

Coogan's Last Run~



By
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(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

COOGAN didn't come to the Transcontinental a fullblown engineer from some other road, as a good many of the boys have, though that's nothing against them; Coogan was a product of the Hill Division pure and simple. He began as a kid almost before the steel was spiked home, and certainly before the right of way was shaken down enough to begin to look like business. He started at the bottom, and he went up. Call boy, sweeper, wiper, fireman—one after the other. Promotion came fast in the early days, for, the Rockies once bridged, business came fast, too; and Coogan had his engine at twenty-one, and at twenty-four he was pulling the Imperial Limited.

"Good goods," said Regan. "That's what he is. The best ever."

Nobody questioned that, not only because there was no one on the division who could put anything over Coogan in a cab, but also because, and perhaps even more pertinent a reason, every one liked Coogan—some of them did more than that.

Straight as a string, clean as a whistle was Coogan, six feet in his stockings, with a body that

played up to every inch of his height, black hair, jet black, black eyes that laughed with you, never at you, a smile and a cheery nod always—the kind of a man that makes you feel every time you see him that the world isn't such an eternal, dismal grind, after all. That was Chick Coogan—all except his heart. Coogan had a heart like a woman's, and a hard-luck story from a bo stealing a ride, a railroad man, or any one else for that matter, never failed to make him poorer by a generous percentage of what happened to be in his pocket at the time. Who wouldn't like him! Queer how things happen.

It was the day Coogan got married that Regan gave him No. 505 and the Limited run as a sort of wedding present, and that night Big Cloud turned itself completely inside out doing honor and justice to the occasion.

Big Cloud has had other celebrations, before and since, but none quite so unanimous as that one. Restraint never did run an overwhelmingly strong favorite with the town, but that night it was hung up higher than the arms on the telegraph poles. Men that the community used to hide behind and push forward as hostages of

righteousness, when it was on its good behavior and wanted to put on a front, cut loose and outshone the best—or the worst, if you like that better—of the crowd that never made any bones about being on the other side of the fence.

They burned red flares, very many of them, that Carleton neglected to imagine had any connection with the storekeeper and the supply account; they committed indiscretions, mostly of a liquid nature, that any one but the trainmaster, who was temporarily blind in both eyes, could have seen; and, as a result, the Hill Division the next day was an eminently paralytic and feeble affair. This is a very general description of the event, because sometimes it is not wise to particularize; this is a case in point.

Coogan's send-off was a send-off no other man, be he king, prince, president, shogun, or high-mucky-muck of whatever degree, could have got—except Coogan. Coogan got it because he was Coogan, just Coogan—and the night was a night to wonder at.

Regan summarized it the next evening over the usual game of pedro with Carleton, upstairs over the station in the super's office. "Apart from Coogan and me," said the master mechanic in a voice that was still suspiciously husky, "apart from Coogan and me and *mabbe* the minister—" The rest was a wave of his hand. Regan could wave his hand with a wealth of eloquence that was astounding.

"Quite so," agreed Carleton, with a grin. "Too bad to drag *them* into it, though. Both 'peds' to me, Tommy. It's a good thing for the discipline of the division that bigamy is against the law, what?"

"They'll be talking of it," said Regan reminiscently, "when you and me are on the scrap heap, Carleton."

"I guess that's right," admitted the super. "Play on, Tommy."

But it wasn't. They talked of Coogan's wedding only for about a year—no, they don't talk about it now.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE THEY PLAYED CARDS.

THE Imperial Limited was the star run on the division—Regan gave Coogan the thirty-third degree when he gave him that—that and No. 505, which was the last word in machine design. And Coogan took them, took them and the schedule rights that pertained thereto, which were a clear and a clean-swept track, and day after day, uphill and down, No. 1 or No. 2, as the case might be, pulled into division on the dot.

