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THE GUARDIAN SHORT STORY

Marsden's Probation.

By ALICE CLARKE

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"What is the work?" asked Marsden as he pocketed the letter. John Dufford looked at him over his steel bowed spectacles.

"When I was a lad," he said severely, "young men did not pick and choose. They were glad to take what they could get. You want to marry my daughter and have come to me to ask for work to prove yourself worthy of her. I give you a letter to my superintendent, and you calmly ask the nature of the employment."

"I merely wanted to know what sort of clothes to lay in," Marsden explained in confusion.

"Any man who works needs plain, serviceable clothes," said the elder man reprovingly. "I would suggest that you might leave your evening clothes at home."

"Yes, sir," answered Marsden obediently as he rose to go.

"Now, it is clearly understood," Dufford said sharply, "that you are not to write or hold any communication with my daughter for two years. That is agreed to?"

"And on my part I promise that if at the end of two years I find that my superintendent gives a good report of your industry I shall withdraw my objection to your marriage."

He swung back to his desk, and Jim Marsden, placing the letter in his pocketbook, left the office. There was a farewell visit to Marjorie, followed by a visit to a cheap outfitter's shop, and when the night train pulled out for the west Marsden was a passenger.

It was long before sleep came to him. It seemed unjust that John Dufford

brought from the railroad by a horse car system, the cars going down loaded with ore and coming back with the coal when it was needed. Every shovelful had to be thrown just where it was needed to feed the fire evenly, and Jim's arms ached as he strove to learn the proper twist of the shovel to land the coal in the desired spot.

It was two weeks before he could be trusted on a trick alone, but at last Casey pronounced himself satisfied with Jim's ability, and he resigned over the stove pit for eight hours a day.

It was hard work for a man whose exercise had been taken in a gymnasium, but Jim rapidly hardened to it, and in six months it had become second habit.

He sent east for books on engineering, and by a mistake a book on electrical engines was sent him instead of the one for which he wrote. He sat down to look it over before he sent it back, and to the original book he added others.

He had been there little more than a year when he sought out Travers and laid a plan before him. Less than half a mile up the valley a constant fall broke over the high cliff and rolled into the valley, 400 feet below. It was Jim's plan to use water-power instead of steam and employ a trolley on the tramway.

Travers smiled at first, but Jim worked out the plan for him, and the New York office approved. Jim was put in charge of the plant, and the company raised Travers' salary.

It was well toward the close of the second year that Dufford came to visit the mine. No one knew of his intention until word was telegraphed from the station. The word was flashed about the camp that the old man had come, but the first hint that ladies accompanied him came to Jim as he stood in the door of the power house.

The road led past the door, and as he stood listening to the rhythmic pur of the dynamo the familiar sound was broken by the quick beat of horses' hoofs on the hard road, and around the curve swung a maddened broncho with a woman swaying in the saddle. Marsden sprang into the roadway and in one tense moment fought the insane brute with desperate energy as

he was dragged along. Then the light was won, and he sprang to the saddle just as Marjorie slipped, fainting, from the seat.

"I came because I wanted to see for myself," she explained an hour later as they sat on the porch of the superintendent's cottage. "I could not believe that you had been content for two years as a fireman. Of course, Mr. Travers wanted the credit of introducing the biggest money saving device in the plant, and he did not remember that father was particularly interested in you. Father ought to have been more explicit."

"But it's been a good thing for you," declared Mr. Dufford as he stepped through the doorway. "You've shown the stuff that's in you, and it's mighty good stuff—fit material for a son-in-law. I'm going on to the rest of my holdings in New Mexico as long as I'm out here. As you are going to be put in charge of my mining interests when we get back to New York, you'd better combine a honeymoon and a business trip."

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AROUND THE CURVE SWUNG A MADDENED BRONCHO.

should insist upon a two years' apprenticeship, but if Jacob could serve seven years and again seven for Rachel, he should be able to serve for two.

The old man had no particular objection to him save that he had inherited his money. This being the case the stipulation that he should not even write Marjorie, lest he work upon her sympathies, seemed particularly hard, but Dufford was a hard man, and if Marsden wanted Marjorie for his wife, he could only bow to the dictum.

It was four days before he landed in the little Colorado town which was the nearest railroad point to the mine, and the next morning a six hour ride brought him to the desolate collection of buildings grouped around the shaft of the mine, which night and day ground out more wealth for the company of which Dufford was the head.

The superintendent was easily found, and he glanced over the letter Marsden presented.

"All right," he said curtly. "Had any experience firing?"

"Guns or steam engines?" said Marsden.

"You know very well," was the sharp response. "Can you fire an engine?"

"I can," was the quiet answer, "though I have had no experience at the work. It's merely a matter of shoveling coal, isn't it?"

"Shoveling the coal right," corrected the superintendent. "Better take your things over to the bunk house, then go to the engineer and tell him that you're Jim and that Casey is to show you how to fire. What is it, Peters?"

He turned to attend to another man who had entered, and feeling himself dismissed Jim turned away.

Inquiry developed the fact that the bunk house was the long, low shed where the men slept and ate. The Chinaman in charge of the place showed him where to put his trunk at the side of a narrow cot, and presently, clad in a suit of overalls, Jim strolled into the engine room and presented himself to the engineer.

"I am Jim," he said simply. "Mr. Travers said that Casey was to show me how to fire."

The engineer nodded over his shoulder.

"Tell Casey," he said and went on with his oiling.

Casey was more companionable. He deftly elicited information as to Jim's place of birth and other facts as he made it apparent that Mr. Travers was right when he said that it was not merely a question of shoveling coal.

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