The Engineer of 519

by FRANCIS LYNDE

HE was oiling around on the 519 when Althea first saw him, and he was not very pretty to look at. There is, or there may be, a sort of artistic fitness, in blue denim overclothes and a mechanic's cap, but the big-boned, thin-faced young man who was jabbing the snout of the oil-can into the vitals of the ten-wheeler had missed it. His overalls, which were as much to large circumferentially as they were lacking in length, were innocent of soap and water; his jumper was little more than a greasy rag; and to complete the motley, he was wearing a cap which was the latest wrinkle in golf headgear.

Vice-President Lockhart's private car, "Nadia," was coupled in the rear of Number Five, and at the breakfast-station stop three members of the party, Miss Lockhart, the vice-president and Mr. Bainbridge Brockton, had descended to take the fresh morning air on the platform. After a few turns up and down beside the "Nadia" Miss Althea had said: "I want to see the engine; don't you know I always want to see the engine?" And so the three of them had walked up the long platform, clear now of the scurrying throngs of breakfast seekers, to where the big "Baldwin" stood throbbing and shuddering preparatory to its plunge into the tunnel-like gateway of Gringo Canyon

This was the way Miss Lockhart came to see Orman. In the ordinary course of things he would scarcely have had a second glance of hers; but with no such intention in mind the peppery vice-president stood his friend. Major Lockhart had been known to have a flagman called down for the lack of a button on his uniform; and Orman's ill-fitting overclothes, the oil, the coal smut, and the parti-colored golf cap aroused his ire.

"Ha!" he snorted, "I wonder how long Hoskins has been putting roustabouts in charge of his first-class trains?"

There was a moment of fuse-fizzing silence in which Brockton, decently reluctant to witness the shaming of a fellow man, turned away. Miss Althea stood her ground, hoping that the engineer had not heard. But it was said of the vice-president that his rapiers were all broad-swords.

"Yes, I mean you!" he rasped, when Orman straightened up and faced him. "You are a disgrace to the service—a harlequin, sir! There is no excuse for the engineer of a passenger train masquerading as a round-house wiper. Report to Mr. Hoskins when you get in, and say to him, with my compliments, that the auditing department will approve a voucher for a box of soap and a supply of wash-buckets for the use of the company's enginemen."

"Oh, uncle!" said Althea, under her breath; and her visible distress changed the engineer's scowl of resentment into a shame-faced grin.

"I'm afraid I do look rather tough," he admitted, good-naturedly. "And there is no excuse, as you say. I'll report to Mr. Hoskins—and mention the box of soap."

Althea was watching him narrowly as he spoke, with her woman's heart full of sympathy. She was not of those who believe that all the finer feelings are monopolized by the leisure classes, and she was generously indignant.

Now, if there be women whom emotion mars—and their name is a multiple of all the others—there are a few whose charms are heightened thereby. Miss Althea was one of the few; and Brockton, who had reattached himself to the group, thought he had never seen her more entirely beautiful. Also, it disturbed him a little to reflect that the exciting cause was an upflash of womanly sympathy for an unwashed workingman. As he knew to his own discomfiture, Miss Lockhart had an exaggerated respect for men who had work to do and did it. It was clearly the moment for a diversion, and he made one.

"We are due to leave, Major," he said, consulting his watch. "Don't you think we'd best be getting back to the car?"

For the first few miles of the canyon-storming Miss Althea sat with Brockton's cousin, Alicia, behind the broad windows in the observation end of the "Nadia," watching the cliffs and peaks swing right and left with the curves and thinking pointedly of a small dilemma.

The outing trip, which was now three days old, and which was to pause indefinitely at Undercliff Inn, a Summer resort in the heart of the main range, had not been, nor did it promise to be, an unalloyed joy. While her invitation to join the party had come from her uncle in his own proper person, Althea was beginning to suspect that it had been prompted by certain match-making proclivities on the part of the vice-president's wife. Mrs. Lockhart II. was a young woman, and Bainbridge Brockton was her cousin, once removed.

Althea had known Brockton since his college days, and had liked him as much as she could like any man who was content to do nothing. Left to herself, she might have come, in time, to look with favor upon his wooing, which was as energetic as anything he ever did. But, with all its yieldings, the woman-heart has a latent quality of stubbornness; and when Miss Althea began to suspect that Mrs. Lockhart had planned things, she set her fine white teeth firmly upon a steady resolve not to be "marketed," at least, not while she was on the small match-maker's own ground.