Coogan's stock soared—if that were possible; but not Coogan. The youngest engineer on the road and top of them all, would have been excuse enough for him to show his oats, and, within decent limits, no one would have thought the worse of him for it—Coogan never turned a hair. He was still the friend of the bo and the man in trouble, still the Coogan that had been a wiper in the roundhouse; and yet, perhaps, not quite the same, for two new loves had come into his life—his love for Annie Coogan and his love, the love of the master craftsman, for No. 505. In the little house at home he talked to Annie of the big mountain racer, and Annie, being an engineer's daughter, as well as an engineer's wife, listened with understanding and a smile, and in the smile was pride and love; in the cab Coogan talked of Annie, always Annie, and one day he told his fireman a secret that made big Jim Dahleen grin sheepishly and stick out a grimy paw.

The days and the weeks and the months went by, and then there came a morning when a sober, serious-faced group of men stood gathered in the super's office, as No. 2's whistle, in from the eastbound run, sounded down the gorge. They looked at Regan. Slowly the master mechanic turned, went out of the room, and down the stairs to the platform, as No. 505 shot round the bend and rolled into the station. For a moment Regan stood irresolute, then he started for the front end. He went no farther than the colonist coach, that was coupled behind the mail car. Here he stopped, made a step forward, changed his mind, climbed over the colonist's platform, dropped down on the other side of the track, and began to walk toward the roundhouse—they changed engines at Big Cloud, and No. 505, already uncoupled, was scooting up for the spur to back down for the

table.

The soles of Regan's boots seemed like plates of lead as he went along, and he mopped his forehead nervously.

There was a general air of desertion about the roundhouse. The 'table was set and ready for No. 505, but there wasn't a soul in sight. Regan nodded to himself in sympathetic understanding. He crossed the turntable, walked around the half circle, and entered the roundhouse through the engine doors by the far pit—the one next to that which belonged to No. 505. Here, just inside, he waited, as the big mogul came slowly down the track, took the 'table with a slight jolt, and stopped.

He saw Coogan, big, brawny, swing out of the cab like an athlete, and then he heard the engineer speak to his fireman: "Looks like a graveyard around here, Tim. Wonder where the boys are. I won't wait to swing the 'table; they'll be around in a minute, I guess. I want to get up to the little woman."

"All right," Dahleen answered. "Leave her to me; I'll run her in. Good luck to you, Chick."

Coogan was starting across the yards with a stride that was almost a run. Regan opened his mouth to shout—and swallowed a lump in his throat instead. Twice he made as though to follow the engineer, and twice something stronger than himself held him back; and then, as though he had been a thief, the master mechanic stole out from behind the doors, went back across the tracks, climbed the stairs to Carleton's room with lagging steps, and entered.

The rest were still there: Carleton in his swivel chair; Harvey, the division engineer; Spence, the chief dispatcher, and Riley, the trainmaster. Regan shook his head and dropped into a seat. "I couldn't," he said in a husky voice. "For the life of me, I *couldn't*," he repeated, and swept out his arms.

A bitter exclamation sprang from Carleton's lips, lips that were not often profane, and his teeth snapped through the amber of his brier. The others just looked out of the window.

MacVicar, a spare man, took the Limited out that night, and it was three days before Coogan reported again. Maybe it was the fit of the black store clothes, and perhaps the coat didn't hang just right, but as he entered the roundhouse he didn't

look as straight as he used to look and there was a queer, inward slope to his shoulders and he walked like a man who didn't see anything. The springy swing through the gangway was gone. He climbed to the cab as an old man climbs—painfully. The boys hung back, and didn't say anything, just swore under their breaths with full hearts, as men do. There wasn't anything *to* say—nothing that would do any good.

Coogan took No. 505 and the Limited out that night, took it out the night after and the nights that followed, only he didn't talk any more, and the slope of the shoulders got a little more pronounced, a little more noticeable, a little beyond the cut of any coat. And on the afternoons of the lay-overs at Big Cloud, Coogan walked out behind the town to where on the slope of the butte were two fresh mounds—one larger than the other. That was all.

