

THE GIRL AND THE GAME

A STORY OF MOUNTAIN RAILROAD LIFE
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SYNOPSIS.
Seagrove, during the little talk, had returned and sat examining reports at the other end of the library. He could overhear Rhinelander's reassuring words to Helen. "The Copper Range and Tidewater will continue operations just as fast as money can be raised," his uncle was saying. "We can begin the work of building the cut-off where it leaves the main line. Meantime, we will send out new surveying parties on reconnaissance to try to relocate the pass through the Superstition range. All may come well yet, little girl."

He patted her hand, rose and left her. Seagrove at a distance studied the outline of the slender figure and the striking silhouette of Helen's head and neck as she stood looking out on the rain-beaten landscape. He walked over to where she remained oblivious to his presence and ventured a few carefully chosen words of sympathy. Nothing so despicable, so pusillanimous as this had ever marked his career, but he had groaned himself for anything.

"I am in a position, Helen," he went on, "perhaps a better position than any among your father's friends, to take up his work where he left it off. His murderers are in jail—I will undertake to see to their punishment. His line can be made a valuable property. I am willing and able to provide the means to put it through. But I am alone, as you know. I care for no one other than you—I've told you that. Let me take your troubles. Be my wife."

"I have told you," she said, looking down but speaking quick and firmly, "that I can't listen to you on that subject. Could you possibly expect me to do so at a moment like this—my father—" her voice faltered—"scarcely buy!"

She put her handkerchief to her face and walked away. Swallowing his humiliation with a resolve to conquer her obstinacy yet, he followed her with his gaze up the stairs. Then he sauntered over to the table at which she had been conferring with his uncle. There lay the bundle of stock certificates. He felt so completely master of the situation that he involuntarily made a gesture as if to tear the batch in two.

Rhinelander, coming into the library at that moment from his room, saw the movement. He took the securities impatiently from Seagrove's hand. "You treat these as if they were waste paper. They are not. On the contrary, if I have my way that cut-off is going to be built," he declared emphatically.

Leaving him, Rhinelander went upstairs to find Helen. "Put these certificates away, my dear," he said with seriousness. "Although they don't stand for much now—" he paused—"some day I may call on you for them."

Seagrove, laughing a little to himself had turned, when his uncle walked away, to light a cigarette. As he did this a servant approached him bearing a shabby-looking, finger-marked note. It bore no address.

Seagrove opened the envelope and read:

"Somebody will have to help me out of here or I'll squeal. No more at present from SPIKE."

It was a blunt shock. But Seagrove knew from what Capelle, his lawyer, had told him, that this man meant always what he said. He pondered his dilemma for a time, decided what must be done, asked a servant for his hat and coat and hastening out headed his car for Cedar Grove, where Spike and Hyde lay incarcerated. Arranging by telephone as soon as he reached the little town for a meeting with Capelle, Seagrove inquired his way to the prison.

The jailer had brought Spike his noonday meal—a dish of stew, a loaf of soggy bread and a tin of coffee—and Spike was settling himself on his iron cot when Seagrove, with the jailer, entered his cell.

Greetings passed between Seagrove and Spike as they met and the two exchanged a few bluffing remarks, calculated to mislead the listening official. But Spike's roving eyes riveted themselves gradually on the bunch of jangling keys carried by the jailer in his hand. When the jailer looked his way, the bullet head of Spike was down and his eyes were fixed on the loaf of heavy bread from which he was tearing great chunks to eat. A thought had come into his head and if it could be successfully acted on, it offered a faint hope of escape. Watching his opportunity, he managed after some effort to make Seagrove understand what he wanted, i.e., that he should occupy for a while the jailer's attention.

In the meantime, while Spike's iron jaw was grinding at a chunk of the crust, he was tearing out the center of the loaf of bread with his hand and kneading the dough thus sliced within his palm. Seagrove made a good confederate, and without much trouble

engaged the jailer's interest. It was then that Spike, leaning back, managed, undetected, to pass the dough around the key that opened the lock of his own cell; in an instant he had the coveted impression.

A bell warned the jailer that the visitor's time was up. In parting, the confederates shook hands. As they did so, Spike slipped the dough, unobserved, into Seagrove's palm and succeeded in conveying to him by signs an intimation of what he had given him.

Capelle, who had arrived on Seagrove's peremptory summons, at the appointed place, some distance from the jail, awaited Seagrove there with a grin: "Some expedition you've embarked on!"

Seagrove was in no mood for joking. "One you shoved me into," he retorted surlily. He curtly told his confederate what had occurred. Then he drew from his overcoat pocket Spike's handful of dough, showed it to Capelle and explained what it was. "Have a key made tonight from this impression; meet me here tomorrow with it."

