

CHRISTMAS IN MY HEART

17



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A St. Nicholas Magazine Christmas

Joseph Leininger Wheeler

The St. Nicholas Christmas Stories

For this very special *Christmas in My Heart* 17, representing as it does the transition from Review and Herald® to Pacific Press®, I decided to do something very different from anything I'd ever done before: take the sixty-six years of the greatest child/teen magazine of all time and choose the most moving Christmas stories ever to appear in those pages.

Serendipitously, I discovered in the process that not only had I put together one of the most memorable Christmas story anthologies ever to see print, I had—unknowingly—also recreated an age. A very special age . . . a time like no other. A time so different from ours that it desperately needed an introduction like this one, so readers could better understand the characters, settings, and times in which the stories took place.

Also, I felt readers would appreciate a short history of the magazine itself and its impact upon the age.

The Santa Claus variable

Way back at the beginning of this series, in 1992, I made my position on Santa Claus clear: that Christ alone is the reason for

the season, not Santa Claus. Having said that, however, I recognize that the Santa Claus persona is interwoven into our Christmas season. Indeed, my conservative minister father donned a Santa Claus suit every Christmas before he handed out our gifts. Consequently, while I've excluded Christmas stories that glorify Santa Claus, I have welcomed stories in which Santa's role is a subsidiary one, one in which he is merely a vehicle for gift giving. Since this is the role of the two Santa characters in the stories included in this collection, I feel comfortable including them.

How the magazine came to be

St. Nicholas began to make itself indispensable in 1873. It held its readers in a rapturous trance for two days a month, and filled their dreams for the other twenty-eight. If you read it as a child, you remember the intensity of anticipation with which you anticipated its coming; the keen disappointment and anxiety if it was late; the tremendous eagerness with which you tore off the wrapper; the little surge of resentment within you if somebody else opened it first. You remember the delight as you turned the pages and gave the pictures and titles the first hasty look; the delectable "feel" of it in your hands. How lovingly you turned every leaf and scanned every page—as you drew near the last pages your heart sank a little, and you tried to assure yourself that "there must be a whole lot more yet!" And every story, every article, every picture, was read and studied until it fairly burned itself into your brain.

—"Fifty Years of *St. Nicholas*," *St. Nicholas*, November 1923, p. 18.

In human history, there has never been anything like *St. Nicholas* magazine. When it began publication, the terrible Civil War had been over a scant eight years. Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* had been born six years earlier. It had been only four years since the "golden spike" was driven into a railroad track in Utah, uniting the nation coast to coast for the first time. Stanley had finally tracked down Livingstone in darkest Africa just two years earlier.

The year was 1873. On September 20, Wall Street reeled due to a financial panic—hardly an auspicious time in which to start a magazine for children and teenagers (the first issue appearing at Thanksgiving). But Roswell Smith (1829–1892), legendary publishing tycoon (cofounder of Scribners and founder of the Century Publishing Company), had a dream. He had the money—all he lacked was a visionary editor. He found that in Mary Mapes Dodge (1831–1905), a mother of two sons who was forced by the untimely death of her husband to strike out on her own. Eight years before, she'd been elevated to the pinnacle of popularity in America by the publication of her perennial bestseller, *Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates*. She proved to be the perfect choice.

Roswell Smith wore big boots. What he envisioned was nothing less than a magazine that would fill a huge vacuum in the English-speaking world—become a child's window into the world; become the one magazine no child in America would wish to grow up without; become a magazine that the world's greatest writers and artists would flock to, each wanting to become a part of it.

Mary Mapes Dodge and her associate editors, Frank Stockton and William Fayal Clarke, pulled it off. A veritable who's who of artists and writers rushed to offer their services: artists such as Arthur Rackham, Maxfield Parrish, Howard Pyle, A. B. Frost, Frederic Remington, Charles Dana Gibson,

Arthur Keller, James Montgomery Flagg, John La Farge, and Reginald Birch; and authors and poets such as Jack London, George Barr McCutcheon, Rudyard Kipling, Anthony Hope, James Barrie, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Joel Chandler Harris, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, Mary E. Wilkins, Louisa May Alcott, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Bret Harte, Josephine Daskom Bacon, James Russell Lowell, Kate Douglas Wiggin, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, William Dean Howells, T. Morris Longstreth, Eugene Field, and Francis Hodgson Burnett.

Faithfully, for two-thirds of a century, over 1,200 pages of fascinating reading material were published each year. During the magazine's first fifty years, there were only two editors: Dodge and Clarke, so the continuity was seamless. *St. Nicholas* was like an answer to prayer for the millions of parents and children. In a very real sense, its pages represented the only real education hundreds of thousands of children and teenagers ever had. And the editors kept the faith. To their credit, they realized that children are the toughest of critics: their decisions quick, accurate, and final. You may occasionally fool them once—but rarely twice.