Regan, short, paunchy, big-hearted Regan, tackled Jim Dahleen, Coogan's fireman. "What's he say on the run, Jim, h'm?"

"He ain't talkative," Dahleen answered shortly.

"What the devil!" growled the master mechanic deep in his throat to conceal his emotion. "'Tain't doing him any good going up there afternoons. Heaven knows it's natural enough, but 'tain't doing him any good, not a mite—nor them, either, as far as I can see, h'm? You got to *make* him talk, Jim. Wake him up."

"Why don't *you* talk to him?" demanded the fireman.

"H'm, yes. So I will. I sure will," Regan answered.

And he meant to, meant to honestly. But somehow Coogan's eyes and Coogan's face said "no" to him as they did to every other man, and as the days passed, almost a month of them, Regan shook his head, perplexed and troubled, for he was fond of Coogan.

Then, one night, it happened.

Regan and Carleton were alone over their pedro at headquarters, except for Spence, the dispatcher, in the next room. It was getting close on to eleven-thirty. The Imperial Limited, westbound, with Coogan in the cab, had pulled out on time an hour and a half before. The game was lagging, and, as usual, the conversation had got around to the engineer, introduced, as it

always was, by the master mechanic. "I sure don't know what to do for the boy," he said. "I'd like to do something. Talking don't amount to anything, does it, h'm?—even if you *can* talk. I can't talk to him, what?"

"A man's got to work a thing like that out for himself, Tommy," Carleton answered, "and it takes time. That's the only thing that will ever help him—time. I know you're pretty fond of Coogan, even more than the rest of us, and that's saying a good deal, but you're thinking too much about it yourself."

Regan shook his head. "I can't help it, Carleton. It's got *me*. Time, and that sort of thing, may be all right, but it ain't very promising when a man broods the way he does. I ain't superstitious or anything like that, but I've a feeling I can't just explain that somehow something's going to break. Kind of premonition. Ever have anything like that? It gets on your mind and you can't shake it off. It's on me tonight worse than it's ever been."

"Nonsense," Carleton laughed. "Premonitions are out of date, because they've been traced back to their origin. Out here, I should say it was a case of too much of Dutchy's lunch-counter pie. You ought to diet, anyway, Tommy; you're getting too fat. Hand over that fine-cut of yours, I——"

He stopped as a sharp cry came from the dispatcher's room, followed by an instant's silence; then the crash of a chair sounded as, hastily pushed back, it fell to the floor. Quick steps echoed across the room, and the next moment Spence, with a white face and holding a sheet of tissue in his hand, burst in upon them.

CHAPTER III.

IN DAHLEEN'S POCKET.

CARLETON sprang to his feet.

"What's the matter, Spence?" he demanded sharply.

"No. 1," the dispatcher jerked out, and extended the sheet on which he had scribbled the message as it came in off the sounder.

Carleton snatched the paper, and Regan, leaping from his chair, looked over his shoulder. They read:

No. 1, engine 505, jumped track east of switchback No. 2 in Devil's Slide. Report three known to be killed, others missing. Engineer

Coogan and Fireman Dahleen both hurt.

Carleton was ever the man of action, and his voice rang hard as chilled steel. "Clear the line, Spence. Get your relief and wrecker out at once. Wire Dreamer Butte for their wrecker as well, so they can work from both ends. Now, then, Tommy—what's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

Regan was leaning over the back of his chair, his face strained, his arm outstretched, finger pointing to the wall. "I knew it," he muttered hoarsely. "I knew it. That's what it is."

Carleton's eyes traveled from the master mechanic to the wall and back again in amazed bewilderment; then he shook Regan by the shoulder. "That's what what is?" he questioned brusquely. "Are you mad, man?"

"The date," whispered Regan, still pointing to where a large single-day calendar with big figures on it hung behind the super's desk. "It's the twenty-eighth."