That her fortune had anything to do with the match-making, or with Brockton's devotion, she was unwilling to believe, since Brockton had enough of his own to make him the most unconscionable of idlers. Yet she remembered, with a curious little thrill of scorn, that the fortune-hunting instinct was in the Brockton blood. Alicia, the fair-haired, serene-eyed cousin who sat within arm's reach, looking out upon this same backward-racing procession of peaks and cliffs, had once—so gossip said—broken an engagement almost between the church stens and the altar because the man had told her he had been cut out of his father's will.

Such thoughts were not altogether pleasant, and she was rather glad when Brockton flung his cigar away and came in from the platform to draw up a chair beside her.

"Enjoying the scenery by height and depth?" he said, making idle talk, as was his wont.

"Yes and no; not as much as I should if we were going toward it instead of running away from it," she rejoined.

"It is disappointing to catch fleeting glimpses of it just as it is vanishing."

The vice-president had been closeted in his state-room with Hoskins, the general manager, and the two men joined the group at the observation windows in time to hear Althea's reply.

"You may ride on the engine if you'd like to, Miss Lockhart," said the general manager. "Mr. Brockton can go with you. I'll arrange it at the next stop if you care to try it."

Althea said: "Thank you," and meant it. From childhood she had had a sort of shivering reverence for locomotives and ship engines, and for the men who made them obey. But her second thought was the recollection of a man's humiliation, and the hope that the opportunity might offer for her to blunt the sharp edge of it.

"By the way, Mr. Hoskins, who is our engineer this morning?" demanded the vice-president.

"A general utility man named Orman," was the reply, but its facetiousness did not seem to lay hold of Major Lockhart. "The regular man had a death in his family, and——"

The vice-president's smile was portentous. "Orman will have something to say to you when he reports his run," he remarked.

Althea happened to be looking at Alicia, and she surprised a little start at the mention of the substitute's name. While two rail joints could click under the wheels the slate-blue eyes were clouded and a faint flush came and went in the fair neck and cheek. Althea wondered why, but at that moment the chime of the 519 sounded for a station and she rose to go forward with Brockton and the general manager.

With the highest executive authority of the company to sanction it, the invasion of the 519's cab facilitated itself, though Orman was no more than gruffly polite to the invaders. Room was made for them on the fireman's box, Althea was told briefly how to brace herself against the side-slam of the cab in rounding the curves, and thereafter the engineer left them to their own devices.

The experience proved something less than exciting, even to a novice. The grade was very heavy, and the big engine labored up the hills and around the dodging curves rather faithfully than spectacularly.

When she had grown somewhat accustomed to the novelty, and had found the approaching scenic procession much like an inversion of the view from the "Nadia's" observation windows, Althea began to take note of her more immediate surroundings; to make mental notes, and to wonder how she might pour a little of the oil of kindliness into the broadsword slashes of the vice-president.

Despairing of finding an opening unless she could make it, she turned to Brockton to say, "I wish I could know how he does it without going crazy," meaning the engineer.

Brockton adjusted his eye-glasses and stared across at the crouching figure on the opposite box as if the subject bored him. But it was the better part of him that made him get upon his feet and offer to help her down from her perch.

"I'll put it any way you like," he answered promptly. "Suppose we say that Major Lockhart has the respect, if not exactly the warm-hearted affection, of all the men in the service, your humble servant included. And his guess hit the mark. This rig of mine is a wiper's outfit."

The 519 was picking her way judiciously around a set of complicated elbows and reversed curves at a point in the canyon where Gringo Creek runs every way save uphill, and for a minute or two the man was lost in the engineer. When he spoke again it was in gentle deprecation of the vice-president's martinetism.

"Of course, Major Lockhart was within his rights in landing on me. But some things which are quite justifiable are not always expedient. This is a rough country, with rough work to be done in it; and the men who do the work are not always mindful of dress-parade regulations."

It was at this conjuncture that Althea's preconceived ideas of a workingman's point of view went to pieces. She was modern enough to be able to set aside the conventions when the occasion demanded; and she had a true woman's disregard of social distinctions based on the lines of a man's occupation. But he could not disguise the fact that she had meant to placate Orman as she would have tried to placate John the gardener, or Thomas the coachman, if her uncle had browbeaten the one or the other. And she was finding it blankly impossible.

