the M——— Division. Two other locomotives were required to pull the wrecked ones apart, so solidly were they wedged together. Cars of merchandise, coke, coal and lumber were scattered in every direction. Fire had broken out from a small heating stove in No. 40's caboose, and threatened to burn the entire train; but the wrecking crew soon extinguished the flames.

Joe Fleming, the young brakeman, had just been removed from between two freight cars when the local physician arrived. He was still living, but unconscious. Bending over the still form, the doctor could see no wounds, and began cutting away the clothing

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in an effort to find the injuries, when he suddenly stopped and said to those about him:

"Why, this is a woman!"

"What!" exclaimed Conductor Long, excitedly. "Why, that boy has been braking on this road for months! Will he die, doctor?"

The physician had resumed his examination. Turning the form over, he saw a frightful wound in the back; after a moment he looked up and answered the conductor's question:

"She cannot live many minutes!"

The doctor was correct, for the person known as Joe Fleming died in twenty minutes—before the accident report had been sent—died without a sound. And those who saw the end thought the secret of her life had died with her, but when the trunk at Mrs. Barr's was opened by keys found on the dead girl's clothing, the strange looking iron box came to view; and in this a large envelope addressed to "Miss Mercedes Morris, Unionville, Pa." It was taken to Mercedes; but the girl, hopelessly insane, could not understand its import, so her mother opened the packet:

**"To the Dearest Girl on Earth:**

**"If your eyes ever fall on these lines, I shall either be far away from this country or—in my grave. After I tell you the secret of my life, try to forgive me the pain I have caused you. From the time we first met there has been something so strangely attractive about you that I could never explain it to myself. I wanted to be near**

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you constantly; but during all this time it never occurred to me that you might learn to love me, as sweethearts love—as wives love husbands. When this fact finally became plain to me, I made three or four attempts to tell you all, but I dreaded to see you suffer. Now that we shall never meet again, I will tell you why I could not marry you:

I am a woman!

I left Italy a little over two years ago, to avoid an unbearable marriage which my uncle and aunt intended forcing upon me. They were comparatively wealthy, and the only guardians I have known for many years. The man intended for my husband had a title, but was a rake of the worst kind, and I would have died rather than marry him. I was finally imprisoned in my bedroom, from where I escaped with what clothing I could carry. After a hard strugle, I reached a seaport town, nearly ten miles from my home, and was fortunate enough to find a captain of a merchant ship with a kind wife who always went to sea with him, and after hearing my story, they consented to take me to New York with them. They were country people of mine.

Oh, if I could tell you of the struggle I have had since my arrival here! Although blessed with a very good education, particularly in music, I could not get employment without references. Living among Italians in poor circumstances, doing what little I could for them to earn my bread, more than a year was spent. As I learned more of the ways of your country, I discovered that men or boys seldom have trouble procuring work, while may girls suffered as I did. Then it was that I conceived the idea of masquerading as a boy. At this time I was living with an Italian family near a railroad yard, and watched the men every day with much inter-

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**est as they switched the cars. I always thought I could do that. Mentioning my idea to the woman with whom I stopped, it met with instant approval—anything to avoid feeding me. She cut off my long hair, supplied me with some old clothing belonging to her son, and I started out. But I applied to several railroads before coming to this one, and was very hungry when Mr. Tuckle first saw me.**

**And now, dearest, you know the story of my unhappy life. If I am dead when you read this, I am sure of your forgiveness; if in another part of the country, I can only hope that you will not feel too bitter toward me.**

**Good-bye! Although of your own sex, I can truthfully say I never loved any person on earth as I love you.**

**JOSEPHINE FLAMEROI.**
**(Joe Fleming.)**

It was never discovered what shattered the glass in the signal, but the general supposition is that the weight of the heavy semaphore arm, being thrown from a horizontal to a semi-vertical position, caused this small round piece of red glass to break and fall to the ground, exposing the white light through the opening. The denseness of the fog prevented the engineer or fireman from seeing the position of the wooden arm; in fact, train crews seldom look for anything but the color of the light at night. This is usually visible so far from the tower that the position of the arm cannot be seen.

The oldest railroad men on the M——— Division said they had never heard of a similar accident.

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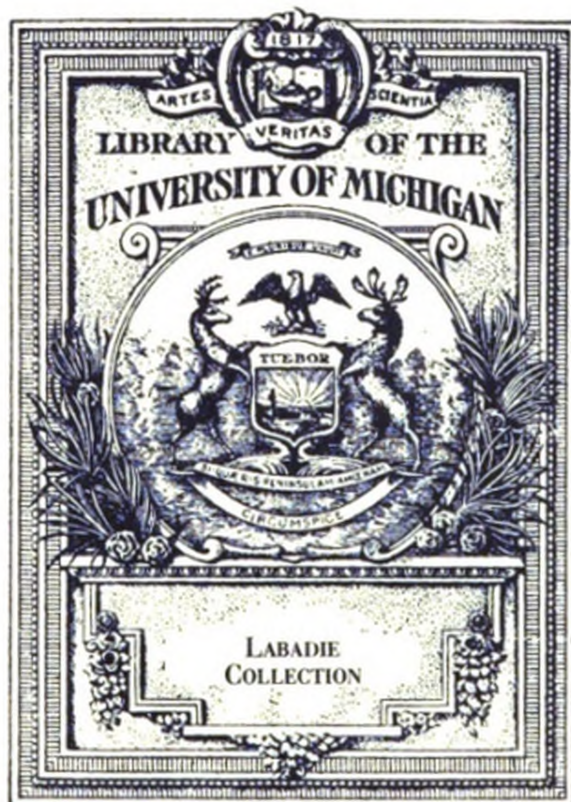


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