The Ghost Whistle

Eugene K. Jones

Table of Contents

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Uncle Bob Holman, habitat the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, feared neither God nor the devil. His profession was moonshining, his chief recreation taking potshots at his feudal enemies, and his age seventy−two. He also had a hobby David, his only son.

Now David, having been educated in the district school, followed his own inclinations instead of his father's lawless footsteps and became an engineer on the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Western Railroad, which passed close to Uncle Bob's cabin in the Blue Ridge. When, after some years of faithful service, the young man was assigned to drive the Limited, Uncle Bob merely grunted; but deep down in his wicked old heart he was tickled to death.

And so it came to pass that every day the mountaineer would cross the field between his cabin and the railroad upon hearing the Limited whistle at the top of the bend. David blew for the grade the customary two long and two short blasts, but he always allowed the last toot to die away in a peculiar manner, thus informing his parent that he himself was at the throttle. Invariably Uncle Bob reached the track before the locomotive had rounded the bend, where he would wait for the brief view of his son leaning from the cab window. He never waved or changed the expression of his face, yet no rainstorm or blizzard could prevent that daily trip across the fields.

One day the crack train struck a boulder that had rolled down from the mountain fifty feet ahead of the locomotive. Uncle Bob, standing near, saw the engine rear up like a frightened horse and topple sideways into the ditch; he saw Pullman after Pullman crumple into a mass of twisted scrap iron. But the shrieks of the imprisoned passengers did not touch his heart. All that he thought of was his son. With his own hands he dragged forth David's crushed body, and with his own hands carried it to his cabin.

Next morning he buried David in a grave he had dug on the hill, even as he had buried his wife many years before. A group of neighbors peered over the fence during the interment, Uncle Bob allowing them no nearer. Nor would he tolerate the presence of a minister. After he had thrown in the last shovelful of earth, he returned to his cabin and picked up his rifle, upon the stock of which he cut a new notch. The old notches had been varnished over, signifying the cancellation of certain debts. But this last notch was very white, very fresh, like a new wound.

A week later the railroad sent an emissary to interview Holman. The visit, however, did not concern the wreck. After a few tactful remarks on the part of the emissary, who was young and hopeful, Uncle Bob gleaned that the RFWwanted his property the very spot, in fact, upon which his cabin stood. Witnesses still awesomely discuss the speed developed by a certain party on leaving those premises, but Uncle Bob really deserved the credit for that. Although had he happened to pick up his rifle instead of his shotgun, the railroad would undoubtedly have lost another employee.

Now, one man in the mountains who did not fear Uncle Bob Holman was the redheaded missionary, Timothy Brockwell. Yet in spite of his temper, which was as fiery as his hair, he had never openly resented Uncle Bob's belligerent attitude toward the church. Always in the back of his mind had lain the hope that the taciturn old moonshiner would someday, and of his own volition, see the light. He was certain nobody could teach him, because in the past the people who had attempted to teach a Holman anything had found themselves violently

removed to the next world.

Although the road had been rough, Brockwell had won a following in his illiterate parish. During his years of struggle he had fought and laughed and prayed his way into the hearts of the people. His Irish wit and sympathy had helped him over many dangerous spots. Once he had stood off a gang of revenue men with a rifle while illicit whiskey was being hastily poured onto the unappreciative earth, and the next day extracted a promise from the grateful still owner to manufacture only enough of the "white lightning" for "family use." When a mountaineer was ill he turned to Timothy Brockwell for aid; when a farmer lost his crop he found the missionary ready to share his last dollar with him. Brockwell did not look down from his superior position on the souls to whom God had given so little, but straight across, and wherever he looked he smiled.

Of course, he occasionally met failure witness the case of Uncle Bob Holman. For that old and professional sinner fought the church and every one who stood for law and decency with his colors nailed to the mast. But when his son David met his death, the missionary felt his time had come. Now, if ever, the redoubtable Holman would turn toward religion for comfort. And so the same day that the railroad sent its agent to interview the mountaineer, Brockwell contrived to intercept Uncle Bob as he was returning from the general store. Halting in front of the towering figure, he said, "Holman, we want you to know our hearts are bleedin' for ye. David was a fine boy."

