The Switchman's Story

SHOCKLEY

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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"He's rather a bad lot, I guess," wrote Bucks to Callahan, "but I am satisfied of one thing—you can't run that yard with a Sunday school superintendent. He [illegible]ake you any trouble unless he [illegible] drinking. If that happens, don't [illegible]y words with him." Bucks un[illegible]d three times. "Simply crawl [illegible] cyclone cellar and wire me. [illegible] you eighteen loads of steel to[illegible]d six cars of ties. Blair re[illegible]ction 10 ready for track layers [illegible]ar's outfit moving into the Pal[illegible]nyon. Push the stuff to the [illegible]

[illegible] getting dark, and Callahan sat [illegible] part of the Benkleton depot he [illegible] the office, pulling at a muddy [illegible]t went unaccountably hot in [illegible] flashes. He took the pipe from [illegible]th, leaving his foot on the ta[illegible] looked at the bowl resentfully, [illegible]ng again if there could be pow[illegible] in that infernal tobacco of Rube[illegible]. The mouthpiece he eyed as a [illegible]sperate man might ponder a final [illegible]hift.

The pipe had originally come from [illegible]od's country, with a beautiful am[illegible] mouthpiece and a beautiful bowl, [illegible] it was a present from his sister [illegible] been bought at a dry goods [illegible] Once when thinking—or, if you [illegible] when not thinking—Callahan [illegible] a lighted match to the beau[illegible]ber mouthpiece instead of to [illegible]cco, and in the fire that ensued [illegible] hard work to save the depot. [illegible]an never wrote his sister about [illegible] thought only about buying [illegible] dry goods stores and about [illegible]hen they exploded, a thousand [illegible]rom the man who sold them. [illegible] was plenty in that to think [illegible] What he now brought his teeth [illegible]tly together on was part of [illegible]ber tube of a dismantled ato[illegible] in happier post-Christmas days [illegible] fixture. But Callahan had [illegible]ed the use of bay rum after [illegible] His razor had gone to the [illegible]nd on Sunday morning he mere[illegible] a pair of scissors over the high [illegible]or Callahan was railroading—[illegible] the front.

[illegible]losing the mouthpiece he would [illegible]n completely in the air but for [illegible]ris Oxen. Chris was Callahan's [illegible] gang. His name was once [illegible] but that wasn't in Benkleton. [illegible] was hurried when he made up [illegible]oll and put it Oxen, as being [illegible] United States. I say United [illegible] because Callahan said United [illegible] preference to English.

[illegible]had been in America only three [illegible]ut he had been in Russia 300 [illegible] that time had learned many [illegible] getting something out of noth[illegible]hen the red haired dispatcher, [illegible] explosion, cast away with bit[illegible] the remains of the pipe, Chris [illegible] it up and by judicious action [illegible] atomizer figured out a new [illegible]ece no worse than the original, [illegible]le the second, like the first, was [illegible]er, it was not of the explosive [illegible]

[illegible] presented the remodeled root [illegible]han as a surprise. Callahan, in [illegible] of gratitude, promoted him on [illegible]. He made little Chris fore[illegible] It didn't bring any advance in [illegible] there was the honor. To be [illegible] was an honor, and, as little [illegible]as the only man on the yard [illegible] became by promotion foreman [illegible]elf.

[illegible]allahan sat thinking of the in[illegible] of Chris, reflecting on the sting [illegible]truction tobacco and studying [illegible]cks' letter.

[illegible]ard was his worry—not that it [illegible]eb of a yard; just a dozen runs [illegible]ead to take the construction ma[illegible]r Callahan to distribute fast as [illegible]e was pushed westward. The [illegible] at the Benkleton yard came [illegible]ithout, not from within.

[illegible]oad was being pushed into the [illegible] country, and it was all easy till [illegible]ck Benkleton. Benkleton was [illegible] hard knot on the Yellow Grass [illegible] squally, sandy cattle town. [illegible]were some bad men in Benkle[illegible]hey didn't bother often. But [illegible]ere some men in Benkleton who [illegible] they were bad, and these were [illegible] of constant bedevilment to the [illegible] men.

