



Destiny's . . . Mis-fire.

By "ALONG THE LINE."

The train had started and the hum and buzz of Melbourne city was left behind. The upholstery of the carriage was of grey damask, pleasing to the eye, and comfortable. My companions were ladies; one rather a hard faced woman of thirty, not harsh-looking, maybe, but lacking the kindly gleam of the eyes that give anticipation to a civil reply. The other face was a rare one, comely and bright with radiant eyes that fairly shone with goodness and young life, not so very young perhaps, for she might have been twenty-eight. I was a stranger in a strange land, and somehow I was aware my fellow travellers opposite me knew it. I'd the soft felt hat of Queensland for one thing, and I knew not the ways of the South.

I looked at her. She looked at me, and there was that in her face that said speak, and I did. I made a remark about the green fields we were passing, and she replied so pleasantly and so kindly that in five minutes I was telling her I was a stranger, and she said she knew it. Then I told her of North Queensland, and she was asking me questions of our country, and her bright eyes and her rosy cheeks told of pleasant interest in all I said. Then I told her of myself; how I'd been a Victorian as a boy, and it was thirty years since I'd travelled that railway, and I was going to see my sister.

"And does your sister know you're coming?"

"Well, I don't know. I wired as the train left, and they may have it, or may not." Then her interest was twice as great. The train sped on; and she told me of the wayside places we passed,

and by and by a boy got in. He was going home for his holidays.

The train travelled fast; past fields bounded by stone walls, past farmsteads, and haystacks, and little herds of dairy cattle; past, now and then, the wayside stone buildings of a railway station. Then the boy got ready to get out. He was ready with his hat on, and his satchel across his shoulders and his packages in his hand ever so long. He was all excitement as he neared his home, and looking out every now and then, imbued us with much the same interest. We saw the meeting between him and his sisters on the platform, and we in the carriage joined in the pleasure.

Then my new friends asked me how far my sister lived from the railway. Only a mile or two. She would have the telegram then. And as we neared the station I found myself looking out and ahead in expectancy; for thirty years is a long absence from loving kinsfolk, and my companion was all interest. Her rosy face and her fine eyes stay with me.

Then we passed a big mountain that I well remembered, and I, too, gathered my belongings, and got ready; then she had a merry laugh over that. I was like the boy. Round a curve and under a bridge, and the train draws up at the farming hamlet which has been my kinsman's home country for fifty years, and there on the platform is my sister and her husband. I had left them both young; now I saw them grey, but hale and well, and I opened the door and was out. I looked back, just an instant to say good-bye to my friend, and to thank her for her pleasant converse; and as I spoke her glowing face was good to see. I had met her once. Would I ever see her again? For in a moment the train was speeding on its way.

Well, she went her way, and I went mine. I stayed at the home of my people a day or two, and then I went to Adelaide; and in a week or so I came back. Meantime a youth of my kin had been to a place some days' journey away, where a lady had told of somebody she met in the train. This stranger, she said, had come from North Queensland, and they described him, and my young kinsman put that and that together, and it seemed like me.

Well, well. I'd talked about the pleasure of her company, and she'd spoken of me.

I set about my business in Victoria to buy horses, and I travelled over a good deal of that country, and after a week or so an agent put me on the track of a pony stallion, "three years old, stout as a draft horse, well bred, and all that was good," so he said, and just what I wanted. He was fourteen miles out from the rail town of Kyneton, and it was a cold, bleak, sleety day when I reached that town; and I found a livery stable and hired a trap, and set out along a metal road for this pony. Cold was no name for the weather. I'd no gloves and the horse pulled on the reins all the way, and then I reached the estate where the pony was.

It was a big mansion, in a valley lined out by hedges, and I drove up an avenue. A lady answered the door. I had left my trap at the gate. She was a fine woman, but in Victoria they don't extend much courtesy, I suppose, to people coming to inspect stock, and she sent me to the groom, and I saw the pony. No good, misrepresented, old, shapeless, and a bad colour.

What I said don't matter. The groom replied, "You'll meet Mr H. on your way going back to Kyneton." And so I set out to return. Cold, out of sorts, disgusted with everything, and scarcely able to hold the reins with the sleety wind on my hands, and believe me, when I saw a buggy in the distance coming along as the groom had described, I was just in the humour to "talk back"; and as the buggy neared me I saw there were two in it. I drew up, and put up my hand for him to stop. I said, "Are you Mr H?" He nodded and looked surprised. "Well, I've been to your place in all this cold misery to look at a pony that has been misrepresented by your agent, a pony as old as me, and offered as a three year old, a pony with a long back and a bad colour, and with a faked mouth at that, and not worth the price of a dead cat — And — an' — an' . . .

Lord! I looked at his companion in the buggy. It was she for whom the blue bells waved. It was she of the train, with her bright eyes, and her rosy, cheery face aglow with pleasure.

All my wrath went away' in the winds and she said to him, "Oh, Harry, this is the gentleman who was in the train."

Oh, ho. She was a good one. Then we spoke for just a moment, and I said no more of the pony. I had none but commonplace things to say; what else could I say? and so the

buggies parted on their way, I along the metal road back to Kyneton, and they among the hedges to the house in the valley.

Well, well, I had met her again. Destiny had done its share. Destiny that guides the lives of men and women.

It was very good and nice of Destiny to do this, but Destiny had lost sight of the important matter of years, and was behind the fair. But, between you and me if I'd been five and twenty, I'd have gone back to have another look at that pony.

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