

Munroe Kirk

Campmates: A Story of the Plains



Kirk Munroe

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Chapter I

A WEARY RIDE

Slowly and heavily the train rumbled on through the night. It was called an express; but the year was long ago, in the early days of railroading, and what was then an express would now be considered a very slow and poky sort of a train. On this particular night too, it ran more slowly than usual, because of the condition of the track. The season was such a wet one, that even the oldest traveller on the train declared he could not remember another like it. Rain, rain, rain, day after day, for weeks, had been the rule of that spring, until the earth was soaked like a great sponge. All the rivers had overflowed their banks, and all the smaller streams were raging torrents, red, yellow, brown, and sometimes milky white, according to the color of the clays through which they cut their riotous way. The lowlands and meadows were flooded, so that the last year's hay-stacks, rising from them here and there, were veritable islands of refuge for innumerable rabbits, rats, mice, and other small animals, driven by the waters from their homes.

And all this water had not helped the railroad one bit. In the cuts the clay or gravel banks were continually sliding down on the track; while on the fills they were as continually sliding out from under it. The section gangs were doubled, and along the whole line they were hard at work, by night as well as by day, only eating and sleeping by snatches, trying to keep the track in repair, and the road open for traffic. In spite of their vigilance and unceasing labor, however, the rains found plenty of chances to work their mischief undetected.

Many a time only the keen watchfulness of an engine-driver, or his assistant, the fireman, saved a train from dashing into some gravel heap, beneath which the rails were buried, or from plunging into some yawning opening from which a culvert or small bridge had been washed out. Nor with all this watchfulness did the trains always get through in safety. Sometimes a bit of track, that looked all right, would suddenly sink beneath the weight of a passing train into a quagmire that had been formed beneath it, and then would follow the pitiful scenes of a railroad wreck.

So nobody travelled except those who were compelled to do so, and the passenger business of this particular road was lighter than it had been since the opening. It was so light that on this night there were not more than half a dozen persons in the single passenger coach of the express, and only one of these was a woman. Another was her baby, a sturdy, wholesome-looking little fellow, who, though he was but a year old, appeared large enough to be nearly, if not quite, two. He had great brown eyes, exactly like those of his mother. She was young and pretty, but just now she looked utterly worn out, and no wonder. The train was twelve hours late; and, instead of being comfortably established in a hotel, at the end of her journey by rail, as she had expected to be before dark that evening, she was wearily trying to sleep in the same stuffy, jolting car she had occupied all day and had no hope of leaving before morning.

There were no sleeping-cars in those days, nor vestibuled trains, nor even cars with stuffed easy-chairs in which one could lie back and make himself comfortable. No, indeed; there were no such luxuries as these for those who travelled by rail at that time. The passenger coaches were just long boxes, with low, almost flat roofs, like those of freight cars. Their windows were small, and generally stuck fast in their frames, so that they could not be opened. There was no other means of ventilation, except as one of the end doors was flung open, when there came such a rush of smoke and cinders and cold air that everybody was impatient to have it closed again.

At night the only light was given by three candles that burned inside of globes to protect them from being extinguished every time a door was opened. There were no electric lights, nor gas, nor even oil-lamps, for the cars of those days, only these feeble candles, placed one at each end, and one in the middle of the coach. But worst of all were the seats, which must have been invented by somebody who wished to discourage railroad riding. They were narrow, hard, straight-backed, and covered with shiny leather.

In a car of this description the young mother, with her baby, had travelled a whole day, and nearly a whole night. It is no wonder then that she looked worn out, or that the baby, who had been so jolly and happy as to be voted a remarkably fine child by all the passengers, should have sunk into an exhausted sleep, after a prolonged fit of screaming and crying, that caused the few remaining inmates of the car to look daggers at it, and say many unkind things, some of which even reached the ears of the mother.

During the day there had been other women in the car, travelling for shorter or longer distances. To one of these, a lady-like girl who occupied an adjoining seat for some hours, and who was greatly interested in the baby, the young mother had confided the fact that this was his birthday, and also part of her own history. From this it appeared that she was the wife of an army officer, who was stationed with his regiment in the far West. She had not seen him for nearly a year, or just after the baby was born; but at last he had been ordered to a fort on the upper Mississippi River, where he hoped to remain for some time. Now his young wife, who had only been waiting until he could give her any sort of a home with him, had bravely set forth with her baby to join him. He had written her that, on a certain date in the spring, a detachment of troops was to start from St. Louis by steamboat for the fort at which he was stationed. As one of the officers of this detachment was to take his wife with him, he thought it would be a fine opportunity for her to come at the same time. She wrote back that she could not possibly get ready by the date named, but would come by a later boat. After she had sent the letter, she found that she could get ready; and, as the aunt with whom she was living was about to break up her home and go abroad, she decided to start at once for St. Louis. There she would join her husband's friends, travel with them to the far-away fort, and give the lonely soldier a joyful surprise. There was no time to send another letter telling him of her change of plan, and she was glad of it, for a surprise would be so much nicer.

The early part of her journey had been accomplished quite easily. There had been no rains in the East, such as were deluging the whole Ohio valley. If there had been, it is not likely the soldier's wife would have undertaken to travel at that time, and expose her precious baby to such terrible risks, even to carry out the surprise she anticipated so joyfully. From her aunt's house, in New York city, she had travelled by steamer up the Hudson to Albany. From there she took cars to Buffalo, and a lake boat to Cleveland. Now she was travelling by rail again, across the flooded state of Ohio towards Cincinnati. There she intended taking a steamboat down the Ohio River, and up the Mississippi to St. Louis, where she expected to join her husband's friends, on the boat that would carry them all to their journey's end.

The details of this plan were fully discussed by the occupants of the adjoining seats in the car, and when it came time for the one who was not going through to leave the train, and take another at a small junction, she had become so greatly interested in her new acquaintance that she begged the latter to write to her, and tell her how she got along. She wrote her own name and address on a bit of paper, just before leaving the car, and gave it to the soldier's wife; but, in her hurry, neglected to make a note of the name given her in return, and afterwards, when she tried to recall it, was unable to do so.

The tediousness of the weary day had been so much lessened by the making of this pleasant acquaintance, that for some time after her departure the young mother remained light-hearted and cheerful. The baby, too, was bright and happy, and a source of constant amusement, not only to her, but to all those about him.

After a while, though, when it grew dark, and the feeble candles were lighted, and most of the passengers had left the car, and the baby at first fretted and then screamed, refusing to be quieted for more than an hour, the exhausted young mother grew nervous and frightened. Only the thought of the glad meeting, and the great happiness awaiting her at the end of this tedious journey, enabled her to bear it as bravely as she did.

At length the babe cried himself to sleep, and the tired arms that had held him so long gladly laid him down in a nest made of shawls and his own dainty blanket on the opposite seat. This blanket had the initials "G. E." embroidered in one corner, though these did not stand for the baby's name. In fact, he had no first name, nor had he yet been christened. This ceremony having been postponed until both the father and mother could take part in it; the question of a name had also been left undecided until then. The young mother wanted her boy called "Gerald," after his father, and she had even embroidered the initial "G." on his blanket to see how it would look. Thus far, however, the baby was only called "baby," and had no right to any other name.

As the child slept quietly in spite of the jar and jolt and rumble of the train, the fair young head of the mother who watched so fondly and patiently over him gradually drooped lower and lower. The brown eyes, so like the baby's, closed for longer and longer intervals, until at length she, too, was fast asleep, and dreaming of the joy that awaited her journey's end.

Chapter II

A RUDE BAPTISM

There were others on that train equally weary with the young mother, and even more anxious; for they knew better than she the ever-present dangers of that water-soaked road-bed, and they bore the weight of a fearful responsibility.

The conductor, looking grave and careworn, started nervously at every lurch of more than ordinary violence, and kept moving uneasily from end to end of his train. He never passed the young mother and her sleeping babe without casting sympathetic glances at them. He had done everything possible for their comfort, but it was little enough that he could do, and for their sake, more than anything else, he wished the trip were ended.

All through the long, dark hours, the brake-men stood on the platforms of the swaying cars, ready at a moment's warning to spring to the iron brake-wheels. This crew of train hands had only come on duty at nightfall, and had little knowledge of the through passengers.

In the locomotive cab, gazing ahead with strained eyes, were the engine-driver, Luke Matherson, and his fireman. Every now and then the latter found a change of occupation in flinging open the furnace door and tossing chunk after chunk of wood into the glowing interior. As he closed the door he would stand for a moment and look inquiringly at his companion, who sat motionless, with his hand on the throttle, and his eyes fixed steadily on the lines of track gleaming in the light of the powerful headlight. Occasionally, without turning his head, he exchanged a few words with the fireman.

"It's a nasty night, Luke," remarked the latter.

"Yes. It wouldn't take many more such to make me give up railroading."

"What do you think of the Beasely cut?"

"I'm afraid of it, and wish we were well through it."

"Well, we'll know all about it in five minutes more, and after that there's nothing serious but Glen Eddy creek."

