



## RICHARD HUGHES—RAILROAD DETECTIVE

By Johnston McCulley

### Case No. V. – The Man on the Pilot Engine and the Battle at the Switch



HE President of the nation, bound from Washington to California, was due to pass over the lines of the P. and P. L. from Parker Junction to the western terminus. Officials along the line were preparing for the flight of the special. A picked crew was to man the trains, trackmen were given stern orders, and despatchers were warned to watch the sheet as they had never watched before.

It was the first time the road had been so honored, and there was a natural desire on the part of the officials to make a good impression on the Presidential mind.

The President was to arrive at Parker Junction exactly at noon, and transfer from another road to the P. and P. L. At half past eleven Richard Hughes, chief secret-service agent of the P. and P. L. at the Junction, stood in the office of the superintendent.

"Hughes," the superintendent was saying, "I am going ask you to ride on the pilot-engine. We need a good pair of eyes there. We'll run the pilot about a block ahead of the special, and have it timed so that when the special is entering one block the pilot will be entering the block ahead.

Of course, there'll be an engine behind, too, in case of emergency, and you might send Ferguson on that. How does the plan strike you?"

"It's just the thing," said Hughes.

"Of course," added the superintendent, "I'm not expecting trouble, but it's always best to be on the safe side."

Hughes looked at his watch.

"I'll go down to the pilot-engine, then," he said. "The special is due in fifteen minutes."

"It will be a quick transfer," the superintendent said. "The President will speak from the rear platform of his car while the engines are being changed." Hughes left the office and went down to the roundhouse. The pilot was leaving the sheds, and Hughes boarded it. He smiled when he saw that the engineer was Murphy, the crack runner of the division.

"Didn't you want to pull the special?" Hughes asked.

"I've pulled specials before," Murphy replied. "It's more fun on the pilot. If there's any excitement, you'll get it here."

The pilot-engine was stopped near a semaphore at the end of the yards. Looking back, Hughes saw the engine

which was to pull the special waiting near the depot. Beyond that was the follow-engine, and Hughes saw Ferguson standing beside it.

The shriek of a locomotive whistle caused Murphy to inspect his engine for about the hundredth time, and drew Hughes's glance down the track toward the coming train. Every whistle at the Junction screamed out a welcome to the chief executive.

The special came to a stop before the station, the engine quickly pulled away, and the P. and P. L. locomotive backed down and took its place. Those on the pilot could tell by the cheers of the crowd that the President was making his hurried speech from the rear platform.

Murphy had his eyes on the semaphore. Suddenly it dropped.

"We're off, Mr. Hughes," said the veteran engineer.

In a minute more the pilot had left the yards and was rushing across the country toward the West. Murphy watched the track, the semaphores, everything. The fireman worked heroically.

Hughes looked carefully at the country through which they were passing. He was beginning to feel ridiculous. The sunshine warmed the earth, there was not a cloud in the sky, and the spirit of peace seemed everywhere.

What was the need of a pilot-engine? Of course, everything was all right—the track-walkers had seen to that. At night there might be danger, but in broad daylight such precautions looked childish, thought Hughes.

Yet no man knew better than Hughes that bolts can come out of a seemingly clear sky. It wasn't that an accident was expected; it was simply a case of being on guard against that which no one anticipated. The eyes of millions of people were, figuratively, following their

President.

The least accident, no matter how trifling, would be wired to the uttermost parts of the earth. Hughes understood why these precautions were taken: the honor of the road was at stake. It was necessary that the President be delivered at the end of the division without accident and without annoyance.

For years Hughes had fought for the honor of the road because he loved it. He felt thankful for the beautiful day because it meant lessened chances of an accident.

Yet there was always the chance of the unexpected, and, until the President was delivered at the terminus, the honor of the road was in suspense.

They passed through Craxton, the first station. A small group of villagers were waiting on the platform, hoping to catch a glimpse of the President. They cheered as the pilot dashed by.

