

The Operator's Story

DE MOLAY FOUR

By
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"Let Tracy take the key."

(Continued from last week.)

The orders buttoned in the reefers gave De Molay a free sweep to Elcho and Jack Moore and Oyster were the men to take it good and hard. More over, there was glory aboard. Pennsylvanian nobles, way up railroad men waiting to see what for motive power we had in the woolly west, how we climbed mountains and skirted canyons and crawled down 2 and 3 per cent grades. Then with Buck himself in the private car what would they let her out and award De Molay through the gorge as maybe you've seen a particularly buoyant life snake its tail out of the grass and drag it careening skyward. When they showed for Elcho at nightfall, past first and second eighty, and Bucks named the mileage, the Pennsylvanians refused to believe it for the hour's run. But, fast as they had sped along the iron trail, Martin Duffy's work had sped ahead of them, and this order was waiting:

Telegraphic Train Order No. 79, C and E Third No. 80, Rat River, C and E Special 326, Elcho. Third No. 80, Logans 210, and Special 326 will meet at Rock Point. J. M. C. D.

With this meeting point made it would be pretty much over in the dispatchers' office. Martin Duffy pushed his sawtooth hair back for the last time, and leaving young Giddings to get the last O. K.'s and the last complete on his trick, got out of the chair.

It had been a tremendous day for Giddings, a tremendous day. Thirty-two specials on the dispatchers, and Giddings copying for the chief. He sat down after Duffy, filled with a riotous importance because it was now in effect all up to Giddings personally—at least until Barnes Tracy should presently kick him out of the seat of honor for the night trick. Mr. Giddings sat down and waited for the signature of the orders.

Very soon Pat Francis dropped off De Molay Four, slowing at Elcho, ran straight to the operator for his order, signed it, and at once Order 79 was throbbing back to young Giddings at Medicine Bend. It was precisely 7:54 p. m. when Giddings gave back the

complete, and at 7:55 Elcho reported Special 326 "out," all just like clock-work. What a head Martin Duffy has, thought young Giddings, and, behold, all the complicated everlasting head-work of the trick and the day and of the West End and its honor was now up to the signature of third eighty at Rat River. Just third eighty's signature for the Rock Point meeting, and the biggest job ever tackled by a single track road in America, Giddings thought, was done, and well done.

So the ambitious Giddings by means of a pocket mirror inspected a threatening pimple on the end of his chubby

nose, patting the glass skillfully as Barnes Tracy couldn't see it even if he did interrupt his eruption, and waited for Bob Duffy, the Rat River night-man, to come back at him with third eighty's signature. Under Giddings' eye as he sat ticked, Martin Duffy's chronometer, the watch that split the seconds and chimed the quarters and stopped and started so impossibly and ran to a second a month—the watch that Bucks, who never did things by halves, had given little Martin Duffy with the order that made him chief. It lay at Giddings' fingers, and the minute hand wiped from the enameled dial 7 o'clock fifty-five, fifty-six, seven, eight—nine. Young Giddings turned to his order book and inspected his entries like a methodical bookkeeper, and Martin Duffy's chronometer chimed the fourth quarter, 8 o'clock. One entry he had still to make. Book in hand, he called Rat River.

"Get third eighty's signature to Order 79 and hurry them out," he tapped impatiently at Bob Duffy.

There was a wait. Giddings lighted his pipe the way Callahan always lighted his pipe—putting out his lips to catch all the perfume and blowing the first cloud away wearily, as Callahan always did wearily. Then he twirled the match meditatively and listened and got suddenly this from Bob Duffy, at Rat River:

"I forgot Order 79," came Bob Duffy's message. "I let third eighty go without it. They left here at 7:50—fifty something, Giddings never heard fifty what. The match went into the ink pipe into the water pail, and Giddings, before Bob Duffy finished, like a drowning man, was calling Elcho with the life and death, the 19 call."

"Hold Special 326!" he cried over the wire the instant Elcho replied.

But Elcho, steadily, answered this: "Special—326—left—here—on—order—79—at—7:55 p. m."