"I don't know what you mean, Tommy." Carleton's voice was quiet, restrained.

"Mean!" Regan burst out, with a hard laugh. "I don't mean anything, do I? 'Tain't anything to do with it; it's just coincidence mabbe, and mabbe it's not. *It's a year ago tonight Coogan was married.*"

For a moment Carleton did not speak; like Regan, he stared at the wall. "You think that——"

"No, I don't"—Regan caught him up roughly—"I don't think anything at all. I only know it's queer, ghastly queer."

Carleton nodded his head slowly. Steps were coming up the stairs. The voice of Flannagan, the wrecking boss, reached them; other voices, excited and loud, joined in. He slapped the master mechanic on the back. "I don't wonder it caught you, Tommy," he said. "It's almost creepy. But there's no time for that now. Come on."

Regan laughed, the same hard laugh, as he followed the chief into the dispatcher's room. "East of No. 2 switchback, eh?" he said. "If there's any choice for hellishness anywhere on that cursed stretch of track, that's it. By Heaven, it's come, and it's come good and hard—good and hard."

It had. It was a bad mess, a nasty mess; but, like everything else, it might have been worse. Instead of plunging to the right and dropping to

the cañon eighteen hundred feet below, No. 505 chose the inward side and rammed her nose into the gray mass of rock that made the mountain wall. The wreckers from Dreamer Butte and the wreckers from Big Cloud tell of it to this day. For twenty-four hours they worked, and then they dropped, and fresh men took their places.

There was no room to work—just the narrow ledge of the right of way on a circular sweep with the jutting cliff of Old Piebald Mountain sticking in between, hiding one of the gangs from the other, and around which the big wrecking cranes groped dangling arms and chains like fishers angling for a bite. It was a mauled and tangled snarl, and the worst of it went over the cañon's edge in pieces, as axes, sledges, wedges, bars, and cranes ripped and tore their way to the heart of it. And as they worked, those hard-faced, grimy, sweating men of the wrecking crews, they wondered—wondered that any one had come out of it alive.

Back at headquarters in Big Cloud they wondered at it, too—and they wondered also at the cause. Every one that by any possible chance could throw any light upon it went on the carpet in the super's office. Everybody testified—everybody except Dahleen, the fireman, and Coogan, the engineer; and they didn't testify because they couldn't. Coogan was in the hospital with queer, inconsequent words upon his tongue and a welt across his forehead that had laid bare the bone from eye to the hair line of his skull; and Dahleen was there also, not so bad, just generally jellied up, but still too bad to talk. And the testimony was of little use.

The tender of switchback No. 1 reported that the Limited had passed him at perhaps a little greater speed than usual—which was the speed of a man's walk, for trains crawl down the Devil's Slide with fear and caution—but not fast enough to cause him to think anything about it.

Hardy, the conductor, testified. Hardy said it was the "air;" that the train began to slide faster and faster after the first switchback was passed, and that her speed kept on increasing up to the moment that the crash came. He figured that it couldn't be anything else—just the "air"—it wouldn't work, and the control of the train was lost. That was all he knew.

And while Regan swore and fumed,

Carleton's face set grim and hard, and he waited for Dahleen.

It was a week before the fireman faced Carleton across the super's desk, but when that time came Carleton opened on him straight from the shoulder, not even a word of sympathy, not so much as "glad to see you're out again," just straight to the point, hard and quick.

"Dahleen," he snapped, "I want to know what happened in the cab that night, and I want a straight story. No other kind of talking will do you any good."

Dahleen's face, white with the pallor of his illness, flushed suddenly red. "You're jumping a man pretty hard, aren't you, Mr. Carleton?" he said resentfully.

"Maybe I've reason to," replied Carleton. "Well, I'm waiting for that story."

"There is no story that I know of," said Dahleen evenly. "After we passed switchback No. 1 we lost control of the train—the 'air' wouldn't work."