[illegible]west of the yard, where the riv[illegible]ks sheer into the bottoms, there [illegible] and still hives a colony of rail[illegible]laborers, Russians. They have [illegible] there, burrowed into the face [illegible] bench like sand swallows and [illegible] caves out for themselves, and [illegible]e of the place is Little Russia. [illegible] was in the troublous days when [illegible] cowboys, homesick for evil, would [illegible] around Little Russia with rope [illegible] and scare the pioneers cross [illegible] The cattle fellows spent the en[illegible]inter months, all sand and sun[illegible] putting up schemes to worry [illegible]han and the Little Russians. The [illegible]quarters for this restless gang [illegible] at Pat Barlie's place, across from [illegible] postoffice. It was there that the [illegible]boys loved to congregate. To Cal[illegible] Pat Barlie's place was a wasps' [illegible] but to Chris it was a den of [illegible] and of a dreader sort than [illegible] wolves, for Barlie's pack nev[illegible]

The east and west section men could run away from them on hand cars. It was the yardmen who caught it, and it grew so bad they couldn't keep a switchman. About 10 o'clock at night, after No. 23 had pulled in and they were distributing a train load of bridge timber, a switchman's lantern would go up in signal, when—plat!—a bullet would knock the lamp clean out of his hand and the nerve clean out of his head. Handling a light in the Benkleton yard was like smoking a celluloid pipe—you never could tell when it would go off.

Cowboys shot away the lamps faster than requisitions could be drawn for new ones. They shot the signals off the switches and the lights from the tops of moving trains. Whenever a brakeman showed a flicker two cowboys stood waiting to snuff it. If they missed the lamp, they winged the brakeman. It compelled Bucks after awhile to run trains through Benkleton without showing ever a light. This, though tough, could be managed, but to shunt flats in the yard at night with no light or to get a switchman willing to play young Tell to Peg Leg Reynolds' William for any length of time was impossible. At last Bucks, on whom the worry reflected at headquarters, swore he would fight them with fire, and he sent Shockley. Callahan still sat speculating on what he would be up against when Shockley arrived.

The impression Bucks' letter gave him, knowing Bucks to be frugal of words, was that Shockley would rise up with cartridges in his ears and bowie knives dangling from his watch chain. To live in fear of the cowboys was one thing, but to live in fear of the cowboys on the one hand and in terror of a yardmaster on the other seemed, all things considered, confusing, particularly if the new ally got to drinking and his fire scattered. Just then train 59 whistled. Pat Barlie's corner began to sputter its salute. Callahan shifted around behind his bombproof, lit his powderhorn and, looking down the line, wondered whether Shockley might be on that train.

It was not till the next night, though, that a tall, thinnish chap, without visible reasons for alighting, got off 59 and walked tentatively down the platform. At the ticket office he asked for the assistant superintendent.

"Out there on the platform talking to the conductor."

The thin fellow emerged and headed for Callahan. Callahan noticed only his light, springy amble and his hatchet face.

"Mr. Callahan?"

"Yes."

"Bucks sent me up to take the yard."

"What's your name?"

"Shockley."

"Step upstairs. I'll be up in a minute."

Shockley walked back into the depot, but he left the copper haired assistant superintendent uncertain as to whether it was really over, whether Shockley had actually arrived or not. As Callahan studied the claimant's inoffensive appearance walking away he rather thought it couldn't be over or that Bucks was mistaken. But Bucks never made a mistake.

Next morning at 7 the new yardmaster took hold. Callahan had intimated that the night air in the yard, it being low land, was miasmatic and that Shockley had maybe better try for awhile to do his switching in the daytime. Just before the appointed hour in the morning the assistant had looked out on his unlucky yard. He thought to himself that if that yard didn't drive a man to drink nothing ever would. Piled shanty high with a bewildering array of material, it was enough to take the heart out of a Denver switching crew.

While he stood at the window he saw their plug switch engine that had been kicked out of every other yard on the system wheeze out of the roundhouse, saw the new yardmaster flirt his hand at the engineer and swing up on the footboard, but the swing—it made Callahan's heart warm to him. Not the lubberly jump of the hoboes that had worried the life out of him all summer, even when the cattlemen didn't bother. It was the swing of the sailor into the shrouds, of the Cossack into the saddle, of the yacht into the wind. It was like falling down or falling up or falling on—the grace of a mastery of gravitation—that was Shockley's swing on the footboard of the yard engine as it shot snorting past him.

"He's all right," muttered Callahan. It was enough.

A man who flipped a tender like that was not like to go very wrong even in that chaos of rails and ties and stringers and coal.

"Now," continued Callahan to himself, timidly hopeful, "if the cuss only doesn't get to drinking!" He watched apprehensively, dreading the first time he should see him entering Pat Barlie's place, but Shockley didn't appear to know Pat had a place. The cowboys, too, watched him, waiting for his lamp to gleam at night down in the yard, but their patience was strained for a long time. Shockley got all his work done by daylight.

