

The Manager Of the B. & A.

By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from Sunday.)

ously:

"How long has he been here, anyhow?"

"A month perhaps; maybe longer. Do you know him?"

"I've seen him before. A cousin of mine, John Kenyon, is warden of a prison back in Massachusetts. It runs in the blood to hold office. I visited him last winter, and while I was there a fire broke out in the hospital ward, and that old man had a hand in saving the lives of two or three of the patients. The beggars came within an ace of losing their lives. I saw afterward by the papers that the governor had pardoned him."

Ryder jumped up with sudden alacrity.

"Do you remember the convict's full name?"

Kenyon meditated a moment; then he said:

"Roger Oakley."

The editor turned to the files of the Herald.

"I'll just look back and see if it's the same name. I've probably got it here among the personals, if I can only find it. What was he imprisoned for?" he added.

He was serving a life sentence for murder, I think, John told me, but I can't be sure."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated Ryder. "Yes, Roger Oakley; the name's the same."

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken. I t a pretty good memory for names and faces. Curious, ain't it, that he could turn up here?"

Ryder smiled queerly as he dropped the Herald files back into the rack.

"His son is manager for Cornish here. He's the fellow I was telling you about."

Kenyon smiled too.

"I guess you won't have any more trouble with him. You've got him where you can hit him, and hit him hard, whenever you like."

CHAPTER IX.

It was pay day in the car shops, and Oakley posted a number of notices in conspicuous places about the works. They announced a 10 per cent reduction in the wages of the men, the cut to go into effect immediately.

By and by McClintock came in from the yards. He was hot and perspiring, and his check shirt clung moistly to his powerful shoulders.

Oakley looked up inquiringly from the letter he was writing.

"Have you seen the notices?"

"Yes," nodded.

"Heard anything from the men yet?"

"Not a word."

McClintock returned to the yards. It was the noon hour, and in the shade of one of the sheds he found a number of the hands at lunch, who lived too far from the shops to go home to dinner.

"Say, Milt," said one of these, "have you tumbled to the notices, 10 per cent all round? You'll be having to go down in your sock for coin."

"It's there, all right," cheerfully.

"I knew when Cornish came down here there would be something drop shortly. I ain't never known it to fall, the old skunk! I'll bet he ain't losing any money."

"You bet he ain't, not he," said a second man, Branyon by name, bit fully into the wedge shaped piece of pie he was holding in his hand. "If was as rich as Cornish I'm hanged if I'd be such an infernal stiff! What good is his money doing him, anyhow?"

"What does the boss say, Milt?"

"That wages will go back as soon as he can put them back."

"Yes, they will! Like fun!" said Branyon sarcastically.

"You're a lot of kickers, you are," commented McClintock good naturedly. "You don't believe for one minute, do you, that the Huckleberry or the shops ever earned a dollar?"

"You can gamble on it that they ain't ever cost Cornish a red cent," said Branyon as positively as a mouthful of pie would allow.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," said the master mechanic, walking on. "I bet he ain't out none on this," remarked Branyon cynically. "If he was he wouldn't take it so blamed easy."

The men began to straggle back from their various homes and to form in little groups about the yards and in the shops. They talked over the cut and argued the merits of the case, as men will, made their comments on Cornish, who was generally conceded to be as mean in money matters as he was fortunate, and then went back to their work when the 1 o'clock whistle blew in a state of high good humor with themselves and their critical ability.

The next day the Herald dealt with the situation at some length. The whole tone of the editorial was rancorous and bitter. It spoke of the paragon of the new management, which had been instanced by a number of recent dismissals among men who had served the road long and faithfully and who deserved other and more considerate treatment. It declared that the cut was but the beginning of the troubles in store for the hands and characterized it as an attempt on the

part of the new management to curry favor with Cornish, who was notoriously hostile to the best interests of labor. It wound up by regretting that the men were not organized, as proper organization would have enabled them to meet this move on the part of the management.