"What business ought that be o' yourn?" growled Uncle Bob.

"None," admitted Brockwell, smiling. "Sure it isn't business at all. It's sympathy and friendliness we're offerin'."

The mountaineer scowled.

"I hain't wantin' none of yer slobberin'. Take hit back thar to them that's a−payin' yeh for hit!"

"Are ye tryin' to insult Timothy Brockwell?" asked the missionary.

"No," replied Uncle Bob. "Hit cain't be done. Thar hain't enough man in yeh for that."

Suddenly Brockwell doubled one fist and shook it under Holman's nose quite a way under, due to his lack of height.

"Don't ye go to sassin' me, you spalpeen! If you weren't so old that you make Methuselah look like a little bye in short pants, I'd teach ye with me bare hands to respect God. I stopped to ask you to come to meetin' so the Lord would forgive the shriveled soul in ye. Now I dare you to come!"

The mountaineer's answer was indicative of his character.

"I hain't never took a dar!" he snarled, and strode down the road.

Although nobody but Brockwell knew that Uncle Bob Holman's entrance into the meetinghouse the following Sunday was in answer to a challenge, his appearance there might have been likened to the advent of a bombshell. Had the devil suddenly materialized in the center aisle, the ensuing consternation could have been no more profound.

Previous to his arrival, the meeting had been progressing with all the funereal solemnity that characterizes the mountaineers at worship. The little frame structure with bare floors, unpainted walls, and hard benches was crowded. Through the cobwebbed windows came the strong light of midmorning, revealing the congregation in all its pathetically incongruous Sunday attire old, wizened faces under gay bonnets conceived in the eighties;

bright young faces framed in gray shawls. Some of the women wore pinched waists, and others obviously lacked a waistline. Some of the men had crowded their broad shoulders into narrow and moth−eaten dress coats, while the less pretentious paraded their belief that God preferred simple raiment.

Every pair of lips was close pressed, every pair of brows drawn together, because to the poor whites of the Virginia mountains religion was a serious business.

The Reverend Timothy Brockwell was just beginning his sermon when the interruption occurred. The main door opened, revealing Uncle Bob Holman. It seemed that his towering figure must hit the top of the jamb. He ignored the faces turned wonderingly toward him. His grizzled hair stood on end; his heavy brows met in a bushy ridge. Ferocity and contempt flashed from his gray eyes. His nose was beaked, his chin thrust upward because of an almost total absence of teeth. As he paused in the doorway, one clawlike hand still gripping the knob, his face suggested the vindictive countenance of an eagle.

Every man and woman in the meetinghouse knew that figure in the doorway. They knew he was the last of the "fighting Holmans"; they knew he had killed his feudal enemies and successfully defied the law. They knew that, no matter how drunk he might be, he was a dead shot with a rifle. All of them feared him; none of them loved him. The majority of the men had followed him into battle against the revenue officers for two reasons. First, because he was a natural strategist, a born leader, and a relentless foe. And second, because they recognized the truth of the mountain slogan: "If ye hain't with Uncle Bob ye're agin him; and if ye're agin him ye'd better be dade!" Mindful only of the short, red−haired person behind the wooden rostrum, the mountaineer strode up the aisle. As he passed bench after bench, every eye followed. Upon reaching the clear space before the platform he stopped. His voice held the booming quality of a big gun.

"Yeh dar'd me ter meetin', and I hain't never took a dar. Now, what the hell do yer want?"

The silence that followed chilled the congregation. It was like the calm before a terrific battle. Suddenly Uncle Bob aimed a gnarled forefinger at the missionary.