Not only did *St. Nicholas* provide an encyclopedic introduction to the entire world—history, biography, religion, literature, art, music, mythology, biology, architecture, anthropology, philosophy, technology, folklore, popular culture, etc., it also kept readers abreast of fast-breaking current events. And without preaching or moralizing, the magazines helped inculcate principles of right living in its readers: character traits such as integrity, kindness, self-sacrifice, empathy, industry, courage, fortitude, self-respect, patriotism, respect for their elders, sportsmanship, etc.—traits that bridged to the golden rule and service for others. Interwoven into the very fabric of the magazine was God's leading in each of our lives. Thus, in its sixty-six

years, *St. Nicholas* had a huge impact on an entire people.

Case in point, one never-to-be-forgotten day, Jack London (1876–1916), a San Francisco wharf rat who'd been abandoned by his father, wandered into a public library, picked up a copy of *St. Nicholas*, read it, and resolved to make something of his life. Later, he would write for the magazine himself.

Readers and critics speak out

My children read it. Their children read it. I, the grandfather, hang around to grab it when they lay it down.

—Gustav Kobbé

Following is a small sampling of responses from those who knew the magazine firsthand:

It was the friend and companion of my youth.

—Frank Nelson Doubleday

St. Nicholas is the best child's periodical in the world.

—John Greenleaf Whittier

I think that St. Nicholas made a novelist of me. It was more than an inspiration; it was an incentive.

—George Barr McCutcheon

There was nothing like St. Nicholas—it couldn't be done.

—James Montgomery Flagg

The best of all periodicals ever published for children.

—*New York Tribune*

It was my friend and guide for many years of my boyhood. Bound volumes have been read and re-read by one after another of

our children and our neighbors' children.

—David Grayson [Ray Stannard Baker]

St. Nicholas—the acknowledged leader of all periodicals for boys and girls not only in America, but in the world.

—Educational Journal

No other periodical has done more to teach its readers the principles of right living; yet how few of them realize it until they grow up!

—Leroy Fairman

One memory that lingers with me . . . is of the monthly arrival of St. Nicholas. There were three of us boys, and as I was the youngest, my turn was naturally last, and I can recall even now . . . the sense of injustice which this stirred in me. We all read St. Nick through—the serials first, for we were impatient to know what new adventures befell our heroes and (let me confess) heroines; then the stories, the historical sketches, the League, and even the puzzles.

—Henry Steele Commager

The editors kept some of the most memorable letters written to the magazine by their young readers. Among them are these:

My sister has taken you for six months, but—well, I get the mail!

My grandmother gives me St. Nicholas for Christmas every year, and I think I love it better than anyone else I know, though I never saw anybody who didn't think it the best magazine ever printed.

I am always waiting on the front porch the first of the month, waiting for you; and when you come, O Boy! I am dead to the world.

The world St. Nicholas readers lived in

So different from ours was the world of 1873–1939 that it seems imperative that we discuss it a little before you burrow into these Christmas stories.

During the first generation of readers (1873–1895), train travel represented the fastest speed known to man. In towns not reached by railroads, transportation was dominated by the horse (pulling a carriage, wagon, or sleigh). Steamboats plied inland waterways, and steamships ruled supreme on the high seas.

The telegraph was the wonder of this generation, for it tied the world together. Not surprisingly, whatever action a given town might provide was, more often than not, found in the telegraph office; the telegraph operator often a star. The superstars that boys yearned to emulate were the railroad engineers on land and the steamship captains on water.

Home life remained rather primitive by today's standards. Relatively few homes had indoor plumbing. Electricity would be slow in reaching rural America (where the majority of people still lived). To most people, the telephone was merely an invention they'd heard about but couldn't imagine using in their homes. The center of home life was the stove, kitchen, or fireplace—here is where family reading took place in the evenings. And they'd gather around the piano to sing. In the summer months, they'd gravitate to the front porch.

Buried as the current generation is in paper, it may be hard for children today to conceptualize how rare paper was back then. So rare, in fact, that children, both at home and at school, tended to write with chalk on slate rather than using

a pencil on paper. It is an eye-opening experience to study letters that have survived from that era and see how often they wrote upside down between the lines and on the flip side of the paper as well, rather than resort to finding another sheet of paper. Not until 1884, when Waterman began marketing the first ink-storing pen, was there much of a writing alternative to the goose-quill pen.

Generally speaking, the role of women was unenviable. Few careers were open to them. Girls were trained to become wives and mothers, and once married lost what identity they had, henceforth merely adding “Mrs.” to their husbands’ names. Thus, when a girl came of age, society expected her to marry and “settle down.” Especially in rural America, girls were expected to marry early (usually from fourteen to seventeen years of age) and boys a bit later (fifteen to nineteen). Since there was no reliable birth control, children came on an average of one every two years, hence large families were the norm. No small thanks to the failure of doctors and midwives to wash their hands between patients, untold millions of women died of puerperal fever or childbirth “complications”—hence men tended to go through three wives in a lifetime. If a young woman did not marry, society stigmatized her as a “spinster” and ostracized her. The workload carried by women in those pre-electricity and pre-indoor plumbing days was brutal, making them old before their time.