"He'll stop there a few minutes," Murphy said. "That's where we gain on them a little, whenever they stop. But we'll have to slacken up a bit afterward; my orders say to stay just a block ahead.

"I don't dare drop behind, or it'll stop the special, and I don't dare run too far ahead. There's where a little head-work comes in.

"If anything happens to the special, the follow-engine will come up to it, then drop back to the first station and wire a report. That'll catch us, and we'll be stopped."

"Nothing's going to happen," said Hughes. "We're going right through this like a charm."

But Hughes had a premonition that something would happen, though he spoke cheerfully. The day was almost too perfect, the spirit of peace too evident. Something—it may have been sheer nervousness—gave him the feeling of the calm before the storm. Then he told himself that it was simply the thought of

the man who followed behind and what it meant to the road, and tried to regain his good spirits.

Station after station was passed. Finally they came to Redhill, the halfway station of the division. The pilot-engine stopped to take water. Murphy had let her out a little for that purpose, hoping to be gone before the special came in sight around the curve.

His hopes were realized, and his big locomotive was under way again before the special came in sight. The President was to deliver quite a speech at Redhill, where there were many miners, and so Murphy slackened speed as soon as he was out of the yards to keep from getting too far ahead of the Presidential train.

The pilot was nearing a switch, where a spur ran from the main line three miles down to an old gravel-pit. Hughes smiled when he saw it. The winter before he had risked his life in a storm rescuing a girl who had been snowbound there.

Ferguson had been with him, and, as a result of the adventure, which almost cost three lives, Ferguson was to be married, a month later, to the girl he helped save. Hughes was to be best man.

As the pilot neared the switch, Hughes glanced around him, living over again the scenes of that dreadful winter night. The pilot was creeping along, for from the top of the hill which they had just gained Murphy had seen that the special was still at the station. He stopped the pilot at the switch, where he could look down the long hill and wait for the special to start.

Hughes sprang to the ground and walked to the switch. He noticed that it had been oiled recently, and that there was no lock on it. That was peculiar.

The pit had not been used for over a year. Evidently some crew had found it necessary to enter the spur, and had neglected to relock the switch. Hughes

made a mental note of the circumstance, intending to ask questions when he returned to the Junction, and to report the breach of rules.

Above the switch and to one side of the road was a mass of rocks and crags. It marked the spot where the track ended its long climb up the hill and entered a deep cut. Hughes happened to glance up at the crags, and saw three heads disappear from view behind a rock. That, too was peculiar, thought Hughes.

The secret-service man returned to the engine, but he did not tell Murphy what he had seen.

"I expect the President is having a hot time at Redhill," the engineer said. "You know, the miners have been having trouble with the State authorities, and have declared that they would demand their rights of the President himself. They tried to get the President to stop at Redhill, and he consented, in spite of the opposition of his advisers. He said he'll tell the miners he could do nothing. It's bold of him; I hope he isn't insulted."

"Um!" replied Hughes. The engineer's words had given him an idea that appalled him.

"Start the engine and run through the cut—now," he ordered. "Start with a spurt, and as soon as you get around the curve, where no one near here could see us, slow down for a second, and let me jump off. When you get to Burton, wire ahead for another secret-service man to come down and meet you and finish the trip. I have business here."

Murphy was curious, but he said nothing. He knew Hughes too well to ask questions. The locomotive gathered speed, rounded the bend, slowed down, Hughes sprang to the ground, and then the pilot continued its journey. Hughes sprang up the side of the cut and walked quickly back toward the gravel-pit switch, keeping

under cover of the brush and rocks.

He reached a point where he could look down the hill to Redhill. The special was still there. Evidently the President was making a long speech. Hughes would have time to investigate.

As he neared the switch, he moved with great caution. He glanced down the hill again, and saw that the Presidential train was pulling out. Another few yards, and the secret-service man had reached the edge of the cut and was peering through underbrush, toward the switch. What he saw drove the blood from his face.

