



ROMANCE OF THE RAIL

BY FREDERIC REDDALL

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John Draper was bound for Denver to attend an important meeting of the presidents of some of the greatest trunk line railroads in the country; hence the presence of his secretary and of his confidential man was a necessity. Yet Filley had begged hard to be left behind in New York on the flimsy plea of ill health and overwork. But his employer overruled all his objections, as we have seen, saying that the trip would do him good.

Now, as a matter of fact, it was as much as Filley's reputation and safety were worth to be out of New York at this juncture. He had entered on a career of duplicity culminating in actual crime. Unless he could be back in the metropolis considerably within the ten days named as the limit of the trip he would be ruined and disgraced. He must return and would, and he counted on being able to concoct some pretext, fair or foul, for leaving the party. Meanwhile there was some intermittent compensation to be gained from the fact that he would be able to see just how far matters had progressed between his patron and Miss Granniss, for Reuben Filley cherished designs on the heiress, and if he "pulled off" his present dangerous coup he would be in a better position to sue for her hand and her fortune.

That a high bred, high strung and high minded maiden like Florence

ing to their relatives and friends in New York by the various personages with whom we are en route for the great west. First in this series of glimpses behind the scenes comes a short but weighty epistle from Mrs. Bradley Hurst to her liege lord. The italics are the fair writer's, not ours:

I.—Mrs. Bradley Hurst to Mr. Bradley Hurst, Union club, New York:

On Board the Miranda, May 12, 1900.

My Dear Bradley—I have heard you say that an ocean voyage gave a man more opportunities than any other situation to show attention upon the woman he liked, but from personal observation I can testify that a trip in a private railroad car—especially if that is your own—is quite as fruitful in chances to express one's affectionate regard.

John has played the role of mine host most charmingly to us all, but to Florence he has been devoted to the last degree. You know my heart is set upon their coming together. It is perfectly clear that he has fallen for her. Even the odious Filley must see that against such an adversary he has no chance. I cannot understand why John ever made him one of us, but it will give Florence a glimpse of the two men side by side. Girls are so queer nowadays, and she is so self contained and reserved that it is impossible to discover whether her heart is touched if an irresistible man must have every chance. It would be such a relief to know that she was happily married and in good hands. A motherless girl is such a responsibility. How odd it will seem for us to be sisters-in-law and I old enough to be her mother! Stranger things have happened!

We expect to be in Denver the day after tomorrow, and I will write again upon our arrival. All of the party are well, and Madge sends her love with mine. Ever yours affectionately, BRUCE.

II.—Miss Madge Hurst to Miss Fannie Hyde, 7493 Madison avenue, New York:

INDIANAPOLIS, Wednesday.

My Dearest Fannie—Our journey has been just one delightful picnic ever since we left New York yesterday morning. I am writing this very hurriedly at the quiet little excursions you ever saw in one corner of Uncle John's private car, and if you do not recognize the handwriting you must blame the jiggling of the train, not me, please.

If we don't have a wedding before we get home, it won't be somebody's fault. I told mamma that it looked as though Uncle John had arranged this trip so that he could have dating Florence all to himself, and then I was in disgrace for the rest of the day. He plays the beau chevalier to perfection, and one would never think he was as old or older than papa. He seems to anticipate her every wish. What she thinks, he sure I don't know. When I tease her, she smiles that superior smile of hers and changes the subject.

But there's no fun in watching other people make love, and C. F. says he agrees with me. Do you know, Fannie, I begin to believe the foolish fellow really cares for me a little bit, but what mamma will say if she ever suspects I dread to think. Pity he's so poor—no, I don't mean that—but I'm sorry he's not rich, though I'm sure he's got brains enough for both of us, and I think Uncle John thinks he'll be somebody some day.

I shall look for a letter from you in Denver, dear, so don't fail. Yours, always lovingly, MADON.

III.—Chester Ives to Frank Carpenter, managing editor of The Daily Scarflier, New York:

My Dear Old Boy—Here I am in Indianapolis, the second day out from New York, enjoying to the utmost the first real vacation I have had in ten years, thanks to Uncle John Draper, whose guest I am. We are reveling in the midst of a luxury that is simply ecstatic. If it were not for the motion, you would imagine yourself in some magical palace. You clap your hands, and lo, a black slave appears and spreads a banquet to which the ends of the earth have contributed their treasures. You press a button, and unlimited cigars and cooling drinks are at your elbow. If you want a magazine or today's paper, you have only to ask for it. A bath and a shave may be had for the wishing. All this while we are ambling along at the rate of 40 or 50 miles an hour. Truly we Americans are the greatest railroad travelers in the world, and we have certainly surrounded ourselves with "all the comforts of home" while rushing over the rails. The quarters are somewhat cramped, but as Draper's private secretary and I have the better part of an ordinary sleeper to ourselves, we can't complain.