"Ye're a fool," he bellowed, "if yeh reckon yeh kin git me ter swaller this yere pap ye're a−handin aout. Why in hell dontcher bring back that son o' mine? Why dontcher git him back whar I mought talk to him? Because yeh cain't! Because thar hain't no Gawd nor no heaven. Yeh stand thar and tells us critters ter be thankful fer what? Hain't the railroad took my boy? Hain't they tryin' ter take my home? Hain't the revenoos a−chasin' and a−harryin' me? And what aire you doin' about hit?" He struck his fist into the palm of his left hand. "You and yer followin' o' milk−drinkin', soft−brained swine kin go to hell! Show me that son o' mine hain't jest whar I laid him. Show me that, will yeh?"

Brockwell came slowly from behind the rostrum. His eyes were dangerous.

"If it's me answer ye want, ye shall have it," said he. "Brother Holman, the Lord took yer son just as the devil will take you some day. I can't give him back to ye; but mark me words, man! He may come back if you don't mend your ways. He's watchin' you now and hopin' he didn't die in vain; and when he finds he did, you'll hear from him! Yes; I know about the railroad wantin' your land, and 'tis wicked man ye are to refuse. For all you know, David's spirit may be ridin' on the Limited when he isn't hauntin' ye.

"The names you called the people here haven't hurt them. We hold no grudge for that, because we daren't judge lest we be judged. But when you say there isn't a God and that David's soul still lies in the grave ye dug, it's up to the Lord to call ye to account. Go home to your cabin, Brother Holman, and wait for the ghost of your son and no need to bar the door or put up the shutters, because he'll come through 'em. When convinced you are, when God has had his way, come back here and you'll find us ready to receive ye."

Uncle Bob turned, his eyes blazing, but he made no reply. Perhaps something in the missionary's words had stirred into life a secret fear in his heart, for Brockwell had cunningly played upon the mountaineer's one weakness. Like most of his race, Holman feared the supernatural. Looking neither to right nor to left, he strode down the aisle and out of the meetinghouse.

Now, in spite of the cavalier fashion in which he had rid himself of the railroad envoy, Holman went to town on his mule Monday morning to see Forbes Lathrop, attorney for the RFNot that he had changed his mind. Oh, no! A Holman had never been known to do that. But he realized the advisability of learning whether or not the railroad considered his action a declaration of war. For the code of the towns differed from that of the mountains, where a fight might occur without a previous disagreement but a disagreement never occurred without a fight.

Hitching his mount in front of the local offices of the RFHolman stalked into the presence of one Miss Gladys Van Horn, who chewed gum and stood guard over the sanctums beyond. Miss Van Horn surveyed him with raised brows, then, scratching her head with her pencil, returned her languid attention to the telephone switchboard, All of which failed to impress the mountaineer.

"I'm a−searchin' fer a man named Lathrop," he said. "Whar's he at?"

Miss Van Horn yawned and plugged in for a number. After a moment she gurgled, "That you, Gertie? Say "

But Uncle Bob was not to be so summarily disposed of. Approaching the switchboard, he deliberately prodded her with a horny and not overclean finger.

"I aim ter see Lathrop. Hain't yer better tell me whar he's at?"

Miss Van Horn contracted violently, as if she had found herself in close proximity to something loathsome. Then, turning scornful eyes upon the caller, "Keep your hands to yourself, you big rube! Can't you see I'm busy? As I was saying, Gertie "

Now the leader of the Holman faction recognized no barriers other than those defended by rifle. He had sought Miss Van Horn's assistance merely because it was the easiest way, and not because of the propriety of the proceeding. With a snort of disgust he flung open the glass−paneled door leading into the offices and stepped through.

It so happened the first office he came upon was tenanted. Behind a flat−topped desk sat an elderly man with gray hair and a pleasant face.

"I'm a−huntin' Lathrop," explained Uncle Bob from the threshold.

"My name is Lathrop," admitted the person, rising. "And you are Bob Holman, father of the engineer who was killed on the big bend."

Uncle Bob entered and sat down.

"I don't aim to talk none about that. What I aims ter talk about is this yere land business. T'other day I run off a feller yeh sent to buy my farm. Next feller yer send won't git run off; I'll plant 'im jest whar he draps!"

Forbes Lathrop, local counsel of the road, knew something of the mountaineer's character. Lighting a cigar, he lay back in his desk chair.