At the switch were half a dozen men—all of them foreign miners. They were jabbering in their own tongue, and seemed much excited. As Hughes watched, one of them stepped forward.

The detective wiggled through the brush, nearer to the edge of the cut. Already he had drawn his revolver, and held it ready for action. The miner who had left the group walked straight to the switch and turned it.

The meaning flashed upon Hughes in an instant. These men were determined to make the President hear them. They were desperate. They might go to any length, or they might confine themselves to insult. They had planned well. Down in the pit were probably hundreds of the miners waiting.

And these men had turned the switch! They were going to try to send the special down into the pit. They had even twisted the switch sign.

The engineer would not notice the mistake until it would be too late to stop the train. Perhaps these men intended to board the locomotive and compel the crew to take the train down the spur.

Hughes was quick to realize what it meant. Even if the President was unharmed, he would be annoyed, insulted perhaps, and lose valuable time.

And it would all reflect upon the P. and P. L. The public would ask why track walkers and other employees had not done their duty.

His worst premonition had been justified. The honor of the road—the road he had served all his life and loved—was at stake!

## II.

GLANCING down the hill, Hughes could see that the special was gathering speed for the long climb. Whatever he did must be done quickly. There were six men near the switch. Hughes realized that they were desperate men who would act upon impulse and without respect for authority.

The secret-service man did not know whether those near the switch were armed, but he suspected that they were. However, it was a case where he was obliged to take chances. Failure was the one thing he must not expect.

He decided to wait until the special was almost at the switch, then dash down the side of the cut and turn it. Then, if he was attacked, the special would be by and the President safe from annoyance.

This was necessary for still another reason. The switch sign had been twisted, and after he had turned the switch safe the sign would read danger. Unless he waited until the last second, the engineer would bring the special to a stop, and the men below might be able to carry out their plans.

The special was making good speed up the long hill. The men below were watching it. Now it was only a mile away—half a mile! Hughes grasped his revolver firmly in his left hand and prepared for his dash.

Now was the time! He would have just time to turn the switch before the special was upon it. Hughes looked quickly at the

side of the cut, picking out a path, then sprang from his place of concealment.

He was half-way to the switch before the men near it were aware of his descent. Though some of them took a couple of steps in his direction, they seemed bewildered, unable to realize what he meant to do. The special was but a short distance away, gathering speed after its long climb.

Holding his revolver ready for instant use, Hughes sprang forward toward the switch. Though the miners did not recognize his authority, they realized that he was attempting to turn the switch back to its former position and frustrate their designs.

With screams of anger and dismay, they rushed toward him, and between him and the switch. Hughes fired once over their heads. But the shot seemingly had little effect. These men were frenzied because of fancied wrongs, courageous to the point of fanaticism.

The shot did not stop them. One flung himself upon Hughes, and the secret-service man had trouble felling him with a blow of the revolver. Another was at his throat, but he beat him off. A third clung to his back, trying to trip him. Hughes half carried him along the ground. He fired again, over their heads, but they did not fall back.

The special was very near now. Hughes began to despair. He knew that the engineer would not see the fight until he was upon it, and it would be too late to stop then. And he didn't want the special to stop, even for an instant. If it stopped, the honor of the road would be gone.

With a mighty effort he threw aside the man who clung to his back, sent another crashing to the ground with a blow, and sprang to the switch. A miner stood over it, a knife gleaming in his hand.

Hughes flourished the revolver, but the man did not move. He fired, and the bullet whistled by the miner's head. The others were rushing forward again to the attack. It looked as though he would fail.

The man at the switch lifted his knife to strike. Hughes fired again, this time in earnest, and the man fell with a bullet through his leg. Hughes sprang to the switch, turning so as to face the others. The locomotive of the special was coming into view around the bend. Another moment, and it would be too late.

They were rushing upon Hughes again. His hand grasped the switch, and he covered the nearest man with his revolver. This time the miners hesitated; they had seen the other man fall.