To the surprise of Callahan, and probably on the principle of the watched pot, the whole winter went without a brush between Shockley and the cowboys. Even Peg Leg Reynolds let him alone. "He's the lucklest fellow on earth," remarked Callahan one day at McCloud in reply to a question from Bucks about Shockley. "There hasn't a shot been fired at him all winter."

"He wasn't always lucky," commented Bucks, signing a batch of letters.

"He came from Chicago," Bucks went on after a silence. "He was switching there on the Q at the time of the stockyards riots. Shockley used to drink like a pirate. I never knew just the right of it. I understood it was in a brawl. Anyway, he killed a man there—shot him and had to get away in a hurry. I was trainmaster. Shockley was a striker, but I'd always found him decent, and when his wife came to me about it I helped her out a little. She's dead since. His record isn't just right back there yet. There's something about the shooting hanging over him. I never set eyes on the fellow again till he struck me for a job at McCloud; then I sent him up to you. He claimed he'd quit drinking. Guess he had. Long as he's behaving himself I believe in giving him a chance, h'm?"

It really wasn't any longer a case of giving him a chance; rather of whether they could get on without him. When the Colorado Pacific began racing us into Denver that summer it began to crowd even Shockley to keep the yard clean. He saw he would have to have help.

"Chris, what do they give you for tinkering up the ties?" asked Shockley one day.

"Dollar an' a half."

"Why don't you take hold of switching with me and get $3?"

Chris was thunderstruck. First he said Callahan wouldn't let him, but Shockley "guessed yes." Then Chris figured. To save the last of the hundred dollars necessary to get the woman and the babies over—it could be done in three months instead of six if only Callahan would listen. But when Shockley talked Callahan always listened, and when he asked for a new switchman he got him. And Chris got his $3, to him a sum unspeakable. By the time the woman and the children arrived in the fall Chris would have died for Shockley.

The fall that saw the woman and the stunted subjects of the czar stowed away under the bench in Little Russia brought also the cowboys down from Montana to bait the Russians.

One stormy night, when Chris thought it was perfectly safe to venture up to Rubedo's after groceries, the cowboys caught him and dragged him over to Pat Barlie's.

It was 7 when they caught him and by 9 they had put him through every pace that civilization could suggest. Peg Leg Reynolds, as always, master of ceremonies, then ordered him tied to the stove. When it was done the cowboys got into a big circle for a dance. The fur on Chris's coat had already begun to sizzle, when the front door opened. Shockley walked in.

Straight, in his ambling, hurried way he walked past the deserted bar through the ring of cowboys at the rear to Chris frying against the stove and began cutting him loose. Through every knot that his knife slit he sent a very low and very bad word, and no sooner had he freed Chris than he jerked him by the collar, as if quarreling with him, toward the back door, which was handy, and before the cowboys got wind he had shoved him through it.

"Hold on there!" cried Peg Leg Reynolds when it was just too late. Chris was out of it, and Shockley turned alone.

"All right, partner; what is it?" he asked amiably.

"You've got a ripping nerve."

"I know it."

"What's your name?"

"Shockley."

"Can you dance?"

"No."

It was Peg Leg's opportunity. He drew his gun. "I reckon maybe you can. Try it," he added, pointing the suggestion with the pistol. Shockley looked foolish. He didn't begin tripping soon enough and a bullet from the cowboy's gun splintered the basswood at his feet. Shockley attempted a shuffle. To any one who didn't know him it looked funny. But Peg Leg was a rough dancing master and before he said "Enough" an ordinary man would have dropped exhausted. Shockley, breathing a good bit quicker, only steadied himself against the bar.

"Take off your hat before gentlemen," cried the cowboy. Shockley hesitated, but he did pull off his cap.

"That's more like it. What's your name?"

"Shockley."

"Shockley?" echoed Reynolds with a burst of range amenities. "Well, Shockley, you can't help your name. Drink for once in your life with a man of breeding—my name's Reynolds. Pat, set out the good bottle—this guy pays," exclaimed Peg Leg, wheeling to the bar.

"What'll it be?" asked Pat Barlie of Shockley, as he deftly slid a row of glasses in front of the men of breeding.

"Ginger ale for me," suggested Shockley mildly. The cowboys put up a single yell. Ginger ale! It was too funny.