Medicine was still such a primitive profession that most any disease was likely to terminate a child’s life. The result was that contemporaries were almost paranoid about the subjects of disease and death.


The economy was in such a perpetual state of flux that the nation reeled from one financial panic (or depression) after another: 1873, 1893, 1901, 1929 (the worst Depression of all). Because there was no federal protection for bank ac-

counts as we know it today, every time a panic hit, banks failed and depositors lost everything they owned. Since credit cards wouldn’t come into regular use until the 1960s and 1970s, one either had money or one didn’t—consequently, a penny, nickel, or dime really meant something then. As a result, children were forced to be extremely frugal with what little hard money they were given or earned. With comparatively little money in circulation, especially in rural areas, a barter economy took its place. People had a horror of debt because it had not been long since debtors were often hauled off to prison until those debts were paid. And, when old, there being no Social Security and precious few pensions, all too many of those who’d lost their money and assets and had no children who’d take them in, ended up in that most dreaded place: the poorhouse—at the mercy of those who ran it.

The biggest craze of this generation was the bicycle. Indeed, it was virtually an epidemic during the 1880s and 1890s. Thanks to railroads, time itself had to be regulated; otherwise who would know when to board a train or meet one? Because of this, in 1883 the continent was divided into four time zones, and clocks and watches were hereafter synchronized relative to the prime meridian in Greenwich, England. The result: these timetables dramatically increased people’s awareness of time and the pace of living.

During the second *St. Nicholas* generation (1895–1917), the pace of life sped up even more. By the late 1890s, the automobile was coming in and striking terror in the hearts of horses now forced to share roads with them. By 1900, eight thousand automobiles were in use. By 1903, the first motorcar had crossed the continent. It was also in 1903 that Wilbur and Orville Wright, in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, launched the age of aviation.

Electricity, indoor plumbing, refrigeration, electric



washing machines, etc., began to transform the lives of women, as did advances in medicine. (Finally, women began living into their forties and fifties.) The Bessemer steel I-beam made the construction of skyscrapers possible. In 1913, Henry Ford introduced the concept of the assembly line, thereby revolutionizing industry around the world.

But life remained tough. Even in 1915, one-third of Americans worked up to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, with rarely a vacation day off—all in order to earn thirty dollars a month.

The third *St. Nicholas* generation (1917–1939) began in trauma with the entrance of America into the so-called Great War (World War I). Since most men were in the military, 1,400,000 women entered the workplace. After the war ended, many women were reluctant to climb back into the boxes society had ordained for them.

By 1929, over five million cars had been built, and there were now almost seven hundred thousand miles of paved roads in America. However, October 29 of that year brought the beginning of the most terrible financial crash in American history. Contrary to what many assume, it was not a one-day plunge but rather a gradual decade-long period of decline that never seemed to hit bottom. The Midwest Dust Bowl, a terrible drought in the Great Plains, compounded the national misery. Millions roamed the country in a desperate search for jobs or food. The entire era can be summed up in six plaintive words: *Brother, can you spare a dime?* For in those days, a dime might mean the difference between eating and not eating.

It was during this terrible crucible of anguish that so many American institutions collapsed. Publishing companies and

magazines too. Sadly, after holding on for ten long years, even that wondrous magazine, *St. Nicholas*, was forced to close its doors for the last time in 1939.

* * * * *

Now that you better understand the world the characters in these fifteen stories were living in, it is time for us to move on into that storied world.

Enjoy!

CODA

I look forward to hearing from you! Please do keep the stories, responses, and suggestions coming—and not just for Christmas stories. I am putting together collections centered on other genres as well. You may reach me by writing to:

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May the Lord bless and guide the ministry of these stories in your home.

* * * * *

Sources used:

Henry Steele Commager, *The St. Nicholas Anthology* (New York: Random House, 1916, 1948), xix–xxi.

“Fifty Years of *St. Nicholas*,” *St. Nicholas*, November 1923, 16–23.

President for One Hour

Fred P. Fox

Fifteen-year-old Tom Martin was the mainstay of his widowed mother. Yet, when the chilling news came over the telegraph wires that a train had broken apart and carnage on the rails was only minutes away, Tom hesitated not a second.

Better that one boy should give up his life than hundreds of lives be lost.

* * * * *

This was the lead story in St. Nicholas' only Christmas treasury: St. Nicholas Christmas Book, in 1920.

* * * * *

It was just eight o'clock as the passenger train pulled out of the Wayville station on the morning of December 24, 1891. The train was heavily laden with jovial people either bound for their eastern homes or festive holiday shoppers going to the city to purchase the last supply of presents that were to make the coming day the happiest of the year.

The mail car and express cars were laden to overflowing with many odd-shaped packages, and even the spaces in the

vestibules between the cars had to be utilized for pouches and packages, so great was the jam of Christmas presents.