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

"You don't seem to," retorted Dahleen, with a set jaw.

"What did you do to stop her?"

"What I could," said Dahleen, with terse finality.

Carleton sprang to his feet, and his fist crashed down upon the desk. "You are lying!" he thundered. "That wreck and the lives that are lost are at your door, and if I could prove it!" He shook his fist at the fireman. "As it is, I can only fire you for violation of the rules. I thought at first it was Coogan and that he'd gone off his head a bit, and you are cur enough to let the blame go there if you could, to let me and every other man think so!"

Dahleen's fists clenched, and he took a step forward. "That's enough!" he cried hoarsely. "Enough from you or any other man!"

Carleton rounded on him more furiously than before. "I've given you a chance to tell a straight story, and you wouldn't. Heaven knows what you did that night. I believe you were fighting drunk. I believe that gash in Coogan's head wasn't from the wreck. If I knew I'd fix you." He wrenched open a drawer of his desk, whipped out a metal whisky flask, and shook it before Dahleen's eyes. "*When you were picked up this was in the pocket*

of your jumper!"

The color fled from Dahleen's face, leaving it whiter than when he had entered the room. He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. All the bluster, all the fight was gone. He stared mutely, a startled, frightened look in his eyes, at the damning evidence in the super's hand.

"Forgotten about it, had you?" Carleton flung out grimly. "Well, have you anything to say?"

Dahleen shook his head.

"Ain't anything *to* say, is there?" His voice was low, with just a hint of the former defiance. "It's mine, but you can't *prove* anything. You can't prove I drank it. D'ye think I'd be fool enough to do anything but keep my mouth shut?"

"No; I can *prove* it." Carleton's voice was deadly cold. "You're out! I'll give you twelve hours to get out of the mountains. The boys, for Coogan's sake alone, if for no other, would tear you to pieces if they knew the story. No one knows it yet but the man who found this in your pocket and myself. I'm not going to tell you again what I think of you—*get out!*"

Dahleen, without a word, swung slowly on his heel and started for the door.

"Wait!" said Carleton suddenly. "Here's a pass East for you. I don't want your blood on my hands, as I would have if Coogan's friends, and that's every last soul out here, got hold of you. You've got twelve hours—after that they'll know—to set Coogan straight."

Dahleen hesitated, came back, took the slip of paper with a mirthless, half-choked laugh, turned again, and the door closed behind him.

Dahleen was out.

CHAPTER IV.

AS STRONG MEN TALK.

CARLETON kept his word—twelve hours—and then from the division rose a cry like the cry of savage beasts; but Regan was like a madman. "Curse him!" he said bitterly, breaking into a seething torrent of words. "What did you let him go for, Carleton? You'd no business to. You should have held him until Coogan could talk, and then we'd have had him."

"Tommy"—Carleton laid his hand quietly on the master mechanic's shoulder—"we're too

young out in this country for much law. I don't think Coogan knows or ever will know again what happened in the cab that night. The doctors don't seem quite able to call the turn on him themselves, so they've said to you and said to me. But whether he does or not, it doesn't make any difference so far as Dahleen goes. It would have been murder to keep him here. And if Coogan ever can talk he'll never put a mate in bad no matter what the consequences to himself. There's nothing against Dahleen except that he had liquor in his possession while on duty. That's what I fired him for; that's the only story that's gone out of this office. You and I and the rest are free to put the construction on it that suits us best, and there it ends. If I was wrong to let him go, I was wrong. I did what I thought was right; that's all I can ever do."

"Mabbe," growled Regan, "mabbe; but, hang him, he *ought* to be murdered. I'd like to have had 'em done it! It's that smash on the head put Coogan to the bad. You're right about one thing, I guess; he'll never be the same Coogan again."