Of course there's a fly in the ointment, and Reuben K. Filley is its name. I think I am pretty tolerant toward other men, but I distrust and detest that fellow, and I dare say he returns my dislike with interest. Nevertheless, we shall doubtless finish the trip without riot or bloodshed. Unless I am mistaken, he evinces a marked penchant for Miss Granniss, Uncle John's ward, whom you have met—and for her momentary attention he might as well make love to the statue of Liberty. She simply looks over him.

I hope Dennis is getting along all right with my work. Write or wire me at Denver if anything turns up. Faithfully yours, CHESTER IVES.

IV.—John Draper to Edward Gates, Esq., of Prodder, Gates & Prodder, New York:

(Personal and confidential.)

INDIANAPOLIS, May 12, 1900.

My Dear Gates—This communication, which will come to you bearing the Indianapolis postmark, treats of a subject very dear to me, though it necessarily partakes of the nature of a business letter.

As trustee with me of Miss Florence Granniss I beg to inform you that it is my intention, if possible, to make her my wife. She is of age and hence free to act for herself, but I consider it only right that you should be advised of my purpose. I don't imagine that you will advance any objections. I am old enough to know my own mind and am certainly as able to "support her in the style to which she has been accustomed" as the most jealous parent could wish. I need scarcely assure you that her private fortune will be most rigidly secured to her. When next I write, I hope to be able to ask you for your congratulations. Cordially yours, JOHN DRAPER.

V.—Telegram from Edward Gates, New York, to John Draper, St. Louis, in answer to foregoing:

Go in and win, and God bless you both. EDWARD GATES.

Reuben Filley kept the wires humming on his own account, but as his purposes and plottings will now appear it is not necessary to cite his various messages nor the replies they elicited. He was playing a deeply dangerous game. Detection meant ruin, disgrace and possibly condign punishment at the hands of the law.

Although in receipt of a handsome stipend from John Draper, he was not content. His was one of those devious and deceitful natures that prefer a



Filley was left to swear under his yellow beard and be arraigned.

Granniss could see anything repulsive in such an alliance never occurred to the conceited and self satisfied fellow. Beyond the usual conventional greetings and a few brief conversations at their casual meetings in her guardian's house there had been no intimate intercourse between them. Respecting the man her mind was a blank. On the other hand, Reuben Filley had dwelt so long on the idea of one day calling her his wife that the thought was become second only to his master passion, wealth getting. Not a gesture, not a glance, not a tone which passed between the millionaire and his ward escaped his vigilant and cunning eye. Of one thing, however, he became sure, there was no definite understanding between them as yet, though he shrewdly suspected that Draper would try to bring matters to a crisis during this trip. Well, so would he!

To this end he set out to make himself entertaining and at times verged on being positively brilliant. All through the meal the most trifling incidents or remarks served to remind him of a story or a pat illustration, and he drew upon his varied store of checkered experience so that he well nigh monopolized the conversation and flattered himself that he was making a good impression upon Florence. She laughed at his sallies of wit, appeared interested in his highly colored adventures and joined in his banter. But if he could have heard her confidential comment to Madge when the two were alone he would not have felt so elated.

"That man leaves a bad taste in one's mouth," she said. Wherein she but voiced Chester's private opinion, which was that Reuben "did not ring true."

The day wore on. The thrilling ascent of the Alleghanies was breast and the summit crossed ere nightfall. Then came the long descent to the Ohio valley, and while the party was at breakfast the next morning the train rolled into Indianapolis. While the engines were being changed every one alighted for a stroll. Draper and Miss Granniss led the way, then followed Chester and Madge, so that Filley was left to swear under his yellow beard and be amiable to Mrs. Bradley Hurst. The astute woman of the world saw through his discomfiture and took an especial delight in detaining him at her side, so that he had no speech with Florence, and the situation was unchanged when once more the limited took up the route for St. Louis over the Vandalla.

SECOND DAY.

THE MAIL AND THE TELEGRAPH.