If it was a jolly crowd that left the little station, it was not an unhappy one that remained. The fog had so settled down upon and around everything that the little lamp in the telegraph and ticket office shed but a feeble light upon the individuals seated around the stove. There is always a crowd in a country station at train time, and in spite of the rules, a few privileged persons always found their way into the office.

Merrily the telegraph instrument ticked away, sending its messages of hope or grief across a continent. As he sat beside the instrument, Fred Clarke, the operator, once in a while shared a bit of electric gossip to the entertained listeners. "Number Thirteen is five minutes late at Bloss," he remarked. Then he smiled as he said, "The general manager has just left High Ridge on his 'special,' coming west. He must have a jolly party with him, for he has ordered fourteen dinners at Glenmore to be ready when he arrives there. His car will pass here at nine ten."

"What engine's pulling the 'special'?" asked Bob Ford, one of the listeners.

"Number Thirty-nine."

"That's Father's old engine," spoke up Tom Martin, a dark-eyed, dark-haired boy of fifteen years, who had been gazing intently into the fire. "He used to run her on all the specials, until he was killed in the accident at Oak Bridge two years ago."

"Right you are, lad," said Bob Ford, "and it's many the time I fired for him on old Thirty-nine. He was as brave and as true a man as ever pulled a lever. You used to ride with us often too—didn't you, Tom?"

"Yes; until one day the general manager saw me sitting in the cab and issued an order that after that day no one but



regular employees in the discharge of their duties should ride upon the engines. I have never been on an engine since; but I learned a great deal about them—didn't I, Bob?"

"Yes, you did, Tom; and, for a boy, you can do as much about an engine as any youngster I know. I would rather have you around than many a fellow I know who's now running an engine. What are you doing now?"

"Since Father's death I do whatever I can to help support my mother, and I find enough to keep me out of mischief. I attend night school, and during the day, I carry the mail between the depot and town, carry dinners and lunches for the men, sell papers, and deliver messages. Besides, I am Fred's pupil and have learned telegraphy."

"Are you making a living at all these odd jobs?"

"Yes, I am. But, of course, I can't make what Father made, and we are trying to pay off the mortgage on the house. I do wish, though, I could do better. Here it is Christmastime, and I have been saving money for six months in order to buy Mother a nice warm cloak, but when I came to price them I found that the five dollars and a half I had saved wouldn't get anything at all like what I wanted. It would take three dollars more, at least. How I would like to have surprised my dear old mother! But then, no matter; I can get her something else that's nice, and we will have a merry Christmas anyway."

"You say you can telegraph," said Bob, after a moment. "What are the wires saying now?"

"The operator at High Ridge is asking whether Number Fourteen left here on time. What's that?" he continued excitedly. "Keep still! Rockville is saying 'Freight train—Number Thirty-three—broke into three sections—at Cantwell. Engineer—thinking there was one break and that rear section was under control—started back to couple on. Dense fog—met middle section coming at full speed—engineer and

fireman thrown from engine. Engine and three cars running east downgrade at full speed.' That's terrible!" Fred said. "But listen—'Middle section, one mile behind, just passed—ten loaded stockcars—Jack Flynn clinging to rear car. Must stop train if you can. If Fourteen has not yet left, switch her to westbound track or she'll be lost.' " Then the instrument stopped ticking.

"Is that right, Fred?" Bob asked the operator, as soon as he found his breath, "or has Tom been joking with us?"


"It's all true!" answered Fred. "That's just what's happened! What shall we do? What can we do?"

There was no answer to this appeal. The blanched faces of the listeners showed that all understood the horror of the situation.

Number Fourteen, the passenger train that had just left, was bowling leisurely along at thirty miles an hour, crowded with passengers. Behind, and coming with resistless force, was a runaway engine and three cars, running sixty miles an hour, and behind that train was the heavy broken section, ten loaded stockcars, coming almost as fast.

There seemed to be no hope for the doomed passengers, since on the westbound track the general manager's through express was approaching. To attempt to switch the runaway engine or section would be likely to tear up the track, and the chances were that the loss of life would be just as great, if not greater, than to let the engine speed on its way. No wonder the men turned pale as they grasped the significance of the telegraphed message. No wonder the stoutest hearts stood still, for as they reflected, horror seemed to pile on horror.

Then, out of the gloom there came a steady voice: it seemed filled with an inspiration. It was an opportunity for the genius of a true "railroad man," and the man, or rather boy, was there, ready to prove his capacity.



The boy Tom spoke up: "All of you men get out and oil the track—pour on oil, put on grease, smear it with tallow, or anything! That will slow the engine a little—perhaps enough. After the engine has passed, keep on with the work. Remember we've got to save Flynn's life—yes, and save the cattle too."

The men at once ran out of the depot, Fred and Bob leading all the rest.

"Now, I must save Number Fourteen!" said Tom to himself. "I'll have to keep the westbound track clear and then switch Number Fourteen on to it at Lewistown."