"So," he said, "you will shoot any man we send to your land? Very well, Holman, we have a way of handling that. But what interests me is why, if you won't sell, you took the trouble to ride down here."

Uncle Bob, sitting awkwardly on the stiff office chair, crossed his legs and dug his hands into his trousers pockets.

"I wanted ter warn yeh. I don't aim ter do no killin' if I don't have to. The place my pap was born in is good enough fer me!"

"Do you know why your son lost his life on the bend?" asked Lathrop abruptly.

"I aims not to talk about that."

"He lost it," continued the lawyer, "because the bend is too close under the mountain. We intend to widen the curve. When our new bend is laid, it will be far enough away from the slope to prevent the possibility of landslides. Which means we must use the ground your cabin stands on. It is not a matter of profit to us the job will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's a matter of making safe our right of way, so that what happened to your son cannot occur again."

"I don't kere nothin' fer yer plans. I won't sell!" growled Uncle Bob.

The lawyer drew on his cigar.

"You will have to, Holman."

Suddenly the mountaineer was towering over the desk. His big fist came down with a crash, rattling the inkwell and calendar.

"Yer damn railroad killed my son. Yeh hain't goin' ter git nothin' more o' mine. The fust man yer sends up thar won't never know what hits him. I got a repeatin' rifle, and I kin set in my cabin and pick off a whole army! Hit's my land, and I don't aim ter sell. Hain't yeh never heered a Holman pays his debts? Wall, I got a debt agin the road hit's marked on my gun and I'll pay part of hit by holdin' on to my property."

The lawyer deliberately knocked the ash off his cigar. His expression was more compassionate than angry.

"No, Holman; you see, the law is on our side. Your refusal of our fair offer simply means that we must appeal to the state. The land will be condemned and a referee appointed to place a valuation on it. You can't hope to whip the state of Virginia single−handedly, you know. And if you give in now it may save lives. Why, man, if your own son was living, he would be the first one to urge you to sell."

"David's underground!" roared Uncle Bob. "Don't yeh go ter speakin' fer him; he won't never speak no more."

Lathrop pressed a button on his desk.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We will give you one week to decide. If we don't hear from you, we must appeal to the authorities. Good day, sir."

Uncle Bob turned to find Miss Van Horn at the door. As he slouched past she drew away her skirts, and when he had left the building she murmured, as she moved her pencil soothingly over her scalp, "The big rube!"

Snow! Nothing but snow everywhere. For three days the white flakes had been drifting out of a leaden sky, hiding the dump heaps round Uncle Bob's cabin, burying deeper the body of the son he had loved. For three days the mountaineers of the section had waded stoically back and forth between the general store and their homes.

Then came the blizzard. The wind swept out of the north with a howl; the clouds huddled earthward, as if to escape its fury, and the snowflakes grew smaller. No longer did they flutter down like butterflies, but, close−packed and driven by a sixty−mile gale, they flew horizontally.

Uncle Bob, in his cabin, kept himself warm externally with a light−wood blaze, internally with moonshine. But his blood−shot eyes and unsteady hand told of sleepless nights. When darkness crowded the single window, he sat very close to the fire, his loaded rifle within reach and his door barred, for he was secretly afraid of the noise of the wind. Also, he cursed ardently the man who had suggested his son's possible return.

On the afternoon of the third day Uncle Bob heard a knock at the door. In spite of the ghost−dispelling daylight, he answered cautiously, "What do yeh want? Speak up!"

Came a quavering voice, "Hit's me, Bobby Soldier. I'm mighty nigh froze solid."

The mountaineer opened the door far enough to allow the bent figure of an old man to stumble in. Although wrapped in Union uniform, his hair was gray, and his age−dimmed eyes sunken in a wrinkled face. Shuffling to the fire, he held his hands to the blaze.

"Hit's a turruble stomm, Bobby! Ol' Soldier 'twas powerful close ter givin' up the ghost yes sir, powerful close!"