"You make me wish I hadn't said anything," she protested, quite humbly; and then she blushed a little in deference to a certain maidenly shame for having opened a door of familiarity which she did not know how to shut again.

But afterward she remembered that the solemn-faced young man had not taken advantage of the opened door. On the contrary, he had stopped talking when she did; and some few minutes later, when he had brought the engine to a shuddering stand at the little station of Undercliffe, he had signed to Brockton to come and take her down from the box.

"Who is Mr. Orman, Cousin Bainbridge?" was the question she asked of Brockton that evening, while they were watching the moon come up over the hunched shoulder of Gringo Mountain from the piazza of the inn.

Brockton got up and flicked the ash of his cigar

For a week after the side-tracking of the "Nadia" at Undercliffe there was no lack of diversions for the outing party, and little Mrs. Lockhart outdid herself in devising pastimes new and different. There were basket luncheons on the shrugged shoulder of Gringo Mountain; burro climbs to the top of Chingato and to the Bridal Veil Falls; and pedestrain marches up the gulches in which Alicia the languid leaned heavily upon the arm of the Reverend Percy Montgomery, a fellow guest at the inn, whom Mrs. Lockhart had attached to eke out the ill-balanced masculine side of her party.

On the eighth day the vice-president went on an inspection trip to the end of the Extension; and while Mrs. Lockhart was planning another excursion which should make Althea dependent for the day upon Mr. Bainbridge Brockton, the little station which was the railway stopping-place for the inn had its sensation made to order.

A heavy freight train had double-headed up the mountain from the west, and at the summit, fifteen hundred feet straightaway above the station of Undercliffe, but five miles distant by the windings of the grade down Dead Man's Gulch and around the shoulder of the mountain, the leading engine had been cut off to run down ahead of the train.

Three minutes later the guests at the inn turned out in a body at the bidding of demoniac whistle shrieks on the high grade. Glasses were levelled and the coming disaster foreshowed itself. The train was out of control, was running away down the mountain, and the driver of the detached engine had a lead of no more than a few hundred yards in the race for life.

The catastrophe climaxed in full view from the inn piazzas at a point where the down-mountain track curves sharply to enter the canyon proper. The engineer of the leading engine knew he could not take the curve at full speed, and at the critical moment lost his head. There was a shrill squeal of brake-shoes grinding on the tires, the flying engine buckled to a dead stop, and the two men of its crew leaped from the gangways and ran for dear life. Three seconds farther along there was a crash like the shock of an earthquake and the long train rammed the standing engine, piling up the wreckage mountain high.

Happily, there were no lives lost. The crew of

gifted, and a helpless idler from choice.

By some workings of the mysterious sixth sense, Brockton felt the comparison, and it angered him. So when Alicia said, "Who is 'our friend of the engine cab'?" he replied shortly, "It's Jack Orman," looking down upon her to note the effect. What he saw gave him a weapon which he fully meant to use if the need should arise.

Orman slept that night at the inn, and, as a matter of course, fate flung them together. The work of track-clearing was completed by nightfall, but there was picking-up enough to keep the wrecking crew on the ground for two or three days, and Orman wired in to the division station for his travelling-bag, which came down on Number Seven. Because of the travelling-bag and its transforming contents, Althea hardly knew him when he walked into the dining-room, but she gave him a friendly little nod when the waiter, at a sign from Mrs. Lockhart, seated him in the chair which would have been occupied by Alicia if she had not pleaded a headache and gone to her room.

It was a moment of surprises for Althea on more counts than one. That the vice-president, who had returned on Number Seven, should remember the young man whom he had reprimanded was not beyond belief; but that he should welcome him cordially to a seat at his own table was by way of being inexplicable. And when Mrs. Lockhart made much of him, calling him "Jack," and putting him at once upon the footing of a family friend, Althea's wonder was complete.

After dinner it was Orman, and not Brockton, who went with Althea to her accustomed corner on the electric-lighted piazza; and their talk in that first tête-à-tête was all of industry battles. But three evenings later, when the wrecking crew was finally piecing the string of "cripples" together for the run to the shops, the mile-posts of commonplace were well to the rear, and she ventured to repeat the question she had once asked of Mr. Bainbridge Brockton.

"Mr. Orman, who are you? By all the family traditions I ought to have known you long ago, but I didn't."