With steady fingers he grasped the telegraph key, and this message flew along the wire:

Operator, Mount Vernon: Flag special train of general manager, and tell him to wait for orders. T. M.

Back came the inquiry:

T. M., Wayville: Who has right to stop special? Track has been cleared for the general manager's train. By whose orders shall I tell him he has been flagged?

It was no time to stick at trifles or to make explanations, so Tom flashed back the answer:

By orders of president of the U.S.R.R., per T. M.

"OK," answered Mount Vernon, as a sign that the order was understood and would be obeyed.

"Now to get Number Fourteen switched from the eastbound to the westbound track! There is just a chance." Again he touched the key.

Operator, Lewistown: Turn crossover switch at your station; transfer passenger train No. 14 from eastbound to westbound track, and hold her there until released. T. M.

Then the key ticked in reply:

T. M., Wayville: Track has been cleared for special of general manager. His train approaching from east with regular orders giving right of way. Make your order more definite, and give authority.

As before, Tom was ready and answered:

Operator, Lewistown: President of U.S.R.R. Co. does not have to show authority. Carry out the orders at once. Important. T. M.

"OK," ticked back the reply.

"Now," said Tom to himself, "if I can only delay the engine until Fourteen gets across on the other track, everything will be all right. The poor horses and cattle will have to take their chances. Let's see, Fourteen has been gone fifteen minutes; she is due at Lewistown in thirty minutes. The runaway engine will be here in about five minutes; unless her speed is reduced, the passenger train will be overtaken about five miles this side of Lewistown. There is only one hope now. I must risk it."

Just then the ticket agent, hearing the men hurrying about, came downstairs and asked about the trouble. As briefly as he could, Tom told him the situation, and then said, "Mr. Lenox, I'm going to climb into the runaway engine, if it's possible, and check her up. I've five dollars or so here. Take it, and if I'm hurt, give it to my mother. Tell her I was going to get her a Christmas present, and tell her I know she would tell me to

do just what I'm going to do. God bless her! If I come out all right—and there is a chance—don't ever let her know what I did. Promise, quick!”

“Don't think of such a thing, Tom,” pleaded the agent. “Why, it's suicide! If you can slow down the engine, when you get aboard, the rear section will run into you and crush you. If you can't, you are sure to run into the passenger train and die in the collision. In this fog, even if you do get control of the engine—and I doubt if you can—you cannot tell at what second you'll run into the passenger train or what second the other section will be upon you. You are the only support of your mother. Just as likely as not, you'll be killed in your attempt to get on the engine. No one ever got on an engine going as fast as this one is; why, to try it is worse than suicide! Then the engine might blow up. You must not attempt it!”

“That's all very true, Mr. Lenox; but it's better to try, even if I fail, when so many lives will be lost unless an effort is made to save them. I'm going to do all I can, and as for Mother—why, God bless her! Goodbye. I must get out on the platform to be ready.”

“Goodbye, and Heaven help you, Tom,” replied Mr. Lenox.

Before going out, Tom took off his well-worn overcoat and jacket, tightened his belt, and prepared to run the race of his life. He then went out to the platform and found that the men had oiled the track thoroughly for several hundred yards. He did not dare tell them of his purpose for fear they would stop him, but he said to Bob, “After the engine passes, get all the men you can at work—more are coming every minute. Put on all the oil you can, and tallow, but be careful to see that there is nothing to make the cars jump the track, for that would kill all the cattle and horses, and perhaps poor Jack Flynn! He was seen clinging to the last car at Rockville. But he dared not climb up or jump off, it seems, on account of the speed of the

train. There she comes now—I can hear her! I'll run up to the other end of the platform to meet her.”

The engine could be heard thundering down the track long before she could be seen coming through the fog. Tom was at the far end of the depot where the men had first begun to apply the oil and grease, and, as they had worked back, he was in a position to get all the benefit of the loss of speed in consequence. The men flew back from the track. When the engine struck the oiled rails she trembled, and her wheels slipped rather than revolved along the track. The momentum was so great that at first the speed was scarcely affected, but as successive sections of track were passed, there began to be quite a marked reduction in speed. Tom noticed this with joy.

The engine was coming rapidly toward him. He turned and ran along the platform in the same direction as the engine, at a speed that would have carried him fifty yards in about six seconds. The engine gained on him, and just as the step was passing, he reached up, grasped the handles, and swung himself up on the step. He rested there for a few seconds and then climbed slowly up into the cab. His face was as white as the card on the steam gauge, and, in spite of the cold wind that blew upon him, he was dripping with perspiration.

Tom glanced up at the gauge and saw that the supply of steam was being rapidly exhausted, and, to his horror, he understood that the engine was running by its own inertia down the steep grade. He closed the throttle, set the lever one notch on the reverse side, and then tried the air brake. It worked in a feeble way, but checked the engine very little. He realized that in order to gain control of the engine he must get up more steam and get the air pump running.