The silence that followed was broken, a few minutes later, by two piercing blasts from the whistle. The fireman had already seen the danger, and sprung to the brake-wheel on the tender behind him. On every car the brakes were grinding harshly, set up by nervous, lusty young arms. The train did not come to a standstill an instant too soon; for, as it did so, the cow-catcher was already half buried in a slide from one of the treacherous banks of the Beasely cut.

An hour's hard work by all the train hands, and some of the passengers, with shovels and spades, cleared the track, and once more the express proceeded slowly on its uncertain way.

Now for the Glen Eddy bridge. Between it and the city that marked the end of the line was the best stretch of road-bed in the state. It was a long one, but it presented no dangers that a railroad man need fear.

The gray dawn was breaking as the train approached Glen Eddy creek. In the summer-time it was a quiet stream, slipping dreamily along between its heavily wooded banks. Now it was a furious torrent, swollen beyond all recognition, and clutching spitefully at the wooden piers of heavy crib-work that upheld the single span of the bridge.

The train was stopped and the bridge was examined. It seemed all right, and the conductor gave the word to go ahead. It was the last order he ever issued; for, in another minute, the undermined piers had given way, and the train was piled up in the creek a shapeless wreck.

From that terrible plunge only two persons escaped unharmed. One was Luke Matherson, the engine-driver, and the other was the baby. When the former felt his engine dropping from under him, he sprang from it, with desperate energy, far out into the muddy waters, that instantly closed

over him. On coming to the surface, the instinct of self-preservation forced him to swim, but it was wildly and without an idea of direction or surroundings. For nearly a minute he swam with all his strength against the current, so that he was still near the wreck, when his senses were again quickened into action by a smothered cry, close at hand. At the same time a dark mass drifted towards him, and he seized hold of it. As the cry seemed to come from this, the man's struggles became directed by a definite purpose. Partially supporting himself by the wreckage, he attempted to guide it to the nearest bank; but so swift was the current that he was swept down stream more than a mile before he succeeded in accomplishing his purpose.

Finally his feet touched bottom, and he drew his prize to shore. It was a car seat, torn from its fastenings. Tightly wedged between it and its hinged back was a confused bundle, from which came a smothered wailing. Tearing away the wrappings, Luke Matherson stared for a moment, in a dazed fashion, at what they had held so safely. He could hardly believe that it was a live baby, lying there as rosy and unharmed as though in its cradle.

The sun had risen when the engine-driver, haggard, exhausted, with clothing torn and muddy, but holding the babe clasped tightly in his arms, staggered into the nearest farm-house, two miles back from the creek.

After his night of intense mental strain, the shock of the disaster, his plunge into the chilling waters, and his subsequent struggle to save the only surviving passenger of the train, it is not surprising that even Luke Matherson's strong frame yielded, and that for several weeks he was prostrated by a low fever. All this time the baby was kept at the farm-house with him, in order that he might be identified and claimed; but nobody came for him, nor were any inquiries made concerning the child. He was called "the Glen Eddy baby" by the few settlers of that sparsely populated region, who came to gaze at him curiously and pityingly. Thus those who cared for him gradually came to call him "Glen" for want of a better name; and, as the initials embroidered on the blanket saved with him were "G. E.," people soon forgot that Glen Eddy was not his real name.

Although several bodies were recovered from the wreck of the express, that of the young mother was not among them; and, as there was no one left alive who knew that she had been on the train, of course her death was not reported. Thus the mystery surrounding the Glen Eddy baby was so impenetrable that, after a while, people gave up trying to solve it, and finally it was almost forgotten.

When Luke Matherson recovered from his fever, nothing could induce him to return to his duties as engine-driver on the railroad.

"No," he said, "never will I put myself in the way of going through another such night as that last one."

He went to Cincinnati as soon as he was able to travel, and while there was offered a position in the engine-room of a large mill at Brimfield, in western Pennsylvania, which he accepted. The people of the farm-house where he had been ill were willing to keep the baby; but Luke Matherson claimed it, and would not give it up.

The babe had been given to him, if ever one had, he said; and, if no one else loved it, he did. Of course, if anybody could prove a better claim to it than his, he would be the last one to dispute it; but, if not, he would keep the child and do the very best by him he knew how. He had no folks of his own in the world, and was only too glad to feel that one human being would grow up to care for him.

The farm-house people lost track of Luke Matherson when he left Cincinnati. Thus when, some four months later, a broken-hearted man, who had with infinite pains traced his wife and child to that line of railroad, reached that part of the country, he could gain no further information except that a baby, who might have been his, was saved from the Glen Eddy disaster, but what had become of it nobody knew.

Chapter III

A BOY WITHOUT A BIRTHDAY

"It's no use, Glen," said the principal of the Brimfield High School, kindly, but with real sorrow in his tone. "Your marks in everything except history are so far below the average that I cannot, with justice to the others, let you go on with the class any longer. So unless you can catch up during the vacation, I shall be obliged to drop you into the class below, and we'll go all over the same ground again next year. I'm very sorry. It is a bad thing for a boy of your age to lose a whole year; for this is one of the most important periods of your life. Still, if you won't study, you can't keep up with those who will, that's certain."

The boy to whom these words were spoken was a squarely built, manly-looking chap, with brown curling hair, and big brown eyes. He was supposed to be seventeen years old, but appeared younger. Now his cheeks were flushed, and a hard, almost defiant, expression had settled on his face.

"I know you are right, Mr. Meadows," he said, at length. "And you have been very kind to me. It's no use, though. I just hate to study. I'd rather work, and work hard at almost anything else, then I would know what I was doing; but as for grinding away at stupid things like Latin and geometry and trigonometry and natural philosophy, that can't ever be of any earthly use to a fellow who doesn't intend to be either a professor or an astronomer, I can't see the good of it at all."

"No, I don't suppose you can now," replied the principal, smiling, "but you will find even those things of use some time, no matter what you may become in after-life. I will try and talk with you again on this subject before I go away; but now I must leave you. I hope for your sake, though, that you will think better about studying, and not throw away your chance to do so now, while it is comparatively easy. To win success in life you must study some time, and if you had stood anywhere near as high as Binney Gibbs I might have managed to offer you – "

"Excuse me, Mr. Meadows, but I must speak with you just a moment," here interrupted a voice, and put an end to the conversation between the principal and the boy who had allowed his distaste for study to bring him into disgrace.

As he walked away from the school-house, carrying all his books with him, for the term was ended and the long vacation had begun, the flush of mortification, called to his cheeks by Mr. Meadows's remarks, still reddened them. He felt the disgrace of his position keenly, though he had told the other boys, and had tried to make himself believe, that he did not care whether he passed the examinations or not. Now that he had failed to pass, he found that he did care. What was it that Mr. Meadows might have offered him? It couldn't be *that*, of course; but if it should have been! Well, there was no use in crying over it now. Binney Gibbs had been honored, and he was disgraced. It was bad enough to realize that, without thinking of things to make it worse. He was thankful when he reached home and had closed the front door behind him; for it seemed as though everybody he met must know of his disgrace, and be smiling scornfully at him.

He was a sensitive chap, was this Glen Eddy; for that was his name, and he was the same one who, as a baby, was rescued by Luke Matherson from the railroad wreck so many years ago. Most people called him Glen Matherson, and on the school register his name was entered as Glen Eddy Matherson; but, ever since his last birthday, when Luke had told him that he was not his real father, and had fully explained their relations to each other, the boy had thought of himself only as Glen Eddy.

The master mechanic of the Brimfield Mills, for such Luke Matherson now was, had meant to keep the secret of the boy's life to himself, at least for some years longer. Glen had, however, heard rumors of it, and had on one occasion been taunted by an angry playmate with the sneer that he was only a nobody who didn't belong to anybody, anyhow.

Glen had promptly forced this tormentor to acknowledge that he did not know what he was talking about; but the taunt rankled all the same. A few days afterwards, which happened to be the one that was kept as his seventeenth birthday, he told his father of it, and asked what it meant.

Then Luke Matherson, greatly troubled, but seeing that the secret could not be kept any longer from the boy, told him what he knew of his history. He ended with, "It is fifteen years ago this very day, Glen, that the terrible wreck took place; and, as you were then thought to be about two years old, I have called this your birthday ever since."

The boy was amazed and bewildered. No idea that the one whom he had always called "father" was not such in reality had ever entered his head; but now that the truth was told him, it seemed strange that he had not always known it instinctively. He had known that Mrs. Matherson was not his own mother, for he was five years old when she assumed that position, and of course he had always known that the two children were not his own sisters, though he loved them as dearly as though they were. But now to find out that he did not really belong to anybody was hard.

Who were his real parents? Were they alive? Could he find them? were questions that now began to occupy the boy's mind most of the time.

One of the strangest things about this state of affairs was to discover that his birthday was not his birthday after all. It seemed as though some foundation on which he had rested in absolute trust of its security had suddenly been swept from under him, and left him struggling in a stormy sea of uncertainty.