During the latter part of the Civil War, Soldier helped seven−year−old Holman and his father fight off renegades who were trying to loot their house. And Holman, with the gratitude of a mountaineer, had been Soldier's friend ever since. Pouring a stiff drink of 'shine, Holman gave it to the octogenarian, who swallowed it at a gulp. After a moment Soldier squatted down, hands still extended. His eyes swept the cabin until they rested on the rifle.

"What're yeh skeered of, Bobby?"

"Revenoos," muttered Uncle Bob. "Yeh cain't tell when they mought happen 'long."

"Hain't skeered o' nothin' else?"

The mountaineer removed his corncob.

"Hit takes a Holman to scare a Holman, and thar hain't no more Holmans!"

After a moment Soldier began to rub his left foot. "Powerful bad doins on this yere mountain tonight, Bobby powerful bad! The railroad tracks a−hid by a pile o' rock yes sir; hit must 'a' slid with the snow."

Uncle Bob started. "Be yer certain, Soldier?"

"As thar's a Lawd God above!"

"Yer say the track's got enough rock on hit ter wreck a train?"

"Enough ter wreck forty trains yes sir."

Uncle Bob strode to the other end of the cabin, halting before the window. The gray light of late afternoon revealed the right−of−way of the RFa long embankment following the mountain base. A short distance southward a dark heap, not yet covered with snow, marked the spot where tons of rock and earth had slid down from the slope, completely burying the rails. At present it offered no particular menace because of its visibility, but by nightfall the blizzard would effectually disguise it. The next train came through at eleven o'clock, and small chance was there for her engineer to recognize the death trap in time.

Uncle Bob remained peering forth until the storm spread a whirling curtain between him and the right−of−way. Then he returned to the fire.

"Soldier," he said, "thar's a few of them fotched−on rail−roaders goin' ter hell tonight."

The old man shivered convulsively.

"Dontcher aim ter stop the Limited, Bobby? Ye're the only man nigh enough that kin."

Into Uncle Bob's eyes came a gleam so vindictive that even Soldier's ancient orbs could not fail to note it.

"They killed my David," said he. "Tonight I'm a−goin' ter watch 'em pay!"

"Hallelujah, Lord!" whispered the frightened man. "I wouldn't be in yere boots, Bobby. Not with all them ghosts 'twill be a−floatin' an' a−wailin' round yere shack! No sir!"

"Shut up!" snarled Holman. "Thar hain't no sech thing as ghosts."

The old soldier began to rock backward and forward, his hands clasped about his knees and only the whites of his eyes showing.

"Yes thar is, Bobby; yes thar is. After Gettysburg, I saw 'em fust. And those Virginia men I shot still ha'nt me. Right now 'tis certain thar's ghosts an' ha'nts an' debils a−roostin' on that rock pile, just a−waitin' fer them mortals to jine 'em. I know what I know! So don't yeh harry me about ghosts."

Uncle Bob took another pull at the corn whiskey. Then, getting some bread and meat from the shelf, he shared it with his friend. Outside, darkness came swiftly; inside, the blazing pine knots illuminated the cabin and sent strange shadows chasing over the walls. The wind tore at the roof, whistled round the eaves, and rushed on. The noise of the storm dissolved into individual and terrifying sounds groans, sighs, shrieks.

For several hours Soldier crouched by the fire, muttering to himself now and then, while Uncle Bob, pipe in mouth, sat in his dilapidated chair and watched the blaze consume the logs. He would have liked to heap on fuel until the last shadow had been driven from the cabin, but his stock of firewood was too scanty to brook such extravagance.

It must have been nearly nine o'clock when the old man suddenly straightened, his eyes bulging.

"Oh, Lordy!" he screamed. "I seen it! It's o'er thar in the corner!"

With surprising speed Uncle Bob reached for his rifle.

"Shet up, yer fool!" he ordered. "Thar hain't nothin' thar!" But the muzzle of his weapon swung in a half−circle about the room.

"Yes sir, Bobby, I seen it! Oh, hallelujah! Them ghosts is a−comin' they's a−comin'!" Backward and forward he rocked in mental anguish. "I kin feel 'em, and I kin hyeah 'em, an' my left foot itches jest like it done when I got hit at Gettysburg!"

