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By VAUGHAN KESTER

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(Continued from 1st week)
 "We'll do twice that presently." The old convict looked relieved. They were running now with a strip of forest on one side of the track and cultivated fields on the other, but with each rod they covered they were edging in nearer the flames. At Parker's Run the road crossed a little stream which doubled back in the direction of Buckhorn Junction. There was nothing after that to stay the progress of the fire, and the rest of their way lay through the blazing pine woods.

Just before they reached the ten mile fill they came to the strip of burned timber that had sent Baker back to Buckhorn earlier in the day. Here and there a tree was still blazing, but for the most part the fire had spent its strength. As they swung past Parker's Run a little farther on Dan saw the freight, or, rather, what was left of it, on the siding. It had been cutting out four flat cars loaded with ties, and he understood the difficulty at a glance. On the main track a brick and stone culvert spanned the run, but the siding crossed it on a flimsy wooden bridge. This bridge had probably been burning as the freight backed in for the flat cars, and when it attempted to pull out the weakened structure had collapsed and the engine had gone through into the cut. It rested on its forward end, jammed between the steep banks, with its big drivers in the air. Of the cars there remained only the trucks and ironwork. Near by a tool shed had formerly stood, but that was gone too. The wheels and gearing of a hand car in the midst of a heap of ashes marked the spot.

Dan turned to his father. "Are you all right, daddy?" he asked. "Yes, Dannie."

"Mind your footing. It will be pretty shaky back there." They were still in the burned district, where a change in the wind that afternoon had driven the fire back on itself. It had made a clean sweep of everything inflammable. Luckily the road had been freshly ballasted, and the track was in fair condition to resist the flames. But an occasional tumbled, and from these the rushing train thrashed showers of sparks.

Dan kept his eyes fastened on the rails, which showed plainly in the jerky glare of the headlight. It was well to be careful while care was possible. By and by he would have to throw aside all caution and trust to chance. Now he increased his speed, and the insistent thud of the wheels drowned every other sound, even the faroff roar of the flames. At his back at intervals a ruddy glow shot upward into the night when Roger Oakley threw open the furnace door to pass in coal. Save for this it was still quite dark in the cab, where Dan sat with his hand on the throttle lever and watched the yellow streak that ran along the rails in advance of the engine. Suddenly the wall of light ahead brightened visibly and its glare filled the cab. They were nearing the fire.

Dan jammed the little window at his elbow open and put out his head. A hot blast roared past him, and the heat of the fire was in his face. He drew the window shut. It was light as day in the cab now.

He leaned across the boiler's end and, with a hand to his lips, called to his father. "Are you all right?"

The old man drew himself erect and crept nearer. "What's that you say, Dannie?" he asked. His face was black with coal dust and grime.

"Are you all right? Can you bear the heat?"

"I am doing very nicely, but this ain't a patch on what it's going to be."

"Yes, it will be much worse, though this is bad enough."

"But we can stand it. We must think of those poor people at Antioch."

"We'll stick to the engine as long as the engine sticks to the rails," said Dan grimly. "Hain't you better come into the cab with me? You'll be frightfully exposed when we get into the thick of it."

"Not yet, Dannie. I'll give you steam, and you drive her as hard as you can."

He turned away, shovel in hand. Then, all in a second, and they were in the burning woods, rushing beneath trees that were blasting to their very summits. The track seemed to shake and tremble in the fierce light and fiercer heat. Burning leaves and branches were caught up to be whirled in fiery eddies back down the rails as the train tore along, for Dan was hitting her up.

Tongues of fire struck across at the two men. Smoke and fine white ashes filled their mouths and nostrils. Their bodies seemed to bake. They had been streaming wet with perspiration a moment before.

Off in the forest it was possible to see for miles. Every tree and bush stood forth distinct and separate. Roger Oakley put down his shovel for an instant to fill a bucket with water from the tank on the tender. He plunged his head and arms in it and splashed the rest over his clothes. Dan

turned to him for the last time. "It isn't far now," he panted. "Just around the next curve and we'll see the town if it's still there off in the valley."

The old convict did not catch more than the half of what he said, but he smiled and nodded his head.

As they swung around the curve a dead sycamore which the fire had girdled at the base crashed across the track. The engine plunged into its top, rolled it over once and tossed it aside.

There was the smashing of glass and the ripping of leather as the sycamore's limbs raked the cab, and Roger Oakley uttered a hoarse cry—a cry Dan did not hear, but he turned, spitting dust and cinders from his lips, and saw the old convict still standing, shovel in hand, in the narrow gangway that separated the engine and tender.

He had set the whistle shrieking, and it cut high above the roar of the flames, for off in the distance under a canopy of smoke he saw the lights of Antioch shining among the trees.

Two minutes later and they were running smoothly through the yards, with the brakes on and the hiss of es-



Dan turned, spitting dust and cinders from his lips.

caping steam. As they slowed up beside the depot Dan sank down on the seat in the cab limp and exhausted. He was vaguely conscious that the platform was crowded with people and that they were yelling at him excitedly and waving their hats, but he heard their cries only indifferently well. His ears were dead to everything except the noise of his engine, which still echoed in his tired brain.

He staggered to his feet and was about to descend from the cab when he saw that his father was lying face down on the iron shelf between the engine and tender. He stooped and raised him gently in his arms.