The idea of a boy without a birthday! Who ever heard of such a thing? How the other fellows would stare and smile if they knew it! Glen had been so proud of his birthday, too, and it had been made so much of at home. His favorite dishes were always prepared for the meals of that day, his tastes were consulted in everything that was done, and his father always made a point of giving him a more valuable present than even at Christmas. Why, on the last one, the very day on which the boy first learned how unreal the whole thing was, his father – no, his adopted father – had given him the dearest little silver watch that ever was seen.

Many times since learning such a sad lesson in the uncertainties of life, Glen had pulled this watch from his pocket, simply to assure himself of its reality, and that it was not a make-believe like his birthday.

But for his natural force of character and sweetness of disposition, Glen would have been a spoiled boy; for Luke Matherson had never been able, since the moment he first saw him lying helplessly on the floating car seat, to cross him in anything, or deny him whatever he asked if it lay in his power to grant it. With his own children Mr. Matherson was rather strict; but with the orphan lad who had shared with him the greatest peril of his life, he could not be.

Thus Glen had grown up to be somewhat impatient of restraint, and very much inclined to have his own way. He was also a brave, generous boy, and an acknowledged leader among his young companions. Was he not the best swimmer, the fastest runner, the most daring climber, and expert horseback-rider in Brimfield? Was he not captain of the baseball nine? and did not all the fellows admire him except one or two, who were so jealous of his popularity that they sought to detract from it?

One of those who were most envious of him was Binney Gibbs, son of the wealthy owner of the Brimfield Mills. He was taller than Glen, but was no match for him in anything that called for muscle or pluck. It was he who had flung the taunt of Glen's being a nobody at the boy. Binney had never been noted for his studious habits until both he and Glen entered the High School at the same time. Then, realizing that he could not excel at anything else, he determined to beat the other at his studies. To this end he strained every nerve with such effect that he not only outranked Glen in his own class, but, by working all through two long vacations, gained a whole year on him. So now, while poor Glen was threatened with being turned back from the second class, Binney Gibbs had just graduated at the

head of the first, and was ready to enter college. And the worst of it all was that everybody believed him to be a whole year younger than Glen, too.

To be sure, Binney was pale and thin, and no stronger than a cat. Why, he couldn't even swim; but what of it? Had he not beaten the most popular fellow in town away out of sight in this scholarship race? To crown his triumph another thing had happened to make Binney Gibbs the envy of all the boys in Brimfield, but particularly of Glen Eddy.

On that last day of school the diplomas had been awarded, and Binney's had been handed to him the first of all. As he was about to return to his seat, amid the loud applause of the spectators, Mr. Meadows asked him to wait a minute. So Binney stood on the platform while the principal told of a wonderful exploring expedition that was being fitted out at that moment, to go across the plains through the almost unknown territories of New Mexico and Arizona to California. It was to be the most famous expedition of the kind ever sent into the far West; and, as it was to be partly a government enterprise, all sorts of political influence was being used to obtain positions in it. It was to be commanded by a noted general, who was an old friend of Mr. Meadows.

"Now," said the principal, "the general writes that he will give a position in this party to the boy who stands highest in my school this year, or, if I cannot recommend him, or he does not choose to accept it, to any other whom I may name." Here Mr. Meadows was interrupted by prolonged applause.

When it had subsided, he continued. "There is no question as to which pupil of the school ranks highest this year. He stands before you now, with his well-earned diploma in his hand [applause], and it gives me great pleasure to be able to offer to Master Binney Gibbs a position in the exploring-party that will start from St. Louis two weeks from to-day, under command of my friend General Lyle. I hope that he may be induced to accept it, and that his parents may permit him to do so; for I cannot imagine a more fascinating or profitable way of spending a year at his time of life."

Chapter IV

"I JUST HATE TO STUDY."

Mr. Meadows's remarks in regard to the famous exploring expedition, about to be sent across the Western plains, were received with tremendous applause, and Binney Gibbs at once became an object of envy to every boy in the school – to say nothing of the girls. What a chance to have offered one just for doing a little hard study! If the other boys had known of it, how they, too, would have studied! Binney Gibbs would have been obliged to work harder than he had for his position! Yes, sir! ten times harder! – only think of it! Indians and buffalo and bears, and the Rocky Mountains, and all the other enchanted marvels of that far-away region. Why, just to contemplate it was better than reading a dime novel!

While these thoughts were racing through the minds of his companions, and while they were cheering and clapping their hands, the lucky boy himself was talking with Mr. Meadows, and telling him how much he should like to join that expedition, and how he hoped his father would let him do so.

Mr. Gibbs left his seat in the audience and stepped up to the platform, where he talked for a moment with Mr. Meadows. Then he spoke to Binney, and then, as he faced the school, they saw that he had something to say to them.

It was that he was proud of his son – proud of the honor shown to the school and to Brimfield through him – and that he should certainly allow Binney to accept the offered position.

So it was settled; and all the boys cheered again. To Glen Eddy it seemed that he would be willing to forego all the other good things that life held for him if he could only have the prospect of one such year of adventure as was promised to Binney Gibbs. For the first time in his life he was genuinely envious of another boy.

It was that same day, after everybody else had gone, that he had the talk with Mr. Meadows, in which the latter told him he must go back a whole year on account of not having studied; though, if he had, he might have been offered – And then came the interruption. Glen was too heart-sick and miserable to wait and ask what the offer might have been. Besides, he thought he knew, and the thought only added to his distress of mind, until it really seemed as though no boy could be much more unhappy than he.

Mr. Matherson knew how the boy stood in school, for the principal had thought it his duty to inform him; and that evening he and Glen had a long and serious talk.

"It's no use, father; I just hate to study!" exclaimed Glen, using the same words that had caused Mr. Meadows to look grave earlier in the day.

"I fancy we all hate a great many things that we have to do in this life," replied the master mechanic, "and you have certainly had a striking example to-day of the value of study."

"Yes, that's so," admitted Glen, reluctantly, "and if I had known that there was anything of that kind to be gained, perhaps I might have tried for it too."

"If I had been given your chance to study when I was young," continued the other, "and had made the most of it, I would have a better position to-day than the one I now hold. As it is, I have had to study mighty hard, along with my work, to get even it. I tell you, my boy, the chances come when you least expect them. The only thing to do is to prepare for them, and be ready to seize them as they appear. If one isn't prepared they'll slip right past him – and when once they have done that, he can never catch them again."

"But aren't there working chances just as well as studying chances, father?"

"Of course there are, and the study must always be followed by work – hard work, too – but the first is a mighty big help to the other. Now I will gladly do all that I can to help you on with your

studies, if you will study; but if you won't, you must go to work, for I can't afford to support you in idleness, and I wouldn't if I could."

"Well, I'll tell you what, father," said Glen, who was more inclined to take his own way than one proposed by somebody else, "if you can help me to the getting of a job, I'll try the work this summer, and when it comes time for school to open again, I'll decide whether it shall be work or study."

"All right, my boy, I'll do what I can to get you a place in the mill or in Deacon Brown's store, whichever you prefer."

Now that a definite kind of work was proposed, it did not seem so very desirable after all, and Glen doubted if he should like either the mill or the store. Still he did not say so, but asked for a day longer in which to decide, which was readily granted him.

At about the same time that evening, Binney Gibbs was saying to his father, with a self-satisfied air,

"Isn't it a good thing that I have stuck to my books as I have, and not wasted my time playing ball, or swimming, or doing the things that Glen Matherson and the other fellows seem to consider so important?"

"Well, yes," replied Mr. Gibbs, a little doubtfully, "I suppose it is. At the same time, Binney, I do wish you were a little stronger. I'm afraid you'll find roughing it pretty hard."

"Oh, yes, I suppose physical strength was the most important thing when you were young, father; but nowadays it's brain-work that tells," answered Binney, with a slight tone of contempt for his father's old-fashioned ideas. Binney was not a bad-hearted fellow – only spoiled.

The next day Glen did not feel like meeting any of his young companions. He wanted to think over the several problems that had been presented to him. So he wandered down to the river, where a fine new railroad-bridge, in the building of which he had been greatly interested, was now receiving its finishing touches. As he walked out towards the centre of the graceful structure, admiring, as he had a hundred times before, the details of its construction, its evident strength and airy lightness, he saw the engineer who had charge of the work standing, with a roll of plans under his arm, talking with one of the foremen.

Glen had visited the bridge so often that the engineer knew him by sight, and had even learned his name, though he had never spoken to him. He was, however, especially fond of boys, and had been much pleased with Glen's appearance. Several times he had been on the point of speaking to him, but had been restrained by the diffidence a man is so apt to feel in the presence of a stranger so much younger than himself. It is a fear that he may do or say something to excite the undisguised mirth or contempt that so often wait upon the ignorance of youth.

Without suspecting these feelings in him, Glen had been strangely attracted towards the engineer, whose profession and position seemed to him alike fascinating and desirable. He wished he could become acquainted with him, but did not know how to set about it. He, too, was diffident and fearful of appearing in an unfavorable light before the other, who was evidently so much older and wiser than he. But he did long to ask this engineer a great many questions.

Now he stood at a respectful distance and watched the young man, whose name he knew to be Hobart, and, wondering whether his position had been reached by study or work, wished he could think of some good excuse for speaking to him.