Uncle Bob grabbed Soldier by the shoulder.

"I aims ter lam' yer hade open with this yere shootin'−iron if yeh don't keep hit shet," he growled.

The old man subsided with reluctance, continuing at intervals to groan dismally. But he had succeeded in directing the mountaineer's thoughts into disastrous channels.

Holman saw in his mind the place where he had buried David. Was the grave as he had left it? Could there be any truth in what Brockwell had said? The screech of the wind more and more resembled voices crying out in agony. The log structure shook and shuddered, while an old coat hanging in the corner suddenly began to swing on its peg. Possibly a draft from under the door . . . yes, possibly. . . . All the eerie stories Uncle Bob had ever heard came creeping through his harassed brain. But very clear was the image of his son David. Whenever he stared at a particular spot, the figure took up a position to right or left of it. It never quite encountered his direct gaze, or entirely disappeared from his field of vision.

Now Soldier was rocking backward and forward again, his eyes rolled up exposing their whites.

"I'm a−listenin', young Dave. I hyeah yeh hollerin'. But yere pap he don' hyeah yeh. Glory be! For the Lawd's sake, spirit, don' yeh shout any louder."

Uncle Bob leaned forward. "Who says I don't hyeah David?"

Soldier increased his pendulatory movements, seeming to build upon the younger man's interest.

"You, young Dave, keep offen that train a−comin'. I'm warnin' you, 'cause yer pap's goin' to let it smash kerplunk into them rocks. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Amen!"

The mountaineer drew his hand across his eyes. "Shet'up!" he muttered. "Fust thing hit'll be me that's a−seein' ghosts." He was trembling, and as he got out of his chair his legs shook. Pacing the length of the cabin, he returned to stand over the crouching veteran. "I tells yeh David's in his grave. That preacher lied ter me. Thar hain't nothin' goin' ter mess round hyeah. Nobody kin come back not from the grave."

The wind shook the log structure as a dog shakes a rat, and brought with it other more terrifying sounds.

"Fer Lawd's sake, Bobby, hain't you fixin' to stop that train?" Soldier's tone held entreaty.

"I aims," answered Uncle Bob, "ter pay up them railroad fellers."

Soldier went back to his swaying, with a groan.

"Yer better quit," advised the mountaineer. "Hit won't help none−you goin' on so. And I cain't hyeah "

Suddenly, grabbing up his rifle, he flung open the door.

"Come in!" he bellowed. "Hit's yer dad, David!" But only the storm entered. The snow swirled about his head and shoulders; great puffs of smoke belched from the fireplace, and Soldier held up his hands as if begging for mercy.

"Don't yer hyeah me?" pleaded Holman. "Hain't yer a−comin'?"

The blizzard's answer was a shriek of wind that nearly tore the door from his fingers. But the shapes dancing in the snow, the creatures just beyond the light from the fire, only shrank further away.

Stumbling back to his chair, he shook his fist at the shadows on the walls.

"Git inter the open! Thar's a Holman hyeah!"

"Hallelujah!" screamed Soldier in an ecstasy of fear.

The mountaineer let his arms fall. His beaked face was gray, and into his voice crept the monotonous intonation of a hypnotized man.

"Soldier's right, David. Don't yeh go ter ridin' on the Limited. Thar's a rock−pile in front of her, and hit hain't a fit place ter come up on. Go back ter the hill, David, whar yer pap put yeh "

His words died away, leaving him staring fixedly into the fire. A half−hour passed, a half−hour of cold and of horror, for the cabin had been chilled by the opening of the door. Then out of the night came a sound that again brought Uncle Bob to his feet. Long−drawn, wailing, it contrived to pierce the noise of the gale. Soldier heard it also, and his face worked convulsively.

"The Limited!" muttered Holman.

Once more the locomotive whistle screamed, but this time the blast died away in a peculiar manner. It was as if someone had struck Uncle Bob a terrific blow. He reeled across the cabin drunkenly.