"Martin Duffy bent before the message; young Giddings, who had been whispering to Tracy, dropped on a stool and covered his face.

"Don't cry, Giddings." It was Duffy who spoke, dry and parched his voice. "It's nothing you—could hear." He looked around and saw Tracy at his elbow. "Barnes," he said, but he tried twice before his voice would carry. "Barnes—they will meet in the Cinnamon cut. Giddings told you? Bob forgot—forgot my order. Run, Giddings, for Benedict Morgan and Doubleday and Carhart—quick!"

Giddings ran, the Rat River call echoing again down the hall behind him. Rat River was closest to Rock Point—would get the first news of the wreck, and Martin Duffy was calling his recreant brother at the River, but the River was silent.

Doubleday and the company surgeon, Dr. Carhart, rushed into the room almost together. Then came with a storm the wrecking boss, Benedict Morgan. It was only an evil hour that brought Benedict Morgan into the dispatcher's office. Stopped and silent, Martin Duffy, holding the chair, was calling Rat River. Carhart watched him just a moment, then he took Barnes Tracy aside and whispered, and, going back, bent over Duffy. The chief pulled himself up.

"Let Tracy take the key," repeated the doctor. "Get away from the table a minute, Martin. It may not be as bad as you think."

Duffy, looking into the surgeon's face, put his hand on his arm. "It's the De Molay train, the Special 326, with Bucks' car, double headed. Oh, my God, I can't stop them. Doctor, they will meet!"

Carhart unfastened the fingers on his arm. "Come away a minute. Let Tracy have the key," he urged. "A head ender, eh?" croaked Benedict Morgan from the counter, and with a frightful oath. "A head ender?"

"Shut up, you brute!" hissed Carhart, Duffy's hands were creeping queerly up the sides of his head.

"Sure," growled Benedict Morgan loweringly. "Sure. Shut up. Of course. Shut up."

Carhart was a quick man. He started for the wrecker, but Duffy, springing, stopped him. "For God's sake, keep cool, everybody!" he exclaimed piteously. There was no one else to talk, to give the orders. Bucks and Callahan both on the special, maybe past order giving now. Only Martin Duffy to take the double lead and the double shame. He stared, dazed again into the faces around as he held to the fiery surgeon. "Morgan," he added steadily, looking at the surly wrecker, "get up your crew, quick. Doubleday, make up all the coaches in the yard for an ambulance train. Get every doctor in town to go with you. Tracy, clear the line!"

The master mechanic and Benedict Morgan clattered downstairs. Carhart, running to the telephone, told central to summon every medical man in the Bend and hurried out. Before he had covered a block, roundhouse callers, like flaws of wind before a storm, were scurrying the streets and from the tower of the fire house sounded the harsh clang of the emergency gong for the wreckers.

Caught where they could be caught, out of saloons, beds, poker joints, Salvation barracks, churches, the men of the wrecking crew ran down the silent streets, waking now fast into life. Congregations were dispersed, hymns cut, prayers forgotten, bars deserted, bells unpealed, barracks raided at that call, the emergency gong call, fell as a fire bell for the Mountain division wrecking gang.

While the yard crews shot up and down the spurs, switching coaches into the relief train, Benedict Morgan, with solid volleys of orders, was organizing his men and filling them at the lunch counters with huge schooners of coffee. Carhart pushed again through the jam of men and up to the dispatchers' office. Before and behind him crowded the local physicians with instrument bags and bandages. The ominous baggage deposited on the office floor, they sat down about the room or hovered around Carhart, asking for details. Doubleday, tall and grim, came over from the roundhouse. Benedict Morgan stamped up from the yard. The Mountain division was ready.

All three dispatchers were in the room. John Mallers, the day man, stood near Tracy, who had relieved Giddings. The line was clear for the relief run. Elcho had been notified of the impending disaster, and at Tracy's elbow sat the chief, looking fixedly at the key, taking the bob of the sander with his eye. A dozen men in the room were talking, but they spoke as men who, speaking, wait on the life of a fuse. Duffy, with suspense deepening into frenzy, pushed Tracy's hand from the key and, sliding into the chair, began once more to call his brother at Rat River.