By virtue of that omniscience necessarily possessed by every story teller we may be permitted to reveal the secrets entrusted to some of the letters sent flying eastward on that May morn-

"It is my intention, if possible, to make her my wife."

crooked road and a subterfuge to a direct path and complete candor. He was a gambler from choice, not from necessity, and scrupled not to avail himself of the "inside" information which it was so easy for one in his position to obtain and to use surreptitiously. But he longed for a larger sphere where he could handle and gamble with millions instead of with thousands.

About six months before this story opens what Filley vulgarly called a "snap" presented itself. A quarter interest in a stockbrokerage house was going begging, being offered for sale very cheaply. Yet the sum required was greatly beyond his means, but he resolved to "make a bluff" and capture the prize. Falsely representing to the members of the firm in question that John Draper was his "backer," he purchased the retiring partner's interest, paying \$50,000 down, raising the money with notes for the amount at six months, drawn by himself and purporting to bear the indorsement of John Draper. With the name of the great financier on their backs these notes were regarded on "the street" as "gilt edged paper," and Filley had no trouble in getting them discounted.

But the indorsements were skillfully forged, and Reuben K. Filley was the forger!

No announcement of his partnership in the new firm was to be made, at Filley's request, for six months. Everything was booming in the stock market, and by the end of the term he confidently hoped that his half yearly share of the profits would be enough or nearly enough to enable him to take up the notes when they fell due. Failing this they would be presented to their indorser for payment, and the forgery would be discovered. Of course it was imperative that he be on the spot to "keep the wires from sagging."

Judge then of his dismay when informed by John Draper that he was to accompany him to Denver! In one way the trip was fortuitous, as it would take his employer out of New York at a critical time. In six days the forged paper would mature and, even allowing for the usual three days of grace customary at that time, would be presented for payment before the date set for his return. But there was also the general risk of something going wrong at such a ticklish time. Hence Filley's determination to quit the car party on the first plausible pretext so as to hasten back to New York, take up his profits, redeem, destroy or renew the forged notes and thus protect his imperiled interests.

Once over this stile, he told himself, he could snap his fingers at John Draper and as a member of an old and honored firm enter the lists with him for the hand and fortune of Miss Granniss.

THIRD DAY.

SOLID COMFORT.

When Reuben Filley entered the door of the Miranda after enjoying a solitary smoke in the "emigrant car," as Madge Hurst dubbed the Pullman, he beheld the following tableau:

Mrs. Hurst, following the example of all good chaperons, was fast asleep on a divan, soothed to slumber by the rocking and humming of the train. Behind her couch sat Chester and Madge, she making desperate pretense of accomplishing some slight fancy work, but not making much progress owing to the fact that even the most skillful of needlewomen cannot work with one hand. Chester Ives had possessed himself of the other and at the moment when Filley entered was murmuring some words that brought a rosier color to Madge's cheeks and a softer glamour to her usually bright and dancing eyes.

Draper and Florence were at the farther end, she reclining in the easiest chair to be found, and he at her side, conversing earnestly in a low tone. Her gracefully poised head, the earnest eyes looking full into his, the mantling color in her cheeks and the half smile on her parted lips indicated that she was an interested listener, even as Desdemona hearkened to Othello of old. And yet all the world might have heard the burden of John Draper's speech. He was only telling her some of the adventures of days long gone by, when he and her father—the father she had never seen—were boys and young men together. From this starting point he went on to speak of their early struggles, when the foundations were laid of the great fortune Florence now possessed. Modest John never once alluded to the part borne by himself in adding to that fortune until now it needed seven figures to express it. But the girl divined all this, and when he ceased speaking she laid her hand caressingly on the back of his as it rested on the arm of her chair and murmured:

"How can I ever sufficiently thank you?"

To be continued.

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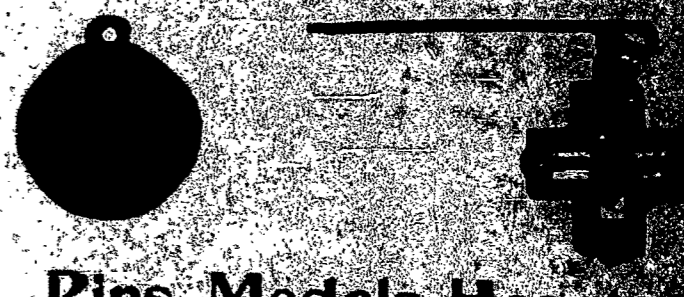
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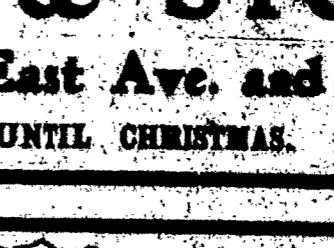
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