And in a way this was so; in another it wasn't. It was not the wound that was to blame—the doctors were positive about that—but Coogan, it was pitifully evident, was not the same. Physically, at the end of a month, he left the hospital apparently as well as he had ever been in his life; but mentally, somewhere, a cog had slipped. His brain seemed warped and weakened, simple as a child's in its workings; his memory fogged and dazed, full of indefinite, intangible snatches, vague, indeterminate glimpses of his life before. One thing seemed to cling to him, to predominate, to sway him—the Devil's Slide.

Regan and Carleton talked to him, trying to guide his thoughts and stimulate his memory. "You remember you used to drive an engine, don't you, Chick?" asked Carleton.

"Engine?" Coogan nodded. "Yes, in the Devil's Slide."

"No. 505," said Regan quickly. "You know old 505."

Coogan shook his head.

Carleton tried another tack. "You were in a bad accident, Coogan, one night. You were in the cab of the engine when she went to smash. Do you remember that?"

"The smash was on the Devil's Slide," said

Coogan.

"That's it," cried Carleton. "I knew you'd remember."

"They're always there," said Coogan simply, "always there. It is a bad track. I'm a railroad man and I know. It's not properly guarded. I'm going to work there and take care of it."

"Work there?" said Regan, the tears almost in his eyes. "What kind of work? What do you want to do, Chick?"

"Just work there," said Coogan. "Take care of the Devil's Slide."

The super and the master mechanic looked at each other—and averted their eyes. Then they took Coogan up to his boarding house, where he had moved after Annie and the little one died.

"He'll never put his finger on a throttle again," said Regan, with a choke in his voice, as they came out. "The best man that ever pulled a latch, the best man that ever drew a pay check on the Hill Division. It's hell, Carleton; that's what it is. I don't think he really knew you or me. He don't seem to remember much of anything, though he's natural enough and able enough to take care of himself in all other ways. Just kind of simplelike. It's queer the way that Devil's Slide has got him, what? We can't let him go out there."

"I wonder if he remembers Annie," said Carleton. "I was afraid to ask him. I didn't know what effect it might have. No; we can't let him go out on the Devil's Slide."

But the doctors said yes. They went further and said it was about the only chance he had. The thing was on his mind. It was better to humor him, and that, with the outdoor mountain life, in time might bring him around again.

And so, while Regan growled and swore, and Carleton knitted his brows in perplexed protest, the doctors had their way—and Coogan, Chick Coogan, went to the Devil's Slide. Officially he was on the pay roll as a section hand; but Millrae, the section boss, had his own orders.

"Let Coogan alone. Let him do what he likes, only see that he doesn't come to any harm," wired the super.

And Coogan, when Millrae asked him what he wanted to do, answered simply: "I'm going to take care of the Devil's Slide."

"All right, Chick," the section boss agreed cheerily. "It's up to you. Fire ahead."

At first no one understood; perhaps even at the end no one quite understood—possibly Coogan least of all. He may have done some good—or he may not. In time they came to call him the Guardian of the Devil's Slide—not slightly, but as strong men talk, defiant of ridicule, with a gruff ring of assertion in their tones that brooked no question.

Up and down, down and up, two miles east, two miles west, Coogan patrolled the Devil's Slide, and never a weakened rail, a sunken tie, a loosened spike escaped him; he may have done some good, or he may not.

He slept here and there in one of the switchback tenders' shanties, moved and governed by no other consideration than fatigue; day and night were as things apart. He ate with them, too; and scrupulously he paid his footing. Twenty-five cents for a meal, twenty-five cents for a bunk or a blanket on the floor. They took his money because he forced it upon them, furiously angry at a hint of refusal; but mostly the coin would be slipped back unnoticed into the pocket of Coogan's coat—poor men and rough they were, nothing of veneer, nothing of polish; grimy, overalled, horny-fisted toilers, their hearts were big if their purses weren't.