In that second Hughes turned the switch. With a shriek, the locomotive thundered by, the train rattling over the frogs. The engineer recognized Hughes, took in the situation at a glance, and shouted something as he dashed by, but Hughes could not understand what he said.

The miners were screaming at him in an alien tongue, and their faces were convulsed with rage. Caution gave way to recklessness.

Hughes knew that they would be upon him in a second, and that while he might bring down one or two of them, he would be conquered in the end. It might be his last work for the P. and P. L., but he did not regret what he had done.

It might mean death, or serious injury at the least, but the honor of the road had been saved. The head of the nation, who sat in his special car, would never know how near he had been to insult and annoyance.

The public would never know. It would be on record that the P. and P. L. had carried the chief executive of the nation in safety, although the man who

had made it possible might not be able to save himself.

### III.

HE glanced at the angry faces before him, and changed his revolver to his right hand. Then they were upon him. Two of the five who still remained in the fight showed knives. The man Hughes had wounded lay upon the ground, groaning and cursing.

They rushed—and Hughes fired. One of the five dropped. He fired again—and missed his mark. And then they seized him, three of the remaining four.

Hughes fought desperately, retaining possession of the revolver, hoping he would get a chance to use it. His blows scattered them, but always they returned to the fight. He saw one of them strike with a knife, but managed to dodge the blow.

For a moment he was free, and fired again. Another man dropped, shot through the leg. Even in this extremity Hughes did not care to take human life if he could avoid it.

There were three left—three able-bodied men, thirsting for revenge. Hughes was in the thick of the struggle again. They were trying to get the revolver from him, but he held it in a tight clutch.

Again and again the knives rose and fell, and always Hughes escaped. His coat was slashed in half a dozen places, but he was still a match for the three men. His eyes seemed to watch everywhere. No trick could catch him.

They rained blows upon him, struggled to trip him, tried to get at his back, struck at him with their knives, but he was always on his guard.

His strength was beginning to ebb the strain of the unequal struggle when down the spur track arose a yell. Hughes found time to glance in that direction. His

assailants glanced also and responded with yells of their own. The hundreds of foreign miners who had been waiting in the gravel-pit had realized that the special had passed and that their plot had failed.

They had started to the switch to investigate, and when they saw a fight in progress they guessed that some one had frustrated their plans. Hundreds of them were coming for the switch at a run.

Hughes fought more desperately, trying to break away from the men at the switch before the advancing horde arrived. He knew what would be the result if he did not. Searchers would find his mutilated body, and in the number of his assailants his murderers would find safety.

The three men at the switch, knowing that Hughes would make a desperate effort to escape, struggled with him harder than ever. They clung to the arm which held the revolver, trying to wrench the weapon from his hand, keeping him from firing it.

He delivered blows when he could, but they seemed to have no effect. Several times he was struck in the face. He dodged a knife again. A mist began to form before his eyes, and he knew that his strength could not last much longer.

With a last effort he managed to throw off one of the three, but before he could free his revolver hand the assailant was back at him again. The men down the track were drawing nearer, many of them brandishing weapons.

Hughes saw some stop beside the track to pick up clubs and stones. The outcome was not much in doubt.

Nearer and nearer they came. They were less than a hundred yards away now, and Hughes was unable to free himself from the three at the switch, who fought like demons to keep him prisoner until the mob arrived.

Nearer they came. It was evident that Hughes's assailants were not trying to give

him a knife-thrust now; they were content to wait for the more spectacular vengeance of the mob. Unconsciously, perhaps, Hughes compared that crowd of men to wolves chasing their prey.

Their shrieks and cries were dreadful to hear. They fought among themselves, each one striving to be the first to reach the victim.

Now Hughes could see the whites of their eyes. He made a last desperate effort to escape. He wrenched the hand which held the revolver away, and fired twice into the advancing crowd of men, watching to see that both bullets took effect.

They hesitated a moment. Then the revolver was snatched from him, he was tripped and thrown to the ground, and they rushed upon him again.