Reynolds, choking with contempt, pointed to the yardmaster's glass. "Fill it with whisky!" he shouted. "Fill it, Pat!" he repeated, as Shockley leaned undecidedly against the bar. The yardmaster held out the glass and the barkeeper began to pour. Shockley looked at the liquor a moment, then he looked at Reynolds, who fronted him with gun in one hand and red water in the other.

"Drink!"

Shockley paused, looked again at the whisky and drew the glass toward him with the curving hand of a drinker.

"You want me to drink this?" he half laughed, turning on his baiter.

"I didn't say so, did I? I said drink!" roared Peg Leg.

Everybody looked at Shockley. He stood fingering the glass quietly. Somehow everybody, drunk or sober, looked at Shockley. He glanced around at the crowd. Other guns were creeping from their holsters. He pushed the glass back, smiling.

"I don't drink whisky, partner," said Shockly gently.

"You drink that whisky or I'll put a little hole into you!"

Shockley reached good naturedly for the glass, threw the liquor on the floor and set it back on the bar.

"Go on!" said Shockley. It confused Reynolds.

"A man that'll waste good whisky oughtn't t' live anyhow," he muttered, fingering his revolver nervously. "You've spoiled my aim. Throw up your hat," he yelled. "I'll put a hole through that to begin with."

Instead Shockley put his cap back on his head.

"Put a hole through it there," said he. Reynolds set down his glass, and Shockley waited. It was the cowboy who hesitated.

"Where's your nerve?" asked the railroad man. The gun covered him with a flash and a roar. Reynolds, whatever his faults, was a shot. His bullet cut cleanly through the crown, and the powder almost burned Shockley's face. The switchman recovered himself instantly and, taking off his cap, laughed as he examined the hole.

"Done with me?" he asked evenly, cap in hand.

Peg Leg drained his glass before he spoke. "Get out!" he snapped. The switchman started on the word for the front door. When he opened it everybody laughed but Shockley.

Maybe an hour later Reynolds was sitting back of the stove in a card game when a voice spoke at his ear. "Get up!" Reynolds looked around into a pistol. Behind it stood Shockley, pleasant. "Get up!" he repeated. Nobody had seen him come in, but there he was and with an absolutely infantile gun, a mere baby gun, in the yellow light, but it shone like bright silver.

Reynolds with visible embarrassment stood up.

"Throw your cannon into the stove, Reynolds; you won't need it," suggested Shockley. Reynolds looked around. There appeared to be no hopeful alternative. The drop looked very cold. Not a cowboy interposed. Under convoy Reynolds stumped over to the stove and threw in his gun, but the grace of the doing was bad.

Peg Leg danced.

"Get up there on the bar and dance. Hustle!" urged Shockley. They had to help the confused cowboy up, and when he stood, shamefaced, looking down on the scene of his constant triumphs and did a painful single foot, marking time with his peg, the cowboys, who had stood their own share of his bullying, roared. Shockley didn't roar; only stood with busy eyes where he could cover any man on demand, not forgetting even Pat Barlie.

Peg Leg, who had danced so many in his day, danced, and his roasting gun sputtered an accompaniment from the stove; but as Shockley, who stood in front of it, paid no attention to the fusillade of bullets good form prevented others from dodging. "That'll do; get down. Come here, Chris," called Shockley. Chris Oxen, greatly disturbed, issued from an obscure corner.

"Get down on your knees!" exclaimed the yardmaster, jerking Reynolds with a chilly twist in front of the frightened Russian. "Get on your knees, right where I threw your whisky." And Shockley, crowding Reynolds down to his humiliation, dropped for the first time into range civilities himself, and the shame and the abasement of it were very great.

"Boys," said the yardmaster, with one restless eye on Reynolds and one on everybody else, as he pointed at Chris, "this man's coat was burnt up. He's a poor devil, and his money comes hard. Chip in for a new coat. I've nothing against any man that don't want to give, but Reynolds must pass the hat. Take mine, you coyote."

Nearly everybody contributed as Reynolds went round. Shockley made no comments. "Count it," he continued when the fallen monarch had finished, and when the tale was made Shockley told Pat Barlie to put in as much more as the cap held, and he did so.

"There, Chris; go home. I don't like you," added Shockley insolently, turning on Reynolds. "You don't know what fun is. This town won't hold you and me after tonight. You can take it or you can leave it, but the first time I ever put eyes on you again one of us will cash in."

He backed directly toward the front door and out.