The old convict opened his eyes and looked up into his face, his lips parted as if he were about to speak, but no sound came from them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONSTANCE EMORY and her mother, waiting quietly in their home, heard the cheers when the noise from Dan's shrieking engine reached the crowd of desperate men on the square. They presently they heard the rattle and clash of the fire engines as they were dragged through the street and were aware that the relief train had arrived, but it was not until the doctor came in some time long after midnight that they knew who had been the savior of the town.

"It's all over, dear. The fire is under control," he said cheerfully, addressing his wife. "I guess we can go to bed now and feel pretty sure we won't be burned out before morning."

Constance put down the book she had been trying to read and rose tiredly and stiffly from her chair beside the table.

"Then the train did come, after all?" she said.

"Yes, but not a moment too soon. I tell you we can't be grateful enough. I've been with Oakley and his father. That's what kept me," he explained.

"Oakley?" Constance cried in amazement. "You don't mean—"

"Yes. Didn't you know that it was Oakley and his father who brought the relief train? The old man is dead. He was killed on the way. It's a miracle that either of them got through alive. Hain't you heard?"

Constance put out her hands blindly, for a sudden mist had come before her eyes.

"Father, you don't mean that Mr. Oakley has returned to Antioch—that he is here now?"

"Yes, it seems no one else would

come. Oakley was in Chicago when he first heard of the fire and started immediately for Buckhorn, where he found the relief train. Oddly enough, he found his father there too."

"Then there was something to the old man after all," said Mrs. Emory, whose sympathies were as generous as they were easily aroused.

"A good deal, I should say. He must have known that he was coming back to arrest and almost certain conviction."

Constance's glance searched her father's face. She wanted to hear more of Oakley. Her heart was hungering for news of this man who had risked his life to save them. All her lingering tenderness, the unwilling growth of many days, was sweeping away the barriers of her pride. "Mr. Oakley was not hurt?" she questioned breathlessly, pale to the lips.

"He is pretty badly shaken up, and no wonder, but he will be all right in the morning."

"Where is he now?" she asked. Her father turned to her. "Oakley— You look tired out, Constance. Do go to bed. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"Where is he now, papa?" she questioned, going to his side and clasping her hands about his arm.

"Down at the shop. They carried his father there from the train."

"Why didn't you have them bring him here?" said Mrs. Emory quickly. "After this I won't listen to a word against either of them. I would like to show the town just how we feel in the matter."

"I suggested it, but Oakley wouldn't hear to it. But don't worry about the town. It's gone wild. You should have seen the crowd on the platform when it saw Oakley in the engine cab. It went stark mad."

Again Constance's eyes swam with tears. The strike, the murder of Ryder, the fire, had each seemed in turn a part of the tragedy of her life at Antioch, but Oakley's return was wholly glorious.

Her father added, "I shall see Oakley in the morning and learn if we can be of any service to him."

A little later, when Constance went to her own room, she drew forward a chair and seated herself by the window. Across the town, on the edge of the "flats," she saw dimly the long, dark outline of the railroad shop, with its single tall chimney. She thought of Oakley as alone there keeping watch at the side of the grim old murderer who had so splendidly redeemed himself by this last sacrifice.

Great clouds of black smoke were still rolling over the town, and the woods were still blazing fiercely in the distance. Beyond her window she heard the call of frightened birds as they fluttered to and fro in the dull red light, and farther off, in the north end, the muffled throbbing of the fire engines.

If she had had any doubts as to her feeling for Oakley these doubts were now a thing of the past. She knew that she loved him. She had been petty and vain. She had put the small things of life against the great, and this was her punishment. She tried to comfort herself with the thought that she should see him in the morning.

Then she could tell him all. But what could she tell him? The time had gone by when she could tell him anything.

It was almost morning when she undressed and threw herself down on her bed. She was disconsolate and miserable, and the future seemed quite barren of hope or happiness. Love had come to her, and she had not known its presence. Yes, she would tell Oakley that she had been little and narrow and utterly unworthy. He had cared for her, and perhaps he would understand. She fell asleep thinking this and did not waken until her mother called her for breakfast.

"I am waiting for your father. He has gone down to see Mr. Oakley," Mrs. Emory said when she entered the dining room. Constance glanced at the table.

"Is he going to bring Mr. Oakley back with him?" she asked nervously.

"He expected to. I declare, Constance, you look worn out. Didn't you sleep well?"

"No, not very. I wonder if they are coming?"

"You might go look," said her mother. And Constance hurried into the parlor. She was just in time to see her father enter the gate. He was alone. Constance flew to the front door and threw it open.

"He wouldn't come?" she cried breathlessly.

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, a train was made up early this morning, and he has returned to Buckhorn— Why, what's the matter, Constance?"

For Constance, with a little gasp of dismay, had slipped down into a chair, with her hands before her face.

"What is it, dear?" he questioned anxiously. But she gave him no answer. She was crying softly, unrestrainedly. It was all over. Oakley was gone, and with him went her only hope of happiness. Yet more keen than her sense of pain and personal loss was her regret that he would never understand that she respected and admired him as he deserved.

"I am sorry, Constance, but I didn't know that you especially wanted to see him," said the doctor awkwardly, but with a dawning comprehension of what it all meant. She made no answer.

"What is it, dear?" he repeated. "Oh, nothing. I wanted to tell him about something, that is all. It doesn't matter now." She glanced up into his face with a sudden doubt. "You didn't see him, you are quite sure he went

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