The floor of the bridge on which they were standing was about twenty-five feet above Brim River, the deep, swift stream that it spanned. Glen had swum and fished in it, and boated on it, until he knew its every current and slack-water pool. He knew it as well as he did the road to the village, and was almost as much at home in the one as on the other.

In order to consult a note-book that he drew from his pocket, Mr. Hobart laid his roll of plans on a floor-beam, at his feet, for a moment. Just then a little whirling gust of wind came along, and in an instant the valuable plans were sailing through the air towards the sparkling waters, that seemed to laugh at the prospect of bearing them away far beyond human reach.

The engineer tried in vain to clutch them as they rolled off the floor-beam, and uttered an exclamation of vexation as they eluded his grasp.

As he looked around to see what could be done towards their recovery, a boyish figure, without hat, jacket, or shoes, sprang past him, poised for an instant on the end of the floor-beam, and then leaped into space. Like a flash of light it shot downward, straight and rigid, with feet held tightly together, and hands pressed close against the thighs. A myriad of crystal-drops were flung high in the air and glittered in the bright sunlight as Glen, striking the water with the impetus of a twenty-five-foot fall, sank deep beneath its surface.

Chapter V

SWIMMING INTO A FRIENDSHIP

Although Glen found no difficulty in coming to the surface, almost at the spot where the roll of plans floated, and grasping it, he did not find it so easy to bring it safely to shore. To begin with, the roll occupied one hand, so that he had but one for swimming. Then the current was strong, and the banks steep. He was very near the middle of the river. Any other Brimfield boy would have been in despair at finding himself in such a situation. But, then, no other boy in Brimfield would have taken that leap.

For a moment Glen wondered what he should do. Then he remembered the "back-set" at the Bend, a quarter of a mile below the bridge. It would put him right in to the bank, at a place where it was low, too. The anxious watchers on the bridge wondered to see the boy turn on his back and quietly drift away with the current, at the same time holding the roll of plans, for which he had dared so much, clear of the water.

They shouted to him to swim towards one or the other bank and they would fling him a rope; but Glen only smiled without wasting any breath in answering. Most of the men ran to one end of the bridge, because it looked to them as though the boy were nearer that bank than the other; but Mr. Hobart, who had studied the river, remembered the Bend, and hurried to the other end. When he reached it he ran down along the bank, towards the place where he felt certain the boy would attempt to land. He got there in time to see Glen swimming with all his might to get out of the main current and into the "back-set." With two hands he would have done it easily; but with only one it was hard work. Then, too, his clothing dragged heavily.

Mr. Hobart shouted to him to let go the roll. "Drop it and make sure of your own safety," he cried. "They are not worth taking any risks for." But Glen was not the kind of a boy to let go of a thing that he had once made up his mind to hold on to, so long as he had an ounce of strength left.

So he struggled on, and at last had the satisfaction of feeling that something stronger than his own efforts was carrying him towards shore. He had gained the "back-set," and, though its direction was rather up along the bank, than in towards it, the swimmer had still strength enough left to overcome this difficulty.

A tree, growing straight out from the bank, overhung the stream, so that Glen at length drifted under it, and caught hold of a drooping branch. He had not strength enough to pull himself up; but it was not needed. With the activity that comes from a life spent in the open air, the engineer had run out on the horizontal trunk, and now, lying flat on it, he could just reach the boy's hand. In another minute the strong arms had drawn Glen up to a secure resting-place, where he might regain his breath and drip to his heart's content.

"Here are the plans, Mr. Hobart," he said, shyly, and at the same time proudly. "I hope they are not spoiled by the water. I held them out of it as much as I could."

"I hope you are not spoiled by the water, Glen Matherson," laughed the engineer, as he took the wet roll from the boy's hand. "You have done splendidly, and I am sincerely grateful to you for rescuing my plans, which are indeed of great value. At the same time I wouldn't do such a thing again, if I were you, for anything less important than the saving of life. It was a big risk to take, and I should have suffered a life-long sorrow if anything had gone wrong with you."

Although it was a warm June day, and Glen laughed at the idea of catching cold, he had been in the water long enough to be thoroughly chilled. So, when they regained the bank, Mr. Hobart insisted that he should take off his clothes, wring them, and let them dry in the hot sun. In the meantime a workman had come down from the bridge with the boy's hat, jacket, and shoes. He lent him his

overalls, and, thus comically arrayed, Glen sat and talked with the engineer while his clothes were drying.

How kindly the brown-bearded face was, and with what interest the man listened to all the boy had to say. How pleasant was his voice, and, in spite of his age (he was about thirty-five) and wisdom, how easy it was to talk to him! It was so easy, and he proved such a sympathetic listener, that before Glen knew it he found himself confiding all his troubles and hopes and perplexities to this new friend. It began with his name, which he told the engineer was not Matherson, and then he had to explain why it was not.

Then they wondered together what sort of a man Glen's real father could be, provided he were alive; and if, by any strange chance, he and his son would ever meet and know each other. Mr. Hobart did not think it at all likely they ever would. From this the boy was led to tell of his dislike for study, and into what trouble it had led him. He even told of the decision reached by his adopted father and himself the evening before, and the undesirable choice of work that had been presented to him.

"And so you don't think you would fancy either the mill or the store?" asked Mr. Hobart.

"No, sir, I do not. Each one, when I think of it, seems worse than the other, and they both seem worse than most anything else."

"Worse than studying?"

"Just as bad, because either of them means being shut up, and I hate to stay in the house. I should like some business that would keep me out-of-doors all the time."

"Ploughing, for instance, or driving a horse-car, or digging clams, or civil-engineering, or something nice and easy, like any of those?" suggested Mr. Hobart, gravely.

"Civil-engineering is what I think I should like better than anything else in the world!" exclaimed the boy, eagerly. "That's what you are, isn't it, sir?"

"That is what I am trying to be," answered Mr. Hobart, smiling; "and if, by years of hard work, hard study, and unceasing effort, I can reach a generally recognized position as an engineer, I shall be satisfied with my life's work."

"Do you have to study?" asked Glen, in amazement.

"Indeed I do," was the answer. "I have to study continually, and fully as hard as any schoolboy of your acquaintance."

Glen looked incredulous. It is hard for a boy to realize that his school is only the place where he is taught how to study, and that his most important lessons will have to be learned after he leaves it.

"I think I should like to be a civil-engineer, anyhow," he remarked, after a thoughtful pause, "because it is an out-of-door business."

"Yes," admitted the other, "it is to a great extent."

Then they found that Glen's clothing was dry enough to be worn, and also that it was dinnertime. So, after Mr. Hobart had shaken hands with the boy, and said he hoped to see him again before long, they separated.

That afternoon Glen, still wearing a perplexed expression on his usually merry face, walked down to the mill and looked in at its open door. It was so hot and dusty and noisy that he did not care to stay there very long. He had been familiar with it all his life; but never before had it struck him as such an unpleasant place to work in, day after day, month after month, and even year after year, as it did now. How hard people did have to work, anyway! He had never realized it before. Still, working in a mill must be a little harder than anything else. At any rate, he certainly would not choose to earn his living there.

Then he walked down to Deacon Brown's store. The deacon did a large retail business; this was a busy afternoon, and the place was filled with customers. How tired the clerks looked, and what pale faces they had. How people bothered them with questions, and called on them to attend to half a dozen things at once. How close and stuffy the air of the store was. It was almost as bad as that of the mill. Then, too, the store was kept open hours after the mill had shut down; for its evening trade was

generally very brisk. It did not seem half so attractive a place to Glen now as it had at other times, when he had visited it solely with a view of making some small purchase. Perhaps going to school, and keeping up with one's class, was not the hardest thing in the world after all.

So the poor boy returned home, more perplexed as to what he should do than ever, and he actually dreaded the after-supper talk with his adopted father that he usually enjoyed so much.

When the time came, and Mr. Matherson asked, kindly, "Well, my boy, what have you decided to do?" Glen was obliged to confess that he was just as far from a decision as he had been the evening before.

Chapter VI

RECEIVING AN OFFER AND ACCEPTING IT

"Well, that is bad," said the master mechanic, when Glen told him that he had been unable to arrive at any decision in regard to going to work. "It is bad, for I can't see that there is anything open to you just now, except one of the two things we talked about last evening. At the same time, I hate to compel you, or even persuade you, to do anything that is hard and distasteful. If you were a year younger, I should say, 'Spend your vacation as you always have done, and have as good a time as you know how, without worrying about the future.' At seventeen, though, a boy should begin to look ahead, and take some decisive step in the direction of his future career. If he decides to study, he should also decide what he wants to study for. If he decides to work, he should have some object to work for, and should turn all his energies in that direction. I declare, Glen, I hardly know how to advise you in this matter. Do you think of any particular thing you would rather do, or try to be? If so, and I can help you to it, you know how gladly I will, in every way that lies in my power."

"It seems to me I would rather be a civil-engineer than anything else," answered the boy, a little hesitatingly.

"A civil-engineer!" exclaimed the other, in surprise; "why, Glen, lad, don't you know that it takes the hardest kind of study to be that?"