"R. T. — R. T. — R. T. — R. T. —" clicked the River call. "R. T. — R. T. — R. T. — Bob — Bob — Bob," spelled the sender. "Answer me, answer, answer. R. T. — R. T. — R. T. — R. T. —" And Barnes Tracy edged away and leaned back to where the shadow hid his face, and John Mallers, turning

from the pleading of the current, stared gloomily out of the window across the yard, shimmering under the double relay of arc lights, and young Giddings, who couldn't stand it—just couldn't stand it—bending on his stool, shook with gulping sobs.

The others knew nothing of the heart-breaking in the little clicks. But they all knew the track—knew where the trains would meet; knew they could not by any possibility see each other till they whirled together on the curve of the Cinnamon cut or on the trestle west of it, and they waited only for the breaking of the suspense that settled heavily over them.

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty minutes went, with Martin Duffy at intervals vainly calling. Then, as the crack opens on the field of ice, as the snow breaks in the mountain slide, as the sea gives up at last its dead, the sander spoke—Rat River made the dispatcher's call. And Martin Duffy, staring at the copper coil, pushed himself up in his chair like a man that chokes, caught smothering at his neck, and slipped wriggling to the floor.

Carhart caught him up, but Duffy's eyes stared meaningless past him. Rat River was calling him, but Martin Duffy was past the taking. Like the man next at the gun, Barnes Tracy sprang into the chair with the I. I. D. The surgeon, Giddings helping, dragged Duffy to the lounge in Callahan's room—his chief was more to Giddings than the fate of Special 326. But soon confused voices began to ring from where men were crowding around the dispatchers' table. They echoed in to where the doctors worked over the ravaged chief. And young Giddings, helping, began, too, to hear strange things from the other room.

"The moon!"

"The moon!"

"The moon!"

"What?"

Barnes Tracy was trying to make himself heard:

"The moon! Moon! That's English, ain't it? Moon!"

"Who's talking at Rat River?" demanded Benedict Morgan hoarsely.

"Chick Neale, conductor of third eighty. Their train is back at Rat River. God bless that man," stammered Barnes Tracy, wiping his forehead feverishly. "He's an old operator. He says Bob Duffy is missing. Tell Martin, quick, there isn't any wreck—quick!"

"What does Neale say?" cried Doubleday, with an explosion.

Tracy thought he had told them, but he hadn't. "He says his engineer, Abe Monsoon, was scared by the moon rising just as they cleared Kennel Butte," explained Tracy unsteadily. "He took it for the headlight of Special 326 and jumped from his engine. The fireman backed the train to Rat River. See?"

While Tracy talked, Mallers at the key was getting it all. "Look here," he exclaimed, "did you ever hear of such a mixup in your life? The head brakeman of the freight was in the cab, Neale says. He and the engineer were talking about the last conclave

of the key against the world! Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

"Then there isn't to be any wreck?" ventured a shy little lady homeopathic physician, who had been crimped into the fray to help out the mangled Knights and was modestly waiting her opportunity.

"Not tonight," announced Tracy, with

the dignity of a man temporarily in charge of the entire division.

A yell went out of the room like a tidal wave. Doubleday and Benedict Morgan had not spoken to each other since the night of the roundhouse fire—that was two years. They turned wonder struck to each other. Doubleday impulsively put out his hand and, before he could pull it in again, the wrecking boss grabbed it like a pay check. Carhart, who was catching the news from the rattle of young Giddings, went wild trying to repeat it to Duffy without losing it in his throat. The chief was opening his eyes, trying to understand.

Medical men of violently differing schools—allopaths, homeopaths, osteopaths, eclectic—made their peace with a whoop. A redheaded druggist, who had rung himself in for a free ride to the horror, threw his emergency packets into the middle of the floor. The doctors caught the impulse. Instrument cases were laid with solemn earnestness on the heap, and a dozen crazy men, joining hands around the pyrexed saws and gauze, struck up "Old Hundred."

Engineer Monsoon was a new man, who had been over the division only twice before in his life, both times in daylight. For that emergency Abe Monsoon was the man of all others, because it takes more than an ordinary moon to scare a thoroughbred West End engineer. But Monsoon and his moon headlight had between them saved De Molay Four from the scrap.