"Hit hain't him! Damn the wind! You, Soldier, did yer hyeah David a−blowin' that whistle? Did yeh, I say?" Reaching the opposite wall, he groped along it like a blind man, only to halt the next moment and swing about, his eagle face working. "Hain't yeh got a tongue? Cain't yeh answer?"

"Yes sir, Bobby; I heered it!" screamed the veteran.

"'Twas David."

"Yes sir! Hallelujah! Amen!"

Gone was the self−contained leader of the Holman faction, and in his place cowered an old man. Uncle Bob was shaking all o'er. He put his hands before his face as if to shut out some terrible picture.

"Ye're up on th' hill, David! I'm a−hear−in' things. Hit's the wind. Ye cain't be a−signalin' yeh pap." He was pleading now, his voice a whine. "Keep offen that train, son! Don't yeh go to meddlin'. Git back to yeh grave whar I left yeh. Hit won't come agin. Hit was a trick of the storm "

But it did! Like the call of a banshee, the sound penetrated the mud−chinked logs, ending with the wail Uncle Bob knew so well. Only one man had ever blown for the bend like that, and that man was dead. No; he couldn't be dead . . . if he were dead, his spirit had jerked the whistle cord . . . David's spirit on the Limited. . . .

Brockwell's warning flashed before Uncle Bob: "Wait for the ghost of your son." He saw the train five miles above the bend, rushing downward to where the landslide lay waiting, hidden under its white coat. He saw the long line of Pullmans, the sleeping passengers; but what appeared most vivid was the engine cab with David at

the throttle. The whistle could mean but one thing: his boy was calling him! His boy who, he'd thought, could never call again.

And now a change came over Holman. The old light crept back into his eyes. He ceased trembling. It took but a moment for him to jerk on his coat and pick up his rifle. Some irresistible force suddenly commanded his body and brain. To reach the track in the short ten minutes required by the Limited to run the length of the bend that was all that counted.

As he flung open the door Soldier stopped his rocking.

"Yeh cain't run off, Bobby! They'll get you . . . them ghosts!"

"I'm a−stoppin' the train!" shouted Uncle Bob. "David's a−ridin' on hit. Hain't yeh heered th' whistle?"

Shutting the door with a crash, he stumbled through the loose snow. The wind cut his face; the flying swirl blinded him, but he was unconscious of his own discomfort. He had received the one call he dared not disregard. His conviction that there was no hereafter crumbled, for had he not been presented with irrefutable proof to the contrary?

Battling every step, he struggled on. The night was black. Holman traveled entirely by the wonderful sense of direction that is a gift of the mountaineers. Already his hands were numb, and he found breathing difficult. Somewhere ahead lay the railroad and the rock pile; and somewhere ahead the Limited was racing to destruction. Even now the horror of what might happen to the passengers and crew did not affect him. What drove him on, heedless of the cold, of the snow, was the conviction that David had spoken from another world through the medium of that whistle.

Time and again Uncle Bob fell, and time and again he was forced to beat his hands against his body so he might continue to grip his rifle. Those vague shadows that had lurked outside the cabin did not bother him now. Perhaps they were pleased with him. Perhaps they, too, had been in league with David!

Ah! What was that? His foot had hit something hard. Bending swiftly, he managed to uncover a section of rail. He had reached the right−of−way in time! With a yell, which was instantly stifled by the storm, Holman began to follow the track northward. Here the going was comparatively easy, from a lack of drifts. Before leaving his cabin he had conceived a simple plan for stopping the train, and all that was necessary for its execution was to put as much distance as possible between himself and the rock pile, thus giving the engineer a chance to apply the brake.

Suddenly a headlight flashed round the bend and bore down upon him. He cocked his rifle and waited. Nearer, nearer drew the ball of fire, reflecting itself in the snow. When the locomotive was hardly a hundred yards away, Uncle Bob raised his gun. With the sharp report came absolute blackness. There was the crash of falling glass, followed by the shriek of the whistle. He stumbled clear of the track in time to watch the cars flash past, wheels striking sparks.