At all hours—in the early dawn, at midday, or late afternoon—the train crews and the engine crews on passengers, specials, and freights passed Coogan up and down, always walking with his head bent forward, his eyes fastened on the right of way—passed with a cheery hail and the flirt of a hand from cab, caboose, or the ornate tail of a garish Pullman. And to the tourists he came to be more of an attraction than the scenic grandeur of the Rockies themselves; they stared from the observation car and listened, with a running fire of wondering comment, as the brass-buttoned porters told the story, until at last to have done the Rockies and have missed the Guardian of the Devil's Slide was to have done them not at all.

It was natural enough; anything out of the ordinary ministers to and arouses the public's curiosity. Not very nice perhaps, no—but natural. The railroad men didn't like it, and that was natural, too; but their feelings or opinions, in the very nature of things, had little effect one way or the other.

Coogan grew neither better nor worse. The

months passed and he grew neither better nor worse. Winter came, and, with the trestle that went out in the big storm that year, Coogan went into Division for the last time, went over the Great Divide, the same simple, broken-minded Coogan that had begun his self-appointed task in the spring; he may have done some good, or he may not. They found him after two or three days, and sent him back to Big Cloud.

"He'd have chosen that himself if he could have chosen," said Carleton soberly. "Heaven knows what the end would have been. The years would have been all alike; he'd never have got his mind back. It's all for the best."

Regan did not answer. Philosophy and the master mechanic's heart did not always measure things alike.

The Brotherhood took charge of the arrangements, and Coogan's funeral was the biggest funeral Big Cloud ever had. Everybody wanted to march, so they held the service late in the afternoon and closed down the shops at half past four; and the shop hands, from the boss fitter to the water boy, turned out to the last man—and so did every one else in town.

It was getting dark and already supper time when it was over, but Carleton, who had left some unfinished work on his desk, went back to his office instead of going home. He lighted the lamp, put on the chimney, but the match was still burning when the door opened and a man, with his hat pulled far down over his face, stepped in and closed it behind him.

Carleton whirled around, the match dropped to the floor, and he leaned forward over his desk, a hard look settling on his face. The man had pushed back his hat. It was Dahleen, Coogan's fireman, Jim Dahleen.

CHAPTER V.

WHY THE "AIR" WOULD NOT WORK.

FOR a moment neither man spoke.

Bitter words rose to Carleton's tongue, but something in the other's face checked and held them back.

It was Dahleen who spoke first. "I heard about Chick—that he'd gone out," he said quietly. "I don't suppose it did him any good, but I kind of

had to chip in on the good-by; Chick and me used to be pretty thick. I saw you come down here, and I followed you. Don't stare at me like that; you'd have done the same. Have you got that flask yet?"

"Yes," Carleton answered mechanically, and as mechanically produced it from the drawer of his desk.

"Ever examine it particularly?"

"Examine it?"

"I guess that answers my question. I was afraid you might, and I wanted to ask you for it that day, only I thought you'd think it mighty funny, refuse, and well—well, get to looking it over on your own hook. Will you give it here for a minute?"

Carleton handed it over silently.

Dahleen took it, pulled off the lower half that served as drinking cup, laid his finger on the inside rim, and returned it to the super.

Carleton moved nearer to the light; then his face paled. *It was Coogan's flask!* The inscription, a little dulled, in fine engraving, was still plain enough. "To Chick from Jim, on the occasion of his wedding."

Carleton's hand was trembling as he set it down. "Great Heaven!" he said hoarsely. "It was Coogan who was drunk that night—not you."

"I figured that's the way you'd read it, you or any other railroad man," said Dahleen. "It was him or me, and one of us drunk, in the eyes of any of the boys on the road, from the minute that flask showed up. There was only one thing would have made you believe different, and I couldn't tell you—then. I'd have taken the same stand you did. But you're wrong. Coogan wasn't drunk that night; he never touched a drop. I wouldn't be telling you this now if he had, would I?"

"Sit down," said Carleton.