The relief arrangements and Monsoon's headlight were the fun of it, but there was more. Martin Duffy lay eleven weeks with brain fever before they could say moon again to him. Bob had skipped into the mountains in the very hour that he had disgraced himself. He has never shown up at Medicine Bend, but Martin still chief, and they think more of him on the Mountain district than ever.

Bucks got the whole thing when De Molay Four reached Rat River that night. Bucks and Callahan and Moore and Oyster and Pat Francis got it and smiled grimly. Nobody else on Special 326 even dreamed of leaving a bone that Sunday night in the Cinnamon cut. All the rest of the evening Bucks smiled just the same at the Knights and the Knighthesses, and they thought him, for a bachelor, wonderfully entertaining.

A month later, when the old boys, more or less ragged, came straggling back from Frisco, Bucks' crowd stayed over a train, and he told his Pennsylvanian cronies what they had slipped through in that delay at Rock Point.

"Just luck," laughed one of the eastern superintendents, who wore on his watch chain an enormous Greek cross with "Our Trust Is In God" engraved on it. "Just luck," he laughed. "Wasn't it?"

"Maybe," murmured Bucks, looking through the Wickup window at the Teton peaks. "That is, you might call it that back on the Penn. Out here I guess they'd call it, Just God."

THE END.

BROWER

R. T. Smith and son, Osmon, are still working on the railroad at Bridal Veil.

Miss Lura and Irena Knapp have returned from hopping and report a very enjoyable time.

W. W. Sharp is clearing land and making improvements on his place.

Born—to Mr. and Mrs. N. E. Turner, of Palmer, a son.

Miss Laura Burkholder expects to attend Gresham school this winter.

Brower school commenced last Monday. Miss Luther of Palmer is teacher.

D. O'Keefe made a business trip to Portland last week.

A telephone meeting was held at Brower last Saturday and four new phones were added to the line, making a total of nineteen.

D. Smith and wife, of Bridal Veil, visited George Smith on Sunday.

F. H. Rix was on the sick list last week.

G. Gill left Monday for his place in Washington to take care of his wheat.

Miss Laura Burkholder spent Tuesday and Wednesday visiting her sister, Mrs. Kaer, at Bridal Veil.

LUSTEDS.

L. A. Davies and wife are at home on their farm for a few days.

John Sletet is going to southern Oregon for a few days' outing this week.

The recent rain has been a great benefit to the potato crop. The late ones promise a good crop this year.

Melvin Long, who is assistant foreman for the Western Union Telegraph Company, was visiting his mother, Mrs. R. Neibauer, a few days recently, returning Tuesday evening to Pendleton.

Miss Ivy Blackburn returned last week from the hopfields, she being on the sick list.

School opened Monday with Miss Glough as teacher.

W. Carpenter came in contact with what he supposed to be a panther on the R. R. Carlson farm near Pleasant Home last Sunday.

The boys all took a smoke on Lyman Davies Monday night.

Frank Linneman, who is working for the Portland Seed Co., and Miss Belle Cumming were recently spending a few days with the George Moulton family.

Mrs. Joseph Manary entertained a few friends at a quilting last Thursday.



Monsoon reversed and jumped off after him.

train, wondering where they were going to meet it, when the brakeman spied the moon coming up around Kennel Butte curve. "There's the 326 special!" he yelled and lighted out the gangway. Monsoon reversed and jumped off after him so quick he knocked the fireman over in the coal. When the fireman got up—he hadn't heard a word of it all—he couldn't see anything ahead but the moon. So he stops the train and backs up for the two guys. When Neale and he picked them up they ran right back to Rat River for orders. They never got to Rock Point at all—why, they never got two miles east of Rat River."

"And where's Special 326?" cried Doubleday.

"At Rock Point, you loco. She must be there and waiting yet for third eighty. The stopping of the freight gave her plenty of time to make the meeting point, don't you see, and there she is, sweating, yet. Neale is an old operator. By heaven, give me a man of the key against the world! Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

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