The secret-service man closed his eyes. Then he opened them quickly, for the cries of the crowd had changed in tone. Anger had given way to consternation and fear.

There was a dull rumble, which grew in volume, the sound of escaping steam, the quick whistle of a locomotive, the singing of grinding brakes! Hughes knew in an instant what it was, and his lips moved in prayerful thankfulness.

It was the follow-engine running after the special. It had arrived in the nick of time—and Ferguson was on it.

Hughes heard the crowd falling back, heard some of them running. One of the three men who held him broke away, another started to follow; but the third, with an oath, flashed his knife in the air to finish Hughes before taking flight. The latter caught the arm as it descended and held it with all the strength left in his body.

For a moment the man fought to accomplish his object, then he tried to wrench himself free. But Hughes held on.

At least, he thought, he would take one prisoner.

He wondered why the crowd had retreated before the engine-crew and Ferguson. Perhaps they thought it was a train of officers coming down upon them.

They might realize their mistake soon, and return to the attack. Why didn't Ferguson come to his relief and take him aboard the locomotive to safety?

Then Ferguson did arrive. He came with a rush, caught the man who held Hughes, and felled him with a blow. Hughes heard handcuffs snap. Then Ferguson lifted him up.

"Hurt?" Ferguson asked.

"Not a bit," Hughes replied, trying to smile.

He looked around. A dozen men with rifles were in pursuit of the fleeing miners.

"What—" Hughes began.

"Sheriff and posse," Ferguson interrupted. "A rancher discovered what the miners were going to do, and came in with the news just before the special arrived. We had the President asked to speak longer than he intended, to cover up the long stop—made him believe something was the matter with the engine that pulled the special.

"I said 'we,' but of course I didn't have anything to do with it. It was arranged before the follow-engine arrived. When we did get to the station, the special was just pulling out.

"They flagged us, and the officers got aboard. Then we came as fast as we could. We expected to find the special on the spur and the President being bothered. We didn't have any idea you were here."

"Why did you let the special go on when there was that danger?" Hughes asked.

"We couldn't have held it without letting the President know all about the trouble. Then the newspaper men on the

special would have got the story. There was only a few minutes to decide in. As it is, nobody except you and I and the sheriff and his men know of the deal."

"You did just right," said Hughes. "You've saved the honor of the road."

"No," replied Ferguson, "you have done that. If you hadn't turned that switch, there would have been trouble. The engine-crew of the special knew of it, of course, but if they had stopped to turn the switch these men would have seized the engine."

Hughes got to his feet and leaned weakly against the switch.

"Call the sheriff and his men back," he ordered. "These miners have done no crime. They tried it, but they didn't accomplish anything. We don't want any arrests."

"But they tried to kill you!"

"It doesn't make any difference, so long as they didn't. Call back the sheriff and his men. If there are any arrests, the story will get out, and the road will be injured."

"It will be better for the public to learn how the plot was frustrated."

Hughes smiled. "Ferguson," he said, "you're trying to get my name in the papers again. I'm not looking for fame, boy. The road has been saved from annoyance; that's enough."

Ferguson called back the sheriff and his men. When they had arrived, Hughes took the handcuffs from the man on the ground before him, and told him to get up. The secret-service man looked at the two men he had wounded.

"Take care of these friends of yours," he said to the man he had freed. "You'll find a couple more in the same fix a few yards up the track. I don't believe any of them are badly hurt. I'm going to let you go this time, but if I ever run across you again it'll go hard with you. And I want this little knife of yours for a souvenir. That's all."

Then Hughes led the way back to the locomotive, followed by Ferguson and the sheriff's men. The locomotive returned to Redhill, and there the despatcher got Hughes on the wire.

"Heard you're having trouble up there," he said.

"All over," wired Hughes in reply. "Will report as soon as I arrive at Parker Junction. How's special?"

"Special just left our tracks, delivered next road, all O.K."

Hughes turned to Ferguson.

"Another battle over, boy," he said. "The road's reputation is safe. Let's have a smoke!"