The following afternoon Seagrove was again at the jail—this time, ostensibly, to visit Hyde. Passing Spike's cell, a dust coat hanging somewhat ostentatiously from his arm, Seagrove paused to greet him. In doing this he took occasion to lay his fingers on one of the bars of the cell door; as he said good morning the new key dropped from his hand inside the barred door. Spike's foot at once covered it. Moving on, Seagrove let fall from his arm one of the two dust coats which he was in reality carrying. Spike, dropping like a cat on his knee, whipped the fallen garment swiftly in between the bars, and while Seagrove and the jailer remained with Hyde, Spike made a rapid change of clothing.

Slipping into the dust coat he found in one of the pockets a cap and a pair of goggles thoughtfully stowed. And watching his chance for the corridor to be empty, he cautiously unlocked his cell door, peered out and swung

Arthur Gaylord, Superintendent C. R. & T. R. R.:

"Dear Gay: The bearer, Miss Helen Holmes, wants work. Anything you can do will be appreciated. R."

Though her resolution had been to Spike, giving him money as he did so.

Rhinelander, as vice-president of the

Tidewater, had been charged with the

cut-off operations and took so lively

an interest in it that he personally di-

rected much of the work. Moreover,

he made it a point to keep his crews

well supplied with the sinews of war

—in this case, men and explosives for

the rock work. Both were scarce,

and much of the time the two roads

were bidding strongly against each

other for them. When Spike applied

to the tent office to Rhinelander's

foreman, Pickens, for a job, the latter,

though not impressed with his appear-

ance, thought it a chance to hire a

man away from the opposition, and

told Rhinelander he would put the

hurried words down on a pad:

"Runaway powder cars on fire. En-

gineer Storm on them. Ditch at first

gates."

She dropped her pencil as she fin-

ished, breathless with shock. Then

pulling her wits together she cast

about for help. She was quite alone

in the Signal station.

Shortly after Spike's appearance at

the time-keeper's window, the boss

driller came in to ask about new sup-

piles of explosives. "We're running

too low right now," he complained to

the foreman. "If we don't get pow-

der for tomorrow, we've got to stop

blasting, that's all there is to that."

Pickens turned to the new man:

"Hike over to the depot, mutt, and

ask the agent when he'll have dyna-

mite for me."

Spike shuffled across to the little

station with his usual confidence.

Helen, at her desk, glanced up at

him, without really recognizing him.

She was only conscious of an in-

stinctive dislike for his unpromising

visage as he asked her when more

explosives would be in.

"Tell Pickens," said the overworked

agent, answering Spike's questions

himself, "there are two cars for him

on No. 85." To make sure of the

answer, he wrote out the information on

a blank and handed it to the messenger.

"And get a move on you!" he

exclaimed rudely, as he noticed Spike's

unpleasant gaze resting on Helen.

Slouching back to deliver his mes-

sage, the safe-blower was still puz-

zed over the identity of the girl. But

he could not place her, and he dis-

missed thought of the incident. He

did, however, stop a moment to ask

questions about train No. 85 from a

passing switchman. Then he deliv-

ered his note to the foreman. Pickens

read and handed the note to Rhinelander. When Rhinelander handed the note back, the foreman crumpled it up and threw it away. As he

and Rhinelander went out together,

Spike picked up the paper and stuck

it in his pocket.

After hours that night he was

again over at the Colorado camp,

where the work was going provoking-

ly slow, to report to his real boss

Seagrove pricked up his ears at the

news of the explosives. He presently

looked hard at Spike. "If you, or you,

can delay their supplies a little," he

mused, "it might help here a lot just

now, Spike." Spike needed only a

hint. He started on foot for a small

station five miles up the line, where

he learned No. 85 usually took water

On his way he had an eye open for

a conceivable, cold-blooded chance

that might offer to wreck the train;

fortunately none inviting offered.

Reaching the water tank and prowl-

ing along the local train after it had

pulled up under the spout, Spike still

sought in some way to work mischie-

vous on it. His eye rested presently on

some waste protruding from a journal

box. Watching his chance, he struck

a match to this and moved

cautiously on.

Storm was in the engine cab. He

had received his signal from the con-

ductor and was pulling his train away

from the spout, when the conductor,

swinging up on the hind end of the

caboose, caught with his eye a color

of something from one of the wheels

of a box car ahead. Pulling the air

valve, he brought the train to an

emergency stop and with his brakeman

ran forward. Storm, looking back

for an explanation, likewise saw

the growing blaze, and getting down

joined the train crew. The flames

had begun to lick the body of the

car.

The trainmen were throwing sand

on the journal, but it was too late

for temporizing with experiments such

as that. Storm told them he would

back under the spout so they could

flame the flames and hastened back

to his cab. As rapidly as possible he

pushed the train up past the water

tank, where the conductor cut off the

hind end and signaled Storm ahead.

But a can of crude oil in the burning

car gave way at that moment under

the strain of the intense heat, and