Tom slowly crept along the flying engine over the tender and was pleased to find that there was plenty of water in the tank. Being as strong a fifteen-year-old as one ever sees, he

had no trouble in getting up a brisk fire. He then went back to the engine and was gratified to see the steam was rapidly coming up. There was no thought of fear in the brave boy, but he did not forget he was “between two fires.” He must keep his own engine from running into the passenger train, and he must keep ahead and out of the way of the runaway section. Anxiously he peered out into the fog, but he could see nothing of the train he was pursuing and could hear nothing of the train that was pursuing him. On sped the flying steed of steel, and still the pointer on the steam gauge moved slowly upward. Twenty pounds more pressure, and he felt he would have complete control of the engine. He was using but little steam now—only enough to try the air pump now and then. In a few moments he moved back the lever another notch toward the reverse and cautiously pulled out the throttle a little. The effect was positive, and he knew he was gaining control of the engine, but how she flew along over culvert, bridge, and trestle, like a living human being on a wild holiday!

Out came the throttle a little farther, and back went the lever another notch. The engine was running slower. “By reversing her and putting on the ‘emergency air,’ ” Tom said to himself, “I can now stop her in three or four lengths. It would be a bad thing to do, but I’ll do it if I have to.” He looked up at the clock. “In five minutes more, Number Fourteen will have passed to the other track and the switch will be closed. I’ll slow up a bit.” And so he did.

The engine promptly responded, and settled down to a forty-mile gait. Tom, with his head far out of the window, with one hand on the throttle and the other on the air lever, tried to pierce the mist with those bright dark eyes, but in vain. *Boom!* A torpedo¹ exploded under the wheels. “Number Fourteen has

stopped to switch!” said Tom. *Boom! Boom!* Again came the warning torpedoes. “ ‘Run slowly, with the engine under full control; that’s what those mean.’ ” Suddenly Tom’s attention was called to a thundering sound from the rear.

“It’s the broken section coming like a whirlwind. Now I’m in for it. If she will hold off for two minutes, I’ll be all right.” Tom threw the lever full ahead and opened the throttle; the engine seemed to leap forward. In a minute more he caught just a glimpse of the rear lights on the passenger train, and knew that a minute later he would be upon her. Nearer came the thundering roar behind him, and he dared not look back. The light in front swerved to the left. Would the switch be closed in time for him to keep ahead of the pursuing section? This was the question which flew through his brain. His engine was at the switch, and it had just been replaced! “Thank God for that!” was the brief prayer he murmured. “The passenger train is safe, if my orders have been carried out. Now to save myself and the cattle behind me. It’s a race for life, and I ought to win.”

A straight section of track twelve miles long lay before him, with a gently descending grade, then a level mile, and then a four-mile upgrade into Mount Vernon. Once more he crept back to the tender, opened wide the furnace doors, raked the fire, and threw in the coal evenly over every part of the great firebox. He left the ashpit door open for better draft and then climbed up on the coal to see if he could distinguish his relentless pursuer. The light had begun to dispel the fog, and three hundred feet away he could see the oncoming train. *It will take all the speed she’s got,* he thought, and leaving the tender, he crept back into the cab.

He opened the throttle wide, pushing the lever over for-

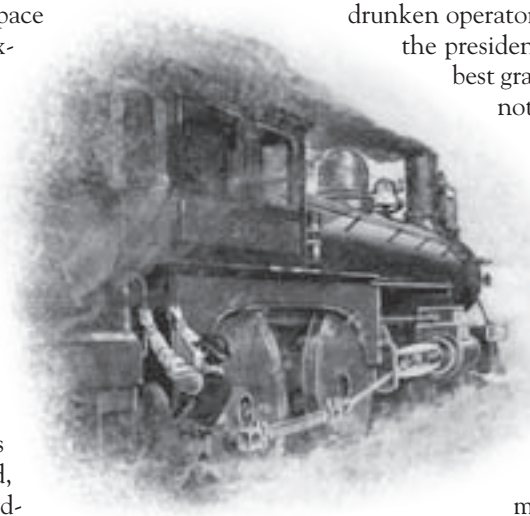
1. A detonating device fastened to the top of a rail to be exploded by the pressure of a locomotive or car to give an audible signal to members of a train crew.

ward as far as it would go. The steam kept up, and the only thing to fear was that the axle boxes would get heated on account of the frightful speed of the engine.

But then he reflected that the pace would tell on the freight train's axles even more, since they were not geared to as high a speed as were those of the locomotive.