His smile was a slow wrinkling of the plain-song face.

"You haven't missed much. I've known your cousins and Mrs. Lockhart for a number of years; but the Major knows me only as a wheel in the railway machine."

She marked the plural, "cousins," and remembered that Alicia had been all but invisible since the day of the wreck; had avoided Orman at every turn. But she was not to be turned aside by the intrusion of the small mystery.

"Still, you are not accounted for," she persisted, half jestingly.

"Were you 'in character' that day when Uncle Jabez scolded you?"

"Yes and no. No, because he didn't recognize me in the wiper's regimentals; and yes, because I am truly a workingman, as truly as I seemed to be that day; a 'lean, unwashed artificer,' as your Cousin Bainbridge once dubbed me. But twice in my life I have played the part of Bottom, the weaver, I think."

"Is it permitted one to ask how?"

"It is permitted to you. The first time was when I was fool enough to believe that a woman loved me for myself; and the other——"

He broke off abruptly at this point, and she led him on, whether from idle curiosity or real interest, he could not tell.

"The other?" she said

"Was a time when I was tempted to forget the lesson so hardly learned."

She was silent for a full minute, and he rose, buttoning his coat.

"I must go now. MacCarthy is about ready to pull out. Shall I hunt up Mrs. Lockhart or Brockton for you?"

She shook her head and went with him to the steps, where they stood for a moment looking down upon the string of "cripples" pricked out by the moving lanterns of the trainmen. Then she gave him her hand, and her parting word was no less than friendly.

"I am sorry to have you go. You have done much for me in these three days."

He smiled down upon her quizzically.

"Is it permitted one to ask the nature of the service?"

"Yes; it is in the way of striking off shackles, and in the widening of horizons. I can't particularize; at least, not while Mr. MacCarthy waits."

"Then I shall come back; may I?"

"Whenever you please. But you mustn't neglect your work."

He laughed like a pleased boy. "How good that sounds!" he said. "My ideal woman is one who would say to a man, to the man she cared for, 'Your work is the thing; go and do it, and do it better than you have ever done it before—for my sake.'"

She smiled back at him. "That sounds very unselfish on the part of your ideal. But really, don't you know, it is the most sublimated type of feminine selfishness. It would be a true woman's triumph—to know that a man's work in the world owed something to her. Good-bye."

He ran down the steps and crossed quickly to the waiting train, throwing up his hand to her, railroad-wise, as he passed out of the hotel grounds. Fifteen minutes later they were bringing him back on an improvised stretcher, and the house physician was wiring the company's surgeon to come to Undercliffe by special train. When the string of "cripples" was started, a broken drawhead had pulled out, dropping a brakeman fairly beneath the wheels. Orman had saved the man's life at the cost of his own; at least, so ran the report which passed from lip to ear on the hotel piazzas.

It was a fortnight before they would let her go to him, and Mrs. Lockhart had talked herself to a standstill in expostulation.

"It is simply dreadful!" she declared, firing her next to the last shot. "Everybody here supposes you are Bainbridge's fiancée—I have as good as told them so—and it will make a ridiculous scandal. Why, you have known Jack Orman only a day or two at the most!"

"I know him,' he said shortly. "I'll introduce him, if you like."

She held back.

"Did you know him when Uncle—when we were at the breakfast station?"

"I didn't recognize him; nobody would in that farcical rig. But Mr. Hoskins' mention of his name gave it away."

The clamor of matter in motion isolated them, and Orman was attending strictly to business. Brockton waited for a bit of straight track, and when it came he gave Althea his hand and steadied her across the foot-plate.

"I take it you don't remember me, Orman," he said. "I'm Brockton, of the class of '98; and this is Miss Lockhart, the niece of the vice-president."

The engineer took the introduction a little sheepishly, as befitted his station, Althea thought; and she was sorry she had let Brockton make it. But since there were now two reasons for kindliness where there had been only one, she would not retreat.

Now a man who runs an engine in Gringo Canyon is happy if, by gluing his eyes to the track, he can see a scant half dozen rail-lengths ahead; to do this and to answer the curious questions of a sweet-voiced young woman who must needs stand almost directly behind him, is manifestly impossible. Orman gave it up after one or two futile attempts, and, surrendering his box to the inquisitive one, he took his place beside her on the running step.