Just then their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a visitor, who, to Glen's surprise, was none other than Mr. Hobart, the engineer whose position he had been thinking of as one of the most desirable in the world.

After a few moments' pleasant chat the visitor asked Mr. Matherson if he could have a private business talk with him. So Glen left the room, and wandered restlessly about the house, filled with a lively curiosity as to what business the engineer could have with his adopted father.

In the meantime Mr. Hobart was saying, "I have known your son for some time by sight, Mr. Matherson, and took a fancy to him from the first. We only got acquainted to-day, when he performed an act of daring in my presence, and at the same time rendered me an important service. I find him to be exactly such a boy as I supposed he was; a generous-hearted, manly fellow, who is just now unhappy and discontented because he has no particular aim in life, and does not know what he wants to do."

"Yes," said Mr. Matherson, "that is just the trouble; and the worst of it is that I don't know what to advise him."

"Then, perhaps, I am just in time to help you. My work here is about finished, and in a few days I am to leave for Kansas, where I am to take charge of a locating-party on one of the Pacific railroads. If you are willing to let Glen go with me, I can make a place for him in this party. The pay will only be thirty dollars per month, besides his expenses; but, by the end of the summer, I believe he will have gained more valuable knowledge and experience than he could in a year of home and school life. I believe, too, in that time I can show him the value of an education and the necessity of studying for it. Now, without really knowing anything about it, he thinks he would like to become a civil-engineer. After a few months' experience in the unsettled country to which I am going he will have seen the rough side of the life, and can decide intelligently whether he desires to continue in it or not."

Mr. Matherson could hardly restrain his delight at the prospect of such an opening for the boy whom he loved so dearly; but he was too honest to let him start out under false colors; so he said,

"I can never tell you how grateful I am for this offer, sir; but I don't want you to think that my boy is any better than he really is. He is not a good scholar, and seems to lack application. Even now he is in danger of being turned back a whole year in school because he has failed to keep up with his class."

"I know all that," replied Mr. Hobart, smiling; "and it is one of the reasons why I want him to go with me. I was very much such a boy myself, and think I understand his state of mind perfectly. He has reached the most trying period of his life, and the one where he most needs encouragement and help. He has a sufficiently good education to build on, and is bright enough to comprehend things that are clearly explained to him. As for his having no knowledge of the peculiar studies necessary for an engineer, I am glad that he hasn't. I believe that it is better for all boys to gain some practical knowledge of the business they intend to follow before they really begin to study for it. A few months or a year of practice shows them in what they are deficient and what they need to learn. I could get plenty of young fellows to go out to Kansas with me who are crammed with theoretical knowledge of surveying and engineering, but who are ignorant of its practice. Such chaps think they know it all, and are impatient of criticism or advice. I can get along better with one who knows little or nothing to begin with, but who is bright and willing to learn. In the end I will guarantee to make such a one the more valuable engineer of the two."

"It is a new idea to me," said Mr. Matherson, reflectively, "but I believe you are right."

"There is another reason why I fancy your boy, and think I can make an engineer of him," continued Mr. Hobart. "His physical condition seems to me to be perfect. As they say of prize animals, he seems to be sound in wind and limb, and without a blemish. Now, the life of an engineer, particularly in unsettled countries, is a hard one. He is exposed to all sorts of weather; must often sleep without a shelter of any kind, and must work hard from early dawn until late at night, sometimes on a scanty allowance of food. It is as hard as, and in many cases harder than, active service in the army. It is no life for weaklings, and we do not want them; but, from what I have seen of your boy, I do not believe that even you can point out any physical defect in his make-up."

"No, I certainly cannot," replied Mr. Matherson, heartily, glad of a chance to praise his boy without qualification, in at least one respect. "I believe him to be physically perfect, and I know that there is not a boy of his age in town who is his match in strength, agility, or daring."

"So you see," laughed the engineer, "he is exactly the boy I want; and if you will let him go with me I shall consider that you have conferred a favor."

"Of course I will let him go, sir, and shall feel forever grateful to you for the offer."

Thus it was all settled, and Glen was summoned to hear the result of the few minutes' conversation by which the whole course of his life was to be changed. By it, too, he was to be lifted in a moment from the depths of despondency and uncertainty to such a height of happiness as he had not dared dream of, much less hope for. The moment he entered the room he was assured, by the smiling faces of its occupants, that their topic of conversation had been a pleasant one; but when its nature was explained to him he could hardly credit his senses.

Would he like to go out to Kansas for the summer? – to a land still occupied by wild Indians and buffalo? The idea of asking him such a question! There was nothing in the whole world he would like better! Why, it was almost as good as the position offered to Binney Gibbs; and, certainly, no boy could ever hope for anything more splendid than that. In two respects he considered himself even more fortunate than Binney. One was that he was to go with Mr. Hobart, whom he had come to regard with an intense admiration as one of the wisest and kindest of men. The other was that they were to start on the third day from that time, while Binney would not go for nearly two weeks yet.

What busy days the next two were! How Glen did fly around with his preparations! How interested Mr. Hobart was, and how he laughed at many of the excited boy's questions! Ought he to have a buckskin suit and a broad-brimmed hat? Should he need any other weapons besides a revolver and a bowie-knife? Would it be better to take long-legged leather boots or rubber-boots, or both? How large a trunk ought he to have?

His outfit, prepared by Mr. Hobart's advice, finally consisted of two pairs of double blankets, rolled up in a rubber sheet and securely corded, two pairs of easy, laced walking-shoes, and one pair of leather leggings, three flannel shirts, three suits of under-clothing, and six pairs of socks, one warm

coat, two pairs of trousers, a soft, gray felt hat, half a dozen silk handkerchiefs, and the same number of towels. Of these he would wear, from the start, the hat, coat, one of the flannel shirts, one of the two pairs of trousers, a suit of under-clothing, one of the silk handkerchiefs knotted about his neck, and one of the pairs of shoes. All the rest could easily be got into a small leathern valise, which would be as much of a trunk as he would be allowed to carry.

He would need a stout leather belt, to which should be slung a good revolver in a holster, a common sheath-knife, that need not cost more than thirty cents, and a small tin cup that could be bought for five.

Besides these things, Mrs. Matherson, who loved the boy as though he were her own, tucked into the valise a small case of sewing materials, a brush, comb, cake of soap, tooth-brush, hand-glass, and a Testament in which his name was written.

On the very day of his departure his adopted father presented the delighted boy with a light rifle of the very latest pattern. It was, of course, a breech-loader, and carried six extra cartridges in its magazine. In its neat canvas-case, Glen thought it was the very handsomest weapon he had ever seen, and the other boys thought so too.

With them he was the hero of the hour, and even Binney Gibbs's glittering prospects were almost forgotten, for the time being, in this more immediate excitement.

Of course they all gathered at the railway station to see him start on the morning of the appointed day. It seemed as though almost everybody else in the village was there, too. Binney Gibbs was among the very few of Glen's acquaintances who did not come. So, amid tears and laughter, good wishes and loud cheerings, the train rolled away, bearing Glen Eddy from the only home he had ever known towards the exciting scenes of the new life that awaited him in the far West.

Chapter VII

ACROSS THE MISSISSIPPI

Never before, since he was first carried to Brimfield as a baby, had Glen been away from there; so, from the very outset, the journey on which he had now started, in company with Mr. Hobart, was a wonderful one. In school, besides history, he had enjoyed the study of geography, being especially fond of poring over maps and tracing out imaginary journeys. In this way he had gained a fair idea of the route Mr. Hobart and he were to pursue, as well as of the cities and other places of interest they were to see. There was one place, however, for which he was not prepared. It was early in the first night of the journey, and the boy had just fallen into a doze in his sleeping-car berth. As the night was warm, and there was no dust, the car door was open, and through it came a sudden shout of "Glen Eddy! Glen Eddy!"

As Glen started up, wide awake, and answering "Here I am," the train rumbled over a bridge. Then it stopped, and the meaning of the shout flashed into the boy's mind. He was at the very place where, so long ago, he had lost a father or mother, or both. All the details of that awful scene, as described by his adopted father, appeared vividly before him, and he seemed to see, through a gray dawn, the mass of splintered wreckage nearly covered by angry waters, the floating car seat with its tiny human burden, and the brave swimmer directing it towards land.

The train stopped but a moment, and then moved on. As it did so, Glen, who was in an upper berth, heard a deep sigh, that sounded almost like a groan, coming apparently from a lower berth on the opposite side of the car.

Directly afterwards he heard a low voice ask, respectfully, "What is it, Governor? Are you in pain? Can I do anything?"

"Nothing, Price, thank you. I had a sort of nightmare, that's all," was the reply, and then all was again quiet.

Glen wished he might catch a glimpse of the person who spoke last, for he had never seen a governor, and wondered in what way he would look different from other men. He would try and see him in the morning. Thus thinking, he fell asleep.

The next morning he was awakened by Mr. Hobart, and told to dress as quickly as possible, for they were within a few miles of East St. Louis, and would soon cross the Mississippi. This news drove all other thoughts from the boy's mind, and he hurried through his toilet, full of excitement at the prospect of seeing the mightiest of American rivers.