The engine was now going at the rate of a mile a minute or faster. More coal was necessary, and he resolved to leave the window and stand by the furnace. In ten minutes the level was struck, and the pursuer had gained two hundred feet, on account of its greater weight; a minute later the upgrade was reached. More coal was needed, and the shovel was kept busy feeding the fiery mouth whose tongues of flame seemed never to be satisfied. As the engine began the ascent of the upgrade, the freight section was only fifty feet away. After a mile on the grade, the locomotive pulled slowly away from the freight. Then Tom closed the ashpit door, went back to the window, closed the throttle a little, tried the air brakes, and three minutes later pulled into the depot at Mount Vernon, and came to a stop. He looked out the window, perched high in the air, and said to the operator: "Just wire Wayville that Engine Three-oh-three has arrived here safely, and that Tom's all right."

The crowd of people who were on the platform surrounding the general manager's special car looked with amaze-



ment on the young engineer seated in the cab of the smoking engine. The general manager himself was not pleased at the sight, nor at the "unaccountable delay caused by some drunken operator," as he thought, who had imagined he was the president of the road. He had not yielded with the best grace to the order stopping his train and would not have heeded it but for the information that the same person had ordered the eastbound passenger train over to the westbound track, and his order had been obeyed, thus blocking the way. This passenger train might now pull in at any minute. The operator could not get any reply from Wayville to find out about the order.

"Well, young man," said the manager, "what are you doing up in that engine? Don't you know it's against orders? Where are the engineer and fireman? It makes no difference—they are discharged. Get down out of there! Where did you steal the engine?"


Tom could say nothing, but he did not move.

"Be lively there," continued the manager in a rage. "Officer, arrest that boy for stealing the engine!"

"Grandpa, give him a chance to explain," said a young girl who stood near the angry official. "He doesn't look as if he'd stolen anything," she continued.

"I'll attend to him, Mary. He will have a chance to explain in court!"

"Please don't have him arrested," pleaded the young girl—and she seemed to be the only one who dared address her grandfather.



“My dear child, you don’t understand these matters. Officer, get this fellow out of there. The engine looks as if it has been badly used.”

The officer climbed up into the cab and roughly shook Tom by the shoulder. Tom seemed dazed. What a fate, after all he had braved and done—to be received, instead of with thanks and praise, with threats of arrest and imprisonment!

“Come, get out of here—lively,” said the officious policeman, anxious to show his authority before so high an official as the general manager of the U.S.R.R. Co. “You look to me like a pretty tough customer.”

This roused Tom’s ire.

“Don’t touch me, please; I’ll get down myself. I want to say just a word to Mr. Holmes.” He walked up to that official and said, “I did not steal your engine, and—”

“I don’t care to hear any talk,” said the manager.

“I don’t care to talk, either,” said Tom, “but you’d better send the engine back to the grade, and see what’s become of Jack Flynn. He was clinging to the rear car of a runaway section of train Number Thirty-three.”

“What do you say? The train broken in two? Where did it happen?” asked Mr. Holmes, all interest at once.

“At Cantwell. The train broke in two places coming down the grade. The engine was struck by the flying center section, hurling the engine crew off and starting the engine the other way. I climbed on the runaway engine at Wayville and brought her here. The rest of the train is back about two miles—unless she has run back down to the level.”

“That’s a pretty story. How did you pass Number Fourteen?” asked the manager sternly, after thinking a moment.

“She was switched to the westbound track at Lewistown,” answered Tom.


“Tell the engineer and fireman on Thirty-nine to get up

in this engine and run her back,” said the manager to the conductor. “Officer, you bring the boy along, and I’ll go with you. If his story is true, he can go; but if not, it will be all the harder for him.”

The trainmen soon had the engine oiled up, finding it was none the worse for its fast run and that Tom had left everything in shipshape order. After they backed down about two miles, a man was seen running up the track. As the engine came nearer, Tom cried out, “It’s Jack Flynn—he’s all right!”

Sure enough it was Flynn, but he was picked up more dead than alive. No one had ever taken or perhaps will ever take a ride like his. Briefly he told the story of the breaking of the train into three parts—an almost unheard-of thing. He’d been on the center section, alone; he had tried to apply the brakes, but the section he was on collided with the first section. He was thrown down on the top of a car, but had retained his senses enough to cling on. Then he had attempted to climb down on the last car, and drop off, but the speed had been so great he knew the fall would be fatal, and so he had clung to the rear car, expecting death at any moment. But the train came to an upgrade, and the speed had been so reduced that he managed to climb up and set two of the brakes, but then he had to stop. The train gained in speed as it passed the downgrade, and he was glad to climb back again to his old place at the rear of the last car. Next the brakes had parted, and it seemed as if he were rushing to swift destruction. At last, the upgrade being reached, the cars lost speed; he could then have stepped off, but he resolved to stay on until the train stopped, because it was his duty. Just before the cars started to run back to the level, he had dragged a tie across the track and held the section.

“You can ‘lay off’ until New Year’s Day,” said Mr. Holmes, after Flynn had finished his story. The engine had by this



time stopped in front of the section of the stock train. The cars were coupled on, and a few minutes later the whole train pulled into the depot at Mount Vernon.

The officer by this time had decided not to put the handcuffs on Tom.