"Now you may ask all the questions you want to," he said, after Brockton, finding himself shut out of this most convenient arrangement for two, had gone back to his place on the fireman's side.

For a dodging curve or two she clung to the window-seat arm-rest and was silent. Then she said: "I want to ask you not to care too much about what my uncle said to you a little while ago. I don't think he really meant to—to——"

The young engineer's laugh was wholly without bitterness.

"Is that what you had in mind?" he asked. And then: "You needn't have taken so much trouble. It was nothing; and, besides, I'm not quarreling with my bread and butter."

"I wish you wouldn't put it that way," she said, after another pause. Quite conscientiously she was trying to get down to his level; to the level of a man in his walk in life; and it perplexed her a little to find him so unresponsive to the effort."

over the piazza railing to gain time. He was not sure how much it would be advisable to tell her.

"He used to be a sort of fourteen-fifteen puzzle when I knew him in the university, and he seems to be keeping it up yet," he replied guardedly. "He was two years ahead of me, and in the Scientific, so I didn't see very much of him."

"Is he a—a gentleman?" she asked; and the word was no sooner spoken than she could have bitten her tongue for the base-born use of it.

"That depends somewhat on your definition. He was always messing in the manual training shops, and he made a social outcast of himself for the sake of 'poling.' It was my impression at the time that he was a poor man's son, working his way through college." So much Brockton said with a nicely calculated air of disinterest. But he had determined not to say anything of the later developments, or of his Cousin Alicia's part in them. That was Alicia's affair, to be buried or kept alive, as she saw fit.

Althea was silent for a little time, and then she said another thing for which she was instantly sorry.

"He seems somehow to be above his present station in life."

Brockton laughed easily. The danger, if any there were, was passing.

"Oh, you can't tell anything about that, you know. A man finds his level; not because he is forced to it, but because he likes it. Orman has an education which would fit him for anything in sight in the technical line; and, apparently, he chooses to wear outlandish clothes and to be a driver of locomotives."

It was not the wisest possible thing to say, since the lightest word may sometimes suffice to turn a clean-hearted woman into a militant defender of the absent.

"How can you tell?" she retorted. "Perhaps it was the best he could do; and, at all events, it is honest work. You couldn't do it, Cousin Bainbridge."

"Now, what have you two found to quarrel about?" said a voice out of the shadows behind them; and Althea left her chair and went to stand beside one of the piazza pillars. She had a discomforting conviction that Mrs. Lockhart II. was always just in the background in her capacity of match-maker.

the train engine had jumped before the crash; and the head brakeman, who stuck to his post until the box-car on which he was riding reared high in air, made a flying leap and landed in the inn trout pool. But, as we have said, the guests of the hotel had their sensation ready-made, and for that day there was no talk of time-killing excursions in the hills.

Two hours after the dust of the crash had settled, the division wrecking train was on the ground and hard at work; and after luncheon Brockton took Althea and his cousin down to join the crowd of onlookers from the hotel.

It was Althea's first sight of a trained army of track-clearers in action, and the fierce toil and wonderful method of it all thrilled her like the clash of arms. Here was a battle royal with dead weights inanimate to call out all that was fittest and most heroic in a master of men and things. Huge freight cars rose to the creaking of windlasses and were toppled with the nicest precision to right and left down the embankment. Gangs of workmen, as orderly and purposeful as well-drilled soldiers, placed the jackscrews, adjusted the lifting tackles, or stood clear at the word of command when the great hawsers were singing like violin-strings under the heart-breaking strain. Althea thought it was the finest thing she had ever seen, and said so, looking meanwhile for the master mind.

"Who is directing it all?" she asked, when Brockton had folded his top-coat to make a cushion for Alicia.

His smile was half cynical, and at the moment she could have hated him for it.

"It's our friend of the engine cab, I think. Don't you see him down under that car showing the men how to make the next hitch?"

She looked again and recognized Orman. As once before, he was a sight to grate upon the nerves of martinet majors and the wearers of purple raiment and fine linen. The grimy overclothes were wanting, but the rough tweed suit was soiled and stained and muddied, and the big, skilful hands were the hands of a blackamoor.

It did not occur to her to question how a driver of locomotives came to be the commander of this army of workmen; there was room only for wonder and admiration, and for an instant comparison between two men: one down there in the thick of it, toiling, shouting, commanding accomplishing; the other standing beside her, well groomed, handsome,

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