Five minutes later found Holman the center of a little group standing beside the panting locomotive. The engineer, fireman, and train and Pullman conductors were there, but those passengers who had suffered rude awakening by the abrupt application of the brakes did not venture forth into the storm to investigate the trouble.

An oil−torch on the tender platform was carrying on its own battle with the blizzard, while, far behind, the Limited had set off a fusee. The brilliant fire painted the snow in its immediate vicinity, attempted to reach flaming fingers through the night, and failed. From the engine the fusee looked like a pink moon perched between the rails.

"You sure can shoot," remarked the engineer for the third time, as he peered at the lanky figure of the mountaineer. "How'd you happen to see the slide on such a night?"

"I saw hit this evenin' afore dark," returned Uncle Bob.

There was a brief silence.

"Then," put in a conductor, "why the devil didn't you warn the nearest tower? What's the idea of smashing our headlight?"

"I reckon yeh wouldn't understand if I told yeh. My son David kept a−callin'. . . ."

The fireman leaped forward.

"Not Dave Holman?"

"That was his name."

"Look here, my friend," said the fireman; "quit kiddin' us. Dave Holman is dead. Don't I know! I fired for Holman for years up to a couple of weeks before his train got smashed on this bend. If I hadn't happened to be laid off with a fever, I'd have been in that wreck, too. This is the first time I've ridden the Limited since he cashed in."

The train conductor spoke. "Whoever you are, you better come across with some facts. How do we know but what you're lying to us? Maybe this is a hold−up game?"

Uncle Bob stepped close to the man in uniform. "Don't yeh go to accusin' no Holman of that! I mought let daylight through yeh. Thar hain't another feller ever blew a whistle like David. He did it special fer me . . . so's I could see the train pass. Tonight hit come . . . hit's the fust time since he died."

"I'll be eternally damned!" ejaculated the fireman. "So that was it! You're Dave's father, eh? And when you heard me blow for the bend "

"You "

"Sure! The fireman generally pulls the whistle not the engineer. Your son used to get me to blow what he called his 'private signal.' What made me do it tonight I don't know. Habit, I guess."

There was a huskiness in Uncle Bob's voice.

"It weren't habit, young feller. Don't yeh go to belittlin' the dead! Hit was David a−savin' his train. Yeh didn't see him, but my son was a−ridin' on that 'ere enjine jest now. No; yeh needn't look" as incredulous eyes were turned toward the cab "he hain't thar no more."

Abruptly the mountaineer shouldered his way clear of the group and plunged into the blizzard.

The following day the Reverend Timothy Brockwell, returning from the general store, discovered a visitor waiting for him in his little cabin. Uncle Bob Holman had entered unbidden, according to mountain custom. The missionary at once recognized the angular figure standing by the stove, but there was something unfamiliar in Holman's carriage. His shoulders seemed stooped; he looked older, less vindictive.

"Howdy!" greeted Brockwell, stamping the snow from his boots.

"Howdy," returned Uncle Bob.

"It's surprised and pleased I am to see ye," went on the missionary cheerfully. "Me conscience has been pesterin' me o'er what I said to you in meetin'. After all, a man has a right to his own opinion."

The mountaineer ignored the apology, his face stony.

"When a Holman finds he's wrong he comes aout with hit. I was wrong about David. He hain't up thar on the hill no more; he's a−takin' kere of the Limited. I'm a−goin' ter help him by sellin' my land to the railroad."

Brockwell showed his amazement, but he managed a smile.

"That's fine, Brother Holman! 'Tis a man ye are to say it. Of course, you know you are welcome at meetin'. . . ."

Uncle Bob drew himself up.

"Don't yeh go ter misunderstandin'. I hain't got no use fer you or yer fotched−on idees. You was right about David which makes me hate the worse. I'm on one side, Brockwell, and you're on t'other. A Holman don't never change sides. But yeh hain't nothin' agin David; have yeh?"

The missionary controlled his rising anger.

"No," he replied.

"Then," said Uncle Bob, his voice quivering, "yeh mought pray fer his soul. 'Twouldn't do no hurt."

As he went out of the door he stumbled a little, and his step was none too steady in the snow.