There was no bridge across the Mississippi then, either at St. Louis or elsewhere. Great four-horse transfer coaches from the several hotels were waiting for passengers beside the train where it stopped, and these were borne to the opposite bank by a steam ferry-boat with a peculiar name and of peculiar construction. The *Cahokia* looked like a regular river steamer, except that she had no visible paddle-wheels, not even one behind, like a wheelbarrow, as some of the very shoal-draught boats had. For some time Glen could not discover what made her go, though go she certainly did, moving swiftly and easily across the broad expanse of tawny waters towards the smoky city on its farther bank. He would not ask Mr. Hobart, for he loved to puzzle things out for himself if he possibly could. At length he discovered that the boat was double-hulled, and that its single paddle-wheel was located between the two hulls. Glen was obliged to ask the object of this; but when he was told that it was to protect the wheel from the great ice-cakes that floated down the river in winter, he wondered that he had not thought of that himself.

So he forgot to look for his governor, or ask about him until they reached the hotel where they were to get breakfast and spend a few hours. Then he was told that the person in whom he was interested was probably General Elting, who had just completed a term of office as governor of one

of the territories, and who was now acting as treasurer of the very railroad company for which he was to work.

Glen regretted not having seen the ex-governor, but quickly forgot his slight disappointment in the more novel and interesting things that now attracted his attention. He had never been in a city before, and was very glad of a few hours in which to see the sights of this one; for the train that was to carry them to Kansas City would not leave until afternoon.

As the offices of the company by whom Mr. Hobart was employed were in St. Louis, he was obliged to spend all his time in them, and could not go about with Glen. So, only charging him to be on hand in time for the train, the engineer left the boy to his own devices.

Glen spent most of his time on the broad levee at the river's edge, where he was fascinated by the great steamboats, with their lofty pilot-houses, tall chimneys, roaring furnaces, and crews of shouting negroes, that continually came and went.

This seemed to be their grand meeting-point. On huge placards, swung above their gang-planks, Glen read that some of them were bound for New Orleans and all intermediate ports. Then there were boats for the Red, Arkansas, Yazoo, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and a dozen other rivers, tributary to the great Father of Waters. Still others were bound for Northern ports, even as far as distant St. Paul, in Minnesota.

Two o'clock found the boy at the railway station, standing beside the car in which all his belongings were already safely deposited, waiting anxiously for Mr. Hobart. Just as the train was about to start, that gentleman rushed into the station.

"Jump aboard, Glen," he said, hurriedly, "and go on to Kansas City with the baggage. Here is your pass and a note to Mr. Brackett. Report to him at the Kaw House. I am detained here by business, but will join you to-morrow or next day. Good-bye."

The train was already in motion, and in another moment the boy had lost sight of his only friend in that part of the world, and was whirling away towards an unknown destination. He felt rather lonely and forlorn at thus being cast upon his own resources, but at the same time he felt proud of the confidence reposed in him, and glad of an opportunity to prove how well he could take care of himself.

For several hours he was interested in watching the rapidly changing features of the landscape; but after a while he grew weary of this, and began to study his fellow-passengers. There were not many in the sleeper, and the only ones near him in whom he took an interest were a little girl, five or six years old, who was running up and down the aisle, and a lady, evidently the child's mother, who sat opposite to him. As he watched the little one she tripped and would have fallen had he not sprung forward and caught her. The child smiled at him, the mother thanked him, and in a few minutes he found himself playing with the former and amusing himself in entertaining her.

She told him that her name was Nettie Winn; but that her papa, who lived a long way off, and whom she was going to see, called her "Nettle." She was a bright, sunny-haired little thing, who evidently regarded elder people as having been created especially for her amusement and to obey her orders. As, in obedience to one of these, the boy carried her in his arms to the forward end of the car that she might look out of the window in the door, a fine-looking middle-aged gentleman spoke to him, remarking that he seemed very fond of children.

"Yes, sir, I am," answered Glen, "for I have two little sisters at home."

They exchanged a few more words, and Glen was so attracted by the stranger's appearance and manner that after the tired child had gone to sleep with her head in her mother's lap, he again walked to the end of the car in hopes that the gentleman might be inclined to renew their conversation. Nor was he disappointed; for the stranger welcomed him with a smile, made room on the seat beside him, and they were soon engaged in a pleasant chat.

It is not hard for a man of tact to win the confidence of a boy, so that, before long, the gentleman knew that this was Glen's first journey from home, and that he was going to Kansas to learn to be an engineer.

"Do you mean a civil-engineer?" he asked, "or an engine-driver?"

"Oh, a civil-engineer, of course!" answered the boy; "for I can run a locomotive now, almost as well as father, and that used to be his business."

Then he explained that his father, who was now a master mechanic, had given him careful instruction in the art of running a pony switch engine that belonged to the Brimfield Mills, and that once, when the engine-driver was ill, he had been placed in charge of it for a whole day.

"That is a most useful accomplishment," remarked the gentleman, "and one that I should be glad to acquire myself."

When the train stopped at an eating station they went in to supper together, and Glen began to think that, in his new friend, he had found a second Mr. Hobart, which was the very nicest thing he could think about anybody.

The boy did not forget to carry a cup of tea and a glass of milk into the car for Mrs. Winn and Nettie, for which act of thoughtfulness he was rewarded by a grateful smile and hearty thanks.

He wondered somewhat at the several men who every now and then came into the car and exchanged a few words in low tone with his other train acquaintance, and also wondered that the gentleman should leave the car and walk towards the forward end of the train every time it stopped at a station.

Glen was so tired that he had his berth made up and turned in very early; but for a long time found himself unable to sleep, so busy were his thoughts. At length, however, he fell into a sound, dreamless slumber, that lasted for hours, though he knew nothing of the passage of time.

He was suddenly awakened by a loud noise, and found himself sitting bolt upright in his berth, listening, bewildered and half frightened, to a confused sound of pistol-shots, shouts, and screams. The train was motionless. The screams were evidently those of fright, and came from the car he was in, while the other and more terrifying sounds reached his ears from some distance.

Chapter VIII

GLEN RUNS A LOCOMOTIVE

Springing from his berth, Glen began hastily to put on his shoes and the few articles of clothing he had laid aside. Several other passengers were doing the same thing, and each was asking the others what had happened; but nobody knew. All the alarming sounds had now ceased, even the women who had screamed being quiet, in the hope of discovering the cause of their terror.

Glen was the first to leave the car, and, seeing a confused movement of lanterns at the forward end of the train, he began to run in that direction. It was still dark, though there were signs of dawn in the sky. The train was not stopped at a station, but in a thick woods. As the boy reached the baggage-car, he was horrified to see that several men were lifting a limp and apparently lifeless body into it. The sight made him feel sick and faint. He stood for a moment irresolute. Then, two men, one of whom carried a lantern, came rapidly towards him.

"Here he is, now!" exclaimed one of them, as the light from the lantern fell on the boy's face. Glen recognized the voice. It was that of his recent acquaintance. Now he was coatless and bare-headed. In his hand was a Colt's revolver. The other man was the conductor of the train.

"This gentleman says you can run a locomotive. Is that so?" asked the conductor, holding up his lantern and scanning Glen's face keenly.

"Yes," answered the boy, "I can."

"Well, it looks like taking an awful risk to trust a boy as young as you; but I don't know what else we can do. Our engineer has just been killed, and the fireman is badly wounded. Two more men are hurt, and we've got to get them to a doctor as quick as we can. It's fifty miles to Kansas City, and there's only one telegraph station between here and there. It's ten miles ahead. We'll stop there, and send a despatch. Will you undertake to run us in?"

"Let me look at the engine first, and then I'll tell you," answered Glen, his voice trembling with excitement in spite of his efforts to appear calm.

The three went to the panting locomotive and swung themselves up into its cab. Glen shuddered as he thought of the tragedy just enacted in that cab, and almost drew back as he entered it. Then, controlling himself by a determined effort, he gauged the water, tested the steam, threw the lever over and back, opened the furnace door, glanced at the amount of fuel in the tender, and did it all with such a business-like air and appearance of knowing what he was about as to inspire both the men, who were watching him closely, with confidence.

"Yes," he said at length, "I'll take her in; but we shall need some more water."

"Good for you, son!" cried the conductor. "You're a trump! and I for one believe you'll do it."

"So do I," said the passenger; "and I'm thankful we've got such a plucky young engine-driver along."

"But who will fire?" asked Glen, hardly hearing these remarks, though, at the same time, sufficiently conscious of them to feel gratified that he had inspired such confidence.

"I will," replied the passenger, promptly.

"You, general!" cried the conductor in astonishment.

"Certainly! Why not I as well as another?"

"Very well," responded the conductor, "I'm only too glad to have you do it, if you will; then let us be off at once." And, springing to the ground, he shouted, "All aboard! Hurry up, gentlemen, we are about to move on."