“Officer, you can let that boy go,” gruffly ordered Mr. Holmes. “Who are you?” he asked Tom.

“I am Thomas Martin’s son,” he answered. “He used to run the engine of your special—Thirty-nine.”

“I thought I’d seen you before. Go into my car and get warm. I see you have neither coat nor overcoat on, and this is a pretty cold day. Mary, get my overcoat and put it on that boy as soon as you can and see that he gets a warm place; he is nearly frozen.” Tom was a little abashed as he walked into the magnificent private car of the general manager, escorted by that official’s granddaughter. But he was soon at ease and warmly wrapped in a big ulster.

Mr. Holmes went into the telegraph office and directed that the passenger train held at Lewistown should be switched back to its own track and started on its way.

He asked the operator at Wayville who had sent from that office the messages stopping his train, and by whose orders. No one at Wayville was in the office when the dispatches were sent, and no copy of the messages could be found. The operator had been greasing the track and had supposed Tom was similarly employed, as on account of the fog he couldn’t tell the men apart.

“That’s very strange,” muttered Mr. Holmes, as he entered his car and signaled the engineer to go ahead. He was an honest, high-principled man, quick in his methods—the first to see a wrong, the first to right it. He was stern in all his dealings with his men, but he was also just, and they all respected him. He came back to where Tom was seated and said, “Well,

my young engineer, how are you coming on, and where do you want to get off?”

“I’m all right, and I want to get off at Wayville. The mail must be at the station, and I have to take it over to town.”

“George,” said Mr. Holmes to his son, who was the trainmaster of the road. “Do you happen to remember where the president is today?”

“I think he is in New York.”

“Well, I wonder who sent these messages,” said Mr. Holmes, handing them over to his son.

Tom flushed, but said nothing.

“They were sent from Wayville, by some man who must have had the running of the trains at his fingers’ ends. A train dispatcher could have done no better. I don’t know of any man at Wayville who could do it. Do you, Tom?” asked the trainmaster.

“Well, I don’t think it was very much of a thing, only a fellow had to think pretty quick.”

“Did *you* do it?” asked the general manager suddenly.

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“You sent the messages?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you—besides being a fireman and an engineer—a train dispatcher and operator?”

“And president for an hour,” chimed in Mary.

“Yes, sir; I plead guilty to all. But I was only acting president,” said Tom.

“How *dared* you do such a thing?” asked Mr. Holmes.

“I dared do anything that would save human life. If someone had not dared, what would have happened? There was but one thing to do, and I did the best I could.”

“You are not working for the company?”

“No, sir.”



“Would you like to be?”

“Yes, sir.”

“George, see that Tom Martin is put on the rolls at fifty dollars a month, as messenger in the general manager’s office. His salary began on December first, and he reports for duty on January second.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Tom heartily.

* * * * *

When the train pulled in at Wayville, there was a large crowd at the depot, and Tom was greeted with cheers as he stepped from the private car. He immediately threw the mail pouches into the handcart that was standing near, and, without saying a word, started to fulfill his duty. Duty was always first with him.

The general manager and his guests got off the train, and, mingling with the crowd, soon learned all that Tom had done in saving the train. They also learned, as they had already guessed, that he was brave, honest, and generous.

The story of his father’s death and the struggle of Tom and his mother to save their little home, found many listeners.

In the depot, Mr. Lenox, the ticket agent, was telling Mr. Holmes the whole story over again—of the money Tom had saved to buy a present for his mother, of his last request as he started for the flying engine. Tears stood in both men’s eyes as the recital was finished.

“Saved hundreds of lives and untold thousands of dollars by his practical knowledge. A wide-awake boy—fearless and true. Risked his own life—a thorough American boy. I like him,”

said the general manager to the agent, in his crisp, short way.

Then the special train pulled out of the depot, but Tom was not forgotten by its passengers, as the sequel will show.

* * * * *

Christmas Day dawned bright and fair on all the world, yet there was a peculiar brightness and happiness around Tom Martin’s home. Tom had purchased a rocking chair for his mother with the money he had earned and was contented with the past and hopeful for the future.

At ten o’clock “Doc” Wise, the express messenger, delivered a large box to Widow Martin’s home, and Tom, with all the curiosity of a wide-awake boy, soon had it open. There was a beautiful cloak from Mrs. Holmes for his mother; there was an overcoat and suit of clothes for Tom, given by George Holmes. There was a gold watch from the general manager, bearing the inscription: “He risked his life for others. December 14, 1891.” Then there was a check to pay off the mortgage from Mr. Holmes and his guests. Last of all in a pretty frame was a little painting of the runaway engine, No. 303, on which Tom had taken his momentous ride. On the back of the picture was this inscription: “Be always brave and true, and you may indeed be president. Mary Holmes.” Of all the presents, Tom liked this one best.

In the evening came the men from the depot, bearing various gifts. It was a fit crowning of a happy day for Tom, because of the knowledge that he had the affection and respect of those who had known him always.