Dahleen took the chair beside the desk, and, resting his feet on the window sill, stared out at the lights twinkling below him. "Yes, I gave him the flask," he said slowly, as though picking up the thread of a story, "for a wedding present. The day he came back to his run after the little woman and the baby died he had it in his pocket, and he handed it to me. *I'm afraid of it, Jimmy,*' he said. That was all, just that—only he *looked* at me. Then he got down out of the cab to oil round, me still holding it in my hand, for the words kind of hit me; they meant a whole lot. Well, before he

came back, I lifted up my seat and chucked it down in the box underneath. I don't want to make a long story of this. You know how he took to brooding. Sometimes he wouldn't say a word from one end of the run to the other. And once in a while he seemed to act a little queer. I didn't think much of it, and I didn't say anything to anybody, figuring it would wear off.

"When we pulled out of Big Cloud the night of the wreck," Dahleen went on, "I didn't see anything out of the ordinary about him. I'd kind of got used to him by then, and if there was any difference I didn't notice it. He never said a word all the way out until we hit the summit of the Devil's Slide and started down. I had the firebox door open, and was throwing coal when he says so sudden as almost to make me drop my shovel:

"Jimmy, do you know what night this is?"

"Sure," says I, never thinking, 'it's Thursday.'

"He laughed kind of softlike to himself.

"It's my wedding night, Jimmy," he says. 'My wedding night, and we're going to celebrate.'

"The light from the fire box was full on his face, and he had the queerest look you ever saw on a man. He was white, and his eyes were staring, and he was pushing his hand through his hair and rocking in his seat. I was scart. I thought for a minute he was going to faint; then I remembered that whisky, and jumped for my side of the cab, opened the seat, and snatched it up. I went back to him with it in my hand. I don't think he ever saw it; I know he didn't. He was laughing that soft laugh again, kind of as though he was crooning, and he reached out his hand and pushed me away.

"We're going to celebrate, Jimmy," says he again. 'We're going to celebrate. It's my wedding night.'

"I felt the speed quicken a bit; we were on the Slide then, you know, and I saw his fingers tightening on the throttle. Then it got me, and my heart went into my mouth; Chick was clean off his head. I slipped the flask into my pocket, and tried to coax his hands away from the throttle.

"Let me take her a spell, Chick," says I,

thinking my best chance was to humor him.

"He threw me off like I was a plaything. Then I tried to pull him away, and he smashed me one between the eyes and sent me to the floor. All the time we was going faster and faster. I tackled him again, but I might as well have been a baby, and then—then—well, that wound in his head came from a long-handled union wrench I grabbed out of the tool box. He went down like a felled ox—but it was too late. Before I could reach a lever we were in splinters."

Dahleen stopped. Carleton never stirred; he was leaning forward, his elbows on his desk, his chin in his hands, his face strained, eyes intently fastened on the other.

Dahleen fumbled a second with his watch chain, twisting it around his fingers; then he went on: "While I laid in the hospital I turned the thing over in my mind pretty often, long before the doctors thought I knew my own name again, and I figured that, if it was ever known, old Coogan was down and out for fair, even if when he got better his head turned out all right again, because he wouldn't be ever trusted in a cab in any circumstances, you understand? If he didn't come out straight, why that ended it, of course; but I had it in my mind that it was only what they call a temporary aberration. I couldn't queer him if that was all, could I? So I said to myself, 'Jimmy, all you know is that the "air" wouldn't work.' That's what I told you that day, and then you sprang that flask on me. You were right; I *had* forgotten it. Whisky in the cab on the night of an accident is pretty near an open-and-shut game. It was him or me, and I couldn't tell you the story then without doing Coogan cold, but Coogan's gone now and it can't hurt him. That's all."

The tick of the clock on the wall, the click of the sounder from the dispatcher's room next door were the only sounds for a long moment; then Carleton's chair scraped, and he stood up and put out his hand.

"Dahleen," he said huskily, "I'd give a good deal to be as white a man as you are."

Dahleen shook his head. "Any one would have done it for Coogan," he said.