But Glen would not start until he had taken a flaring torch and the engine-driver's long-nosed oil-can, and walked all around the locomotive, examining every part of the huge machine, pouring on a little oil here and there, and making sure that everything was in perfect working order.

Then he again swung himself into the cab, pulled the whistle lever for one short, sharp blast, opened the throttle slowly, and the train was once more in motion.

It had hardly gone a hundred yards before two rifle-shots rang out of the forest, and one ball crashed through both windows of the cab, but without harming its occupants. Glen started; but his hand did not leave the throttle, nor did his gaze swerve for an instant from the line of gleaming track ahead. He had no time then to think of his own safety. He was too busy thinking of the safety of those so suddenly and unexpectedly intrusted to him.

The new fireman glanced at him admiringly, and murmured to himself, "That boy is made of clear grit. I would that I had a son like him."

This man, who was heaving great chunks of wood into the roaring furnace with the strength and ease of a trained athlete, formed no unpleasant picture to look upon himself. He was tall and straight, with a keen, resolute face, an iron-gray, military moustache, and close-cropped hair. He looked not only like a soldier, but like one well accustomed to command. At the same time he obeyed promptly, and without question, every order issued by the young engine-driver on the opposite side of the cab.

As the train dashed along at full speed there was no chance for conversation between the two, even had they felt inclined for it. Both were too fully engaged in peering ahead along the unfamiliar line of track to pay attention to aught else.

Presently the conductor clambered over the tender from the baggage-car, and stood in the cab with them, to post Glen as to the grades and crossings.

It lacked a few seconds of fifteen minutes from the time of their starting, when they slowed down for the telegraph-station, the lights of which were twinkling just ahead. Here, while the conductor roused the operator, and sent his despatch, the locomotive was run up to the tank, and a fresh supply of water was taken aboard.

Then they were off again – this time for a run of forty miles without a stop or check. Daylight was coming on so rapidly now that the track was plainly visible by it, and thus one source of anxiety was removed.

Up to this time Glen had no idea of what had happened, nor of the cause of the shooting that had resulted so disastrously. Now, though he did not turn his head, he learned, from the conversation between the conductor and his fireman, whom the former called "General," that an attempt had been made to rob the train of a large sum of money that the latter had placed in a safe in the express-car. He had received secret information that such an attempt would probably be made, and had engaged two detectives in St. Louis to guard his treasure. When the train was stopped in the woods by a danger signal waved across the track, the engine-driver had been ordered by the would-be robbers, who had cut the express-car loose from those behind it, to go ahead. His refusal to obey them had cost him his life, and the fireman an ugly wound.

The general, who left the sleeper, and ran ahead at the first alarm, had shot and severely injured two of the robbers, and with the aid of his men had driven the rest to the shelter of the forest after a few minutes sharp fighting. The three wounded men, together with the body of the dead engine-driver, were now in the baggage-car; while the train-load of passengers, thanks to the practical knowledge of a sixteen-year-old boy, and the pluck that enabled him to utilize it, were rapidly nearing their journey's end in safety.

An anxious crowd was gathered about the Kansas City station as the train rolled slowly up to its platform. The general wrung Glen's hand warmly as he said,

"God bless you, boy, for what you have just done. I will see you again in a few minutes. Now I must look after the wounded men."

Thus saying, he sprang to the platform, leaving Glen in the cab of the locomotive; but when he returned, fifteen minutes later, the boy had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found.

Chapter IX

KANSAS CITY IN EARLY DAYS

The reason that Glen Eddy disappeared after running that engine so splendidly, and bringing the night express safely to its destination, was that he was diffident and nervous. Now that the strain was relaxed and he had time to think of the terrible risks run by that train while under his inexperienced guidance, he was seized with a sudden fright. Queerly enough, he felt almost guilty, as though he had done something wrong, or to be ashamed of. Suppose somebody should try to thank him. Suppose the crowd, now surging about the door of the baggage-car, should turn their attention to him, and come to gaze at him as a part of the show that had attracted them. What should he do in either case? It would be unbearable. He must make good his escape before either of these things happened.

The wounded men were being carefully lifted from one side of the baggage-car. Everybody's attention was for the moment directed to that spot. So Glen slipped down from the locomotive cab on the opposite side, and ran back to the sleeper in which were his belongings. The car was deserted and empty. Its passengers, and everybody connected with it, had either gone up town or joined the curious throng about the baggage-car. Thus nobody saw the boy, as, securing his valise and rifle, he slipped from the rear end of the car and walked rapidly away. He plunged into one of the tunnel-like streets running back from the railroad, not knowing, nor caring, where it would lead him. His only idea was to escape, he did not even know from what. It had so taken possession of him, that he almost felt as though he were being pursued, with the danger, at any moment, of being overtaken, and dragged ignominiously back to be – thanked and made a hero of.

Kansas City, which has since enjoyed such an astonishing growth and prosperity, was at that time very young. It was still burrowing through the high and steep bank of stiff red clay that separated its river front from the main street of the newer portion perched on the bluff. Several cross streets, connecting these two parts of the city, had been dug out with infinite labor, to a great depth through the red clay, and it was up one of these that Glen now walked.

He was so far below the level of the airy building-lots on either side that he could not see whether they were occupied or not. Only an occasional long flight of wooden steps, leading up from the street, led him to suppose they might be. He was beginning to wonder where the city was, or if there were any more of it beyond the straggling business street that bordered the railroad, when he came to the main thoroughfare of the new town, and gazed about him with amazement. Although it was yet so early that the sun had only just risen, the broad avenue presented a scene of the most lively activity.

In Brimfield the erection of a new house, or building of any kind, was a matter of general interest that afforded a topic of conversation for weeks. Here were dozens, yes, scores of them, springing up in every direction. A few were of brick; but most of those intended for business purposes were long and low, though furnished with pretentious false fronts that towered as high again as the roof itself. Everywhere was heard the din of hammer and saw, or the ring of the mason's trowel, and in every direction Glen could see the city growing, spreading, and assuming new aspects as he gazed.

At length a pang of hunger recalled him to his present situation, and he inquired of a man, who was hurrying past, the way to the Kaw House.

"Up there a piece," answered the man almost without pausing, and pointing vaguely up the street. "There comes the surveyor's wagon from there now," he added, nodding his head towards one, drawn by two mules, that was dashing in their direction at that moment.

The surveyor's wagon. Then, perhaps, Mr. Brackett was in it, thought Glen. Acting on the impulse of the moment, he sprang into the middle of the street, and waved his rifle in the faces of the advancing mules. The driver reined them in sharply, and the team came to a standstill. "Hello, young fellow, what do you want now?" he shouted.

"I want to know if Mr. Brackett is in this wagon," answered Glen.

"Yes, he is, and that's my name," said a pleasant-faced young man, dressed in a red-flannel shirt, a pair of army trousers tucked into his boot-legs, and what had once been a stylish cutaway coat, who sat beside the driver. "What can I do for you?"

For answer Glen handed him Mr. Hobart's note, which the young man glanced quickly through.

"I see by this that you are to be a member of our party," he said, as he finished reading it, "and that the chief will not be here for a day or two yet. I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Matherson. Boys, this is Mr. Glen Matherson, our new – Well, we will see what position he will occupy later. Now, Matherson, we are off for our day's work. Would you rather accompany us into the thick of the fray, or will you wend your weary way to the hotel, and while away the hours until our return, surrounded by its gloomy grandeur?"

"I think I would rather go with you, sir," replied Glen, who did not know whether to laugh or not at Mr. Brackett's words and tone.

"'Tis well, and go with us you shall. So tumble into the chariot, and stow yourself away wherever you can find room. Then let us on with speed."

"But I left Mr. Hobart's things and some of my own on board the train," said Glen, hesitatingly, "and here are the checks for them."

This difficulty was settled by the hailing of a dray, and instructing its driver to get the articles called for by the checks, and carry them, together with Glen's valise, to the hotel. The boy could not bear to trust his precious rifle out of his sight, and so carried it with him.

They had hardly started, when Mr. Brackett turned to Glen and asked him if he had been to breakfast.

This was a question in which the boy was greatly interested just at that moment, and he answered very promptly that he had not.

"Well, here's a go!" exclaimed the other. "A rule of this party is, Matherson, and I hope I shall never be obliged to repeat it to you, that if a man hath not eaten, neither shall he work. It is now too late to return to Delmonico's, so we must intrust you to the tender mercies of the Princess, and may she have mercy upon your appetite. Joe, drive to the palace."

The "palace" proved to be a patchwork shanty of the most unique and surprising description. It was constructed of bits of board, pieces of boxes and barrels, stray shingles and clapboards, roofing-paper, and a variety of other odds and ends. Its doors and windows had evidently been taken from some wrecked steamboat. It was overrun with roses and honeysuckles; while within and without it was scrupulously neat and clean.

As the surveyor's wagon with its noisy load drew up before this queer establishment, its mistress appeared at the door. She was a fat, jolly-looking negress, wearing a gay calico dress, and a still more brilliant turban, and she was immediately greeted with shouts of "How are you, Princess?" "Good-morning, Princess!" "How's her royal nibs to-day?" etc., to all of which she smiled and bowed, and courtesied with the utmost good-nature.