Peg Leg Reynolds took only the night to decide; next day he hit the trail. The nervy yardmaster he might have wiped out if he had stayed, but the disgrace of kneeling before the dog of a Russian was something never to be wiped out in the annals of Benkleton. Peg Leg moved on, and thereafter cowboys took occasion to stop Shockley on the street and jolly him on the way he did the one legged bully, and the lights were shot no more.

The railroad men swore by the new yardmaster; the Russians took their cigarettes from their mouths and touched their caps when Shockley passed; Callahan blessed his name, but little Chris worshiped him.

One day Alfabet Smith dropped off at Benkleton from Omaha headquarters. Alfabet was the only species of lizard on the payroll. He was the west end spotter. "Who is that slim fellow?" he asked of Callahan as Shockley flew by on the pilot board of an engine.

"That's Shockley."

"Oh, that's Shockley, is it?"

But he could say little things in a way to make a man prick hot all over.

"Yes, that's Shockley. Why?" asked Callahan, with a dash of acid.

"Nothing, only he's a valuable man. He's wanted, Shockley is," smiled Alfabet Smith, but his smile would freeze tears.

Callahan took it up short. "Look here, Alfabet. Keep off Shockley."

"Why?"

"Why? Because you and I will touch, head on, if you don't."

Smith said nothing. He was used to that sort. The next time Bucks was up his assistant told him of the incident.

"If he bothers Shockley," Bucks said, "we'll get his scalp, that's all. He'd better look after his conductors and leave our men alone."

"I notice Shockley isn't keeping his frogs blocked," continued Bucks, reverting to other matters. "That won't do. I want every frog in the yard blocked, and kept blocked, and tell him I said so."

But the frog blocking was not what worried Shockley. His push was to keep the yard clean, for the month of December brought more stuff twice over than was ever poured into the front end yard before. Chris, though, had developed into a great switchman, and the two never let the work get ahead.

So it came that Little Russia honored Chris and his big pay check above most men. Shockley stood first in Little Russia, then the czar, then Chris, then Callahan. Queen Victoria and Bismarck might have admirers, but they were not in it under the bench.

When the Russian holidays came down below, Chris concluded that the celebration would be merely hollow without Shockley, for was not the very existence of Little Russia due to him? All the growth, all the prosperity—what was it due to? Protection. What was the protection? Shockley. There were brakemen who argued that protection came from the tariff, but they never made any converts in Little Russia, where the inhabitants could be induced to vote for president only on the assurance that Shockley was running.

"Well, what's the racket anyhow, Chris?" demanded Shockley lazily after Cross Eyes, trying to get rid of the invitation to the festivities, had sputtered switch English five minutes at him.

"Ve got Chrismus by us," explained Chris desperately.

"Christmas," repeated Shockley grimly. "Christmas. Why, man, Christmas don't come nowhere on earth in January. You want to wind up your calendar. Where'd you get them shoes?"

"Dollar sefenty-vife."

"Where?"

"Rubedo."

"And don't you know a switchman oughtn't to put his feet in flatboats? Don't you know some day you'll get your foot stuck in a tongue or a guard? Then where'll you be, Dutch, with a string of flats rolling down on you, eh?"

However, Chris stuck for his request. He wouldn't take no for an answer. Next day he tired Shockley out.

"Well, for God's sake let up, Chris," said the yardmaster at last. "I'll come down awhile after 23 comes in. Get back early after supper, and we'll make up 55 and let the rest go."

It was a pretty night; pretty enough over the yard for anybody's Christmas, Julian or Gregorian—no snow, but a moon, and a full one, rising early over the Arikaree bluffs and a frost that bit and sparkled and the north wind asleep in the sand hills.

Shockley after supper, snug in a pea jacket and a storm cap, rode with the switch engine down from the roundhouse. Chris, in his astrakhan reefer and turban, walking over from the dugout in Rubedo's new shoes, flipped the footboard at the stockyard with almost the roll of Shockley himself.

Happily for Christmas in Little Russia 23 pulled in on time, but it was long and heavy that night. It brought coal and ties and the stuff for the Fort Rawlins depot and a batch of bridge steel they had been waiting two weeks for, mostly Cherry Creek stuff, eleven cars of it.

The minute the tired engine was cut off the long train up ran the little switch engine and snapped at the headless monster like a coyote.