When Oakley read the obnoxious editorial his blood grew hot and his mood belligerent. It showed evident and unusual care in the preparation, and he guessed correctly that it had been written and put in type in readiness for the cut. It was a direct personal attack, too, for the expression "the new management," which was used over and over, could mean but the one thing.

Dan's first impulse was to hunt Ryder up and give him a sound thrashing, but his better sense told him that while this rational mode of expressing his indignation would have been excusable enough a few years back, when he was only a brakeman, as the manager of the Buckhorn and Antioch railroad it was necessary to pursue a more pacific policy.

He knew he could be made very unpopular if these attacks were persisted in. This he did not mind especially except as it would interfere with the carrying out of his plans and increase his difficulties. After thinking it over he decided that he would better see Ryder and have a talk with him. It would do no harm, he argued, and it might do some good, provided, of course, that he could keep his temper.

He went directly to the Herald office and found Griff in and alone. When Dan strode into the office, looking rather warm, the latter turned a trifle pale, for he had his doubts about the manager's temper and no doubts at all about his muscular development, which was imposing.

"I came to see what you meant by this, Ryder," his caller said, and he held out the paper folded to the insulting article. Ryder assumed to examine it carefully, but he knew every word there.

"Oh, this? Oh, yes! The story of the reduction in wages down at the car shops. There! You can take it from under my nose. I can see quite clearly."

"Well?"

"Well," repeated Ryder after him, with exasperating composure. "The editor was no stranger to intrusions of this sort, for his sarcasms were frequently personal. His manner varied to suit each individual case. When the wronged party stormed into the office, wrathful and loud lunged, he was generally willing to make prompt reparation, especially if the visitor had the advantage of physical preponderance on his side. When, however, the caller was uncertain and palpably in awe of him, as sometimes happened, he got no sort of satisfaction. With Oakley he pursued a middle course."

"Well?" he repeated.

"What do you mean by this?"

"I think it speaks for itself, don't you?"

"I went into this matter with you, and you know as well as I do why the men are cut. This—striking the paper contemptuously with his open hand—"is the worst sort of rubbish, but it may serve to make the men feel that they are being wronged, and it is an attack on me."

"Did you notice that? I didn't know but it was too subtle for you."

He couldn't resist the gibe at Oakley's expense.

"Disguised, of course, but intended to give the men less confidence in me. Now, I'm not going to stand any more of this sort of thing!"

He was conscious he had brought his remarks to a decidedly lame conclusion.

"And I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Oakley, I'm editor of the Herald, and I don't allow any man to dictate to me. That I shall print. That's a point I'll pass on for myself."

"You know the situation. You know that the general will dispose of his interests here unless they can be made self sustaining, and, whether you like him or not, he stands as a special providence to the town."

"I only know what you have told me," sneeringly.

Oakley bit his lips. He saw it would have been better to have left Ryder alone. He felt his own weakness and his inability to force him against his will to be fair. He gulped down his anger and chagrin.

"I don't see what you can gain by stirring up this matter."

"Perhaps you don't."

"Am I to understand you are hostile to the road?"

"If that means you, yes. You haven't helped yourself by coming here as though you could bully me into your way of thinking. I didn't get much satisfaction from my call on you. You let me know you could attend to your own affairs, and I can attend to mine just as easily. I hope you appreciate that."

Dan turned on his heel and left the office, cursing himself for his stupidity in having given the editor an opportunity to get even.

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CHAPTER X.

IN the course of the next few days Dan decided that there was no danger of trouble from the hands. Things settled back into their accustomed rut. He was only a little less popular, perhaps.

He was indebted to Clarence for the first warning he received as to what was in store for him.

It came about in this way. Clarence had retired to the yards, where, secure from observation, he was indulging in a quiet smoke, furtively keeping an eye open for McClintock, whose movements were uncertain, as he knew from sad experience.

A high board fence was in front of him, shutting off the yards from the lower end of the town. At his back was a freight car, back of that again were the interlocking tracks and beyond them a cornfield and Billup's Fork, with its inviting shade of sycamores and willows and its tempting swimming holes.