The moment he could make himself heard, Mr. Brackett said, "Princess, we have here a fainting wayfarer. Can you provide him with a cup of nectar?"

"Yes, sah."

"A dish of peacock's tongues?"

"Sartin, sah."

"And a brace of nightingale's eggs on toast?"

"In about free minutes, sah."

"Very well, hasten the feast and speed our departure; for we must hence, ere many nimble hours be flown."

While waiting for his breakfast to be prepared, Glen had a chance to examine his new companions somewhat more closely than he had yet done. There were eight of them, besides the driver

of the wagon, mostly young men, some of them hardly more than boys; but all strong, healthy looking, and brown from long exposure to sun and wind. Their dress was a medley of flannel, buckskin, and relics of high civilization. They were as merry, careless, and good-natured a set of young fellows as could well be found, always ready for hard work in its time, and equally so for a frolic when the chance offered. They all seemed to be on a perfect equality, called each other by their given names, and played practical jokes upon one another with impunity. As their wagon clattered out of town in the morning, or dashed in again at dusk, its occupants generally sang the most rollicking of college or camp songs, at the top of their voices, and everybody had a kindly word or an indulgent smile for the young surveyors.

Foremost in all their fun was their temporary chief, whom Glen only knew as Mr. Brackett, but who was called "Billy" by all the others. He was about twenty-five years old, and his position was that of transit-man; though, until Mr. Hobart should join the party, he was in charge of it. To Glen, who had thus far only seen him off duty, it was incomprehensible that so frivolous a young man as "Billy" Brackett appeared should hold so responsible a position.

The party had recently returned from the front, where they had been locating a line of new road since earliest spring. Now, while waiting to be sent out again, they were engaged in running in the side tracks, Y's, and switches of what has since become one of the greatest railroad yards in the world. It was on the state line, between Kansas and Missouri, about an hour's drive from the Kaw House, where the surveyors made their headquarters.

In less than five minutes Glen found himself drinking the most delicious cup of coffee he had ever tasted; while into his hands were thrust a couple of sandwiches of hot corn-pones and crisp bacon. These, with two hard-boiled eggs, furnished a most acceptable meal to the hungry-boy. Mr. Brackett tossed a quarter to the "Princess," and the wagon rolled merrily away with Glen eating his breakfast, as best he could, *en route*.

Chapter X

AT WORK WITH THE ENGINEER CORPS

The "Princess" was a character of those early days, and was celebrated for her *café au lait*, which "Billy" Brackett said meant "coffee and eggs;" but which was really the best of coffee and the richest of goat's milk. Her husband was steward on one of the steamboats that plied up and down the Missouri, and her exertions, added to his, enabled them to accumulate a small property, with which they afterwards made some successful investments in real estate. The boys of the engineer corps were quick to discover the "Princess" after their arrival in the place, and with her they were prime favorites.

Glen had hardly finished his breakfast when the party reached the place where they were to begin work. Here the boy obtained his first knowledge of the names and uses of the various objects that had attracted his curiosity as they lay in the bottom of the wagon.

From their neat wooden boxes were taken two highly polished brass instruments, each of which was provided with a telescope. One of these was a transit, for laying off lines, angles, and curves on the surface of the earth; and the other was a level for measuring the height of elevations or the depth of depressions on this same surface. As these instruments were lifted carefully from their boxes they were screwed firmly to the tops of wooden tripods, that supported them at the height of a man's eyes.

Then came the long rod, divided into feet and the decimal fractions of a foot, that was to be used with the level, and two slender flag-poles painted red and white, so as to be seen at long distances. At their lower ends these poles were tipped with sharp iron points, and at the other they bore small flags of red flannel. They went with the transit, and were to designate the points at which the sights were to be taken through its telescope.

There was a one-hundred-foot steel chain, having links each one foot long, with which to measure distances. With it went ten slender steel pins, each eighteen inches long, to the tops of which bits of red flannel were tied, so that they could be readily seen. The head chainman carried all of these to start with, and stuck one into the ground at the end of each hundred feet. The rear chainman gathered them up as he came to them, and thus, by counting the number of pins in his hand, he always knew just what distance had been measured.

The man having charge of or "running" the transit was called the transit-man; the one running the level was called the leveller; while the other members of the party were designated as rodman, front and back flagmen, or "flags," chainmen, and axemen. There were generally two of these last named, and their duty was to clear away timber, brush, or other obstructions on the line, and to make and drive stakes wherever they were needed.

As the several members of the party were preparing for their respective duties, Mr. Brackett put Glen through a sort of an examination, to discover for what particular task he was best fitted.

"I don't suppose, Matherson," he began, "that you care to run the transit to-day?"

"No," laughed Glen, "I think not to-day."

"Nor the level?"

"No, sir. I'd rather not try it."

"Well, I guess you'd better not. You might get it out of adjustment. Can you read a rod!"

No, Glen could not read a rod.

He proved equally ignorant of the duties of flagman, chainman, and axeman, which Mr. Brackett said was very fortunate, as all these positions were already so capably filled in his party that he should really hate to discharge anybody to make room for the new arrival. "But," he added, "I have a most important place left, that I believe you will fill capably. Can you reproduce the letters of the alphabet and the Arabic numerals on a bit of white pine with a piece of red chalk?"

Somewhat bewildered by this banter, Glen answered rather doubtfully that he believed he could.

"Good! Then you shall stay with the wagon to-day, and mark stakes with this bit of 'kiel'" (red chalk).

So Glen's first day's duty as a civil-engineer was to mark stakes with figures to denote the distance measured, or with various letters, such as P. T. (point of tangent), P. C. (point of curve), etc., for the transit party, and B. M. (bench mark), C. (cut), F. (fill), G. (grade), etc., for the levellers.

Mr. Brackett explained the meaning of these signs patiently and clearly to the boy, whose quick wit enabled him readily to comprehend all that was told him. By noon he was furnishing stakes, properly marked, for the various purposes required, as well as though he had been engaged in this business for a month. It was not a very important position, to be sure; but he filled it to the very best of his ability, which is the most that can be expected of any boy.

One of the things by which the new member was most strongly impressed, during this first day's experience, was the great difference between Mr. Brackett on duty and the same gentleman during his hours of relaxation. While at work he was grave and dignified, nor did he tolerate any familiarity from those who obeyed his orders. And they did obey them promptly, without question or hesitation. He was no longer "Billy;" but was carefully addressed as "Mr. Brackett" by every member of the party. It was evident that he not only thoroughly understood his business, but as thoroughly understood the temper of his men. It was clear, also, that they were well aware that he was not a man to allow his authority to be questioned or trifled with. With this mutual understanding the work progressed smoothly and satisfactorily.

All this was a study in character of which Glen was wise enough to learn the lesson; and perhaps it was the most valuable one of that day's schooling. The discipline of a well-drilled engineer corps is very similar to that maintained on board ship; and, while at certain seasons it may be greatly relaxed, it can, and must, be resumed at a moment's notice, if the authority necessary to produce the best results is to be respected.

The same merry, rollicking party rode back into Kansas City that evening that had left it in the morning; and, though Glen was very tired, he had become well enough acquainted with them to enter heartily into the spirit of the fun. Thus, whenever they sang a song he knew, his voice was heard among the loudest.

At the hotel they learned for the first time of the attempt to rob the train Glen had come on, and wondered that he had said nothing of the affair. When they questioned him, he did not know how to talk of it without proclaiming his share in the night's work, and so only said that, as he was asleep when the fight took place, he had seen nothing of it.

Long after Glen had gone to bed that night, Mr. Brackett, the leveller, and the rodman sat up hard at work on the maps and profiles of the lines they had run that day. If Glen had seen this he would have realized what he afterwards learned, that while the work of most men ends with the day, that of an engineer in the field only ends with bedtime, and sometimes a late one at that.

For two days longer Glen worked with this congenial party, gaining valuable knowledge with each hour, and thoroughly enjoying his new life.

On the third day Mr. Hobart came, and it seemed to Glen like seeing one from home to meet him again. After their first greeting, the engineer said,

"Well, my boy, what other wonderful deeds have you been performing since you and the governor ran the locomotive?"

"The governor!" almost gasped Glen. "Was he a governor?"

"Certainly he was, or rather had been. Didn't you know it? He was General Elting, the ex-governor whom you were inquiring about in St. Louis, and who is now the treasurer of our road. He returned to St. Louis almost immediately from here, and there I heard the whole story from his own lips. He was greatly disappointed at your disappearance, and much pleased to find out that I knew you; for of course I recognized you from his description. He hopes to meet you again some time, and I have promised to see that you do not indulge in any more mysterious disappearances."

While they talked of that night, and its tragic incidents, Mr. Hobart suddenly interrupted himself with,

"By the way, Glen, I am not going to take charge of this locating-party, after all, and so cannot give you a position in it."

Glen felt his face growing pale as he repeated slowly and incredulously,

"Not going to take charge of it?"

"No; I have been relieved of my command, and am going to engage in another kind of work," replied the engineer, smiling at the boy's startled and distressed expression.

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