Out came the coal with a clatter, out came the depot stuff with a sheet of flame through the goat's flues, shot here, shot there, shot yonder, flying down this spur and down that and the other, like stones from a catapult, and the tough connected, smut faced, blear eyed yard engine coughed and snorted and spit a shower of sparks and soot and cinders up into the Christmas air. She darted and dodged and jerked and backed up and down and across the lead and never for a fraction of a second took her eye off Shockley's lamp—shivering and clanging and bucking with steam and bell and air, but always with one smoky eye on Shockley's lamp, until 23 was wrecked clean to the caboose, and the switch engine shot down the main line with the battered way car in her claws like a hawk with a prairie dog.

Then there was only the westbound freight, 55, to make up with the Fort Rawlins stuff and the Cherry Creek steel, which was "rush," and a few cars of ties flung on behind on general principles. It was quick work now—sorting and moving the bridge steel—half an hour for an hour's work, with the north wind waking at the clatter and sweeping a bank of cloud and sand across the valley. Shockley and Chris and the goat crew put at it like black ants. There was releasing and setting and kicking and splitting, and once in awhile a flying switch dead against the rubrics, and at last the whole train of steel was in line, clean as the links of a sprocket and ready to run in on the house track for the caboose.

For that run Chris set the east house track switch, crossed the track and swung a great circle with his lamp for the back. To get over to the switch again he started to recross the track. In the dark his ankle turned on a lump of coal. He recovered lightly, but the misstep sent his other foot wide, and with a bit of a jolt Rubedo's new shoe slipped into the frog.

Up the track he heard a roll of stormy coughs from the engine gathering push to shove the string of flats down. They were coming toward him, over the spot where he stood, on his signal, and he quietly tried to loosen his heel.

The engine's drivers let go, and she roared a steaming oath, and Chris could hear it, but he was glad, for his heel would not work quietly out of the frog; it stuck. Then the engineer, unruffled, pulled at his sand lever, and his engine snorted again, and her driver tires bit, and slowly she sent the long train of steel down on Chris' switch. He heard the frosty flanges grinding on the face of the rails as he tried to loosen his foot.

Coolly first like a confident man in a quicksand, soon with alarm running into fright; but there was time enough. The head car was four or five lengths above the switch and coming very, very slowly, heavylike and squeaking stiffly under its load, yet coming, and he wrenched harder, but his foot stuck. Then he yelled for Shockley. Shockley had gone over to open the caboose switch. Shockley couldn't hear, and he knew it, and he yelled again.

The sweat broke over him as he turned and twisted. The grip of the frog seemed to stifle him. Half the time was gone. The near truck wheels screeched two car lengths away, and the switchman played his last card. Time and time again Shockley had told him what to do if that moment came in the night—had told him to throw his lamp in the air like a rocket. But Chris had forgotten all that till the flat dropped heavily on the tongue in front of him. Then he threw his lamp like a rocket high into the night.

No help came. He raised his arms frantically above his head, and his cries cut the wind. Desperate at last, he threw himself flat, to lie outside the rail to save all but a foot, but the frog held him and crying horribly he struggled back to his feet, only to sink again half crazy to the ground. As his senses left him he was hardly aware of a stinging pain in his foot, of a wrench at his leg, an instant arm around his neck and his yardmaster's voice in his ear.

"Jump!" screamed Shockley.

Chris scrambled frantically on the deadly rails, unable to jump, felt himself picked from the ground, heard a choke in the throat at his ear, and he was flung like a drawbar through the dark. Shockley had passed a knife blade from vamp to sole, slit the Russian's clumsy shoe, jerked his foot from it and thrown him bodily into the clear.

Chris staggered panting to his feet. Already the steel was moving slowly over the switch. He heard the sullen pounding of the trucks on the contact. A lantern, burning yet, lay on its side near the stand. It was Shockley's lamp. Chris looked wildly around for his yardmaster, called out, called Shockley's name, listened. No scream, no groan, no cry, no answer, no sound, but just the steady pounding of the wheels over the contact. The little switchman screamed again in a frenzy and, turning, raced stumbling up the track to the cab. He swung into it and by signs made the engineer shut off. He tried to talk and only stammered a lingo of switch pidgin and the name of Shockley. They couldn't understand it all, but they shut off with frightened and sallow, threw open the roundhouse door and, grabbing their lanterns, ran back. The fireman, on his knees, held his lamp out under the flat that spanned the contact. He drew, shrinking, back and, rising, started on the run for the depot to rouse Callahan.

It was Callahan who pulled the pin a moment later, Chris shivering like a rabbit at his side. It was Callahan who gave the slow pull ahead order that cut the train in two at the frog and Callahan who stepped, wavering, from the gap that opened behind the receding flat—back from something between the rails—back to put his hands blindly out for the target rod and un-

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