Suddenly he heard a scrambling on the opposite side of the fence, and ten brown fingers clutched the tops of the boards, then a battered straw hat came on a level with the fingers, at the same instant a bare foot and leg were thrown over the fence, and the owner of the battered straw hat swung himself into view. All this while a dog whined and yelped; then followed a vigorous scratching sound, and presently a small, dilapidated looking yellow cur squeezed itself beneath the fence. Clarence recognized the intruder. It was Branyon's boy, Augustus, commonly called "Spide," because of his exceeding slowness and the length of his legs, and his dog Pink.

As soon as Branyon's boy saw Clarence he balanced himself deftly on the top of the fence with one hand and shaded his eyes elaborately with the other. An amiable, if toothless, smile curled his lips. When he spoke it was with deep facetiousness.

"Hi, come out from behind that roll of paper!"

But Clarence said not a word. He puffed away at his cigarette, apparently oblivious of everything save the contentment it gave him, and as he puffed Spide's mouth worked and watered sympathetically. His secret admiration was tremendous. Here was Clarence in actual and undisturbed possession of a whole cigarette. He had to purchase his cigarettes in partnership with some other boy and go halves on the smoking of them. It made him feel cheap and common.

"Say, got one of them coffin tacks that ain't working?" he inquired. Clarence gazed off up the tracks, ignoring the question and the questioner. Spide's presence was balm to his soul. But as one of the office force of the Buckhorn and Antioch he felt a certain lofty reserve to be incumbent upon him. Besides, he and Spide had been engaged in a recent rivalry for Susie Poppleton's affections. It is true he had achieved a brilliant success over his rival, but that a mere schoolboy should have ventured to oppose him, a salaried man, had struck him as an unpardonable piece of impertinence for which there could be no excuse.

Spide, however, had taken the matter most philosophically. He had recognized that he could not hope to compete with a youth who possessed unlimited wealth, which he was willing to lay out on chewing gum and candy, his experience being that the sex was strictly mercenary and incapable of a disinterested love. Of course he had much admired Miss Poppleton. From the crown of her small dark head, with its tightly braided "pigtails," down to her trim little foot he had esteemed her as wholly adorable; but, after all, his affair of the heart had been an affair of the winter only. With the coming of summer he had found more serious things to think of. He was learning to swim and to chew tobacco. The mastering of these accomplishments pretty well occupied his time.

"Say," he repeated, "got another?"

Still Clarence blinked at the fierce sunlight which danced on the rails and said nothing. Spide slid skillfully down from his perch, but his manner had undergone a change.

"Who throwed that snipe away anyhow?" he asked disdainfully. Clarence turned his eyes slowly in his direction.

"Looker here. You fellows got to keep out of these yards or I'll tell McClintock. First we know some of you kids will be getting run over, and then your folks will set up a lively howl. Get on out! It ain't no place for little boys!"

He put the cigarette between his lips and took a deep and tantalizing pull at it. Spide kept to his own side of the ditch that ran between the fence and the tracks.

"Huh!" with infinite scorn. "Who's a kid? You won't be happy till I come over there and lick you!"

"First thing I know you'll be stealing scrap iron!"

"My gosh! The Huckleberry 'd have to stop running if I swiped a coupling pin!"

Clarence had recourse to the cigarette, and again Spide was consumed with torturing jealousies. "Where did you shoot that snipe anyhow?" he inquired insultingly.

Once more Clarence allowed his glance to stray off up the tracks.

"For half a cent I'd come across and do what I say?" added Spide, stooping down to roll up his trousers leg and then casting an unelastic "gallus" that cut his shoulders. This elicited a short and contemptuous grunt from Clarence. He was well pleased with himself. He felt Spide's envy. It was sweet and satisfying.

"Say!" with sudden animation. "You fellows will be going around on your uppers in a day or so. I'll bet you'd give a heap to know what I know!"

"I wouldn't give a damned cent to know all you know or ever will know!" retorted Clarence promptly.

(To be continued.)

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