

# JIMMIE — VANDIVER, RAILROADER

By Arthur K. Akers  
COPYRIGHTED 1911

**J**IMMIE VANDIVER, the son of rich but honest parents, came to us from a different source than we were accustomed to at Damascus Junction. And perhaps that is one of the reasons that our opinion of him had to be revised so radically in the end. Generally the new recruits reached us after somewhat lengthy terms as fourth assistant station agents at Podunk Corners or similar places where they had been allowed to sweep the depot, make out reports, smash trunks, load chicken-crates, and talk to the engineer on number Sixteen. In the midst of these privileges they managed to pick up a fair idea of telegraphy and rail-roading, and after being duly frightened to death and examined by Bancroft, the chief despatcher, they rose at once to the imposing rank of night operator at various little "o. s." towers along the road. But Jimmie was no common clay. He descended from the vestibule of a Pullman and with all the insignia of scholastic life still upon him—trousers at half-mast, pipe in mouth, little rah-rah cap clinging precariously to the northeast corner of his head, and his whole personality radiating that splendid cock-sureness that comes only of a brand new diploma, framed and reposing in the bottom of one's trunk. "Stubby" Sullivan, who was hanging around waiting to quarrel with McKelly about the coal they had been getting lately, caught sight of Jimmie as he was sending his card in to Bancroft. "God help that if it's ever caught out on the yard after dark!" said Stubby fervently to himself, and he voiced the sentiments of others.

About ten minutes was all it required for the chief to persuade Jimmie that the General Manager was really giving satisfaction, that the Superintendent was a man of family and needed his job, and that the Master of Trains was kin to the President and couldn't be removed without friction. However, if Mr. Vandiver still wanted to become a railroad man, he had a letter from Mr. McKelly (who had formerly worked on a section with Jimmie's father) suggesting that Dan Reagan, agent at Winchester, needed a helper around the station and that it would be a great chance for Jimmie to learn the rudiments of rail-roading. It was a bitter pill for Vandiver, junior, who it seems had been of much consequence at college, but he swallowed it

She had married James, senior, on the correct guess that he would become a richer man than his nearest rival, and she always



spoke of his former employment on the section as "when Mr. Vandiver was connected with the W. G. S. System. Some responsible position in the Maintenance of Way Department, you know."

In the months that followed we heard little more from Jimmie, except that we knew he was good-naturedly enduring merciful chaffing and snubbing and had forgotten so much nonsense that he was really getting into a position to do something useful. And in less than a year a new Jimmie, though he still clung to his pipe and his explosive socks and neckties, came up to be examined preparatory to graduation as a full-fledged operator. Bancroft remembered the cap and the previous cut of his pants and made it a stiff one, but Jimmie passed with flying colors. The second day after found him installed as agent at Knob Rocks where he was monarch of a ten-by-

light and practically everything was running on schedule. Seventy-six, a through freight, southbound, would be a little late getting out of Eighteenth Street because of waiting for three cars of dressed beef coming in from Chicago over the O. & C., but he would provide for her against third Seventy-five later on. At two o'clock Jimmie was almost alone in the dimly lighted building. In the office with him was only Petey Ferguson, who copied on that trick, and "the Fathead," staying after hours to memorize the rules, was in a corner droning over his book. In the next room was the North End despatcher, while down below were the ticket agent and a few baggagemen, some of them napping during the dullest hour of the night. Except for a half dozen through freight and passenger trains the Clinch River Division slept, snatching a few hours' uneasy slumber before waking to the turmoil and fierce struggle of another day.

In one of the dark and silent offices in the third story a rat stole timidly out from his hole, scurried across the room, and took refuge in an unemptied waste-basket. On the second floor, at the far end of the long building, Jimmie called for some belated "o. s.'s" and entered them on his sheet. The Fathead yawned sleepily, rubbed his eyes, and went home. Quiet, broken only by the ticking of the clock and the muffled chattering of a sounder in the next room, settled down over the big depot.

Overhead his ratship made a hasty exit from the waste-basket. A faint odor of burning paper arose, and then a tiny tongue of flame ran up the ceiling wall beside the basket. Another followed, and another. The dry varnished wood smoked, then caught fire and burned on unnoticed. Soon the heat about the window cracked the glass and it fell tinkling outward, admitting more air. The flames ate through a partition, shot up into the attic, and roared along under the metal roof. Just as Jimmie began to feel an unusual warmth in the room and catch a slight whiff of burning wood an engine in the yards set up a frantic whistling. Others took it up. The hoarse voice of the shop whistle boomed out the fire alarm. Downstairs a telephone bell rang insistently, shrilling high above the clamor without. Glancing out of the window, Jimmie saw a glowing flickering light on the long lines of freight cars standing on the tracks below. At the same instant the door was flung open by the North End despatcher. "Hey, you fellows!" he shouted. "The building's all on fire. Get out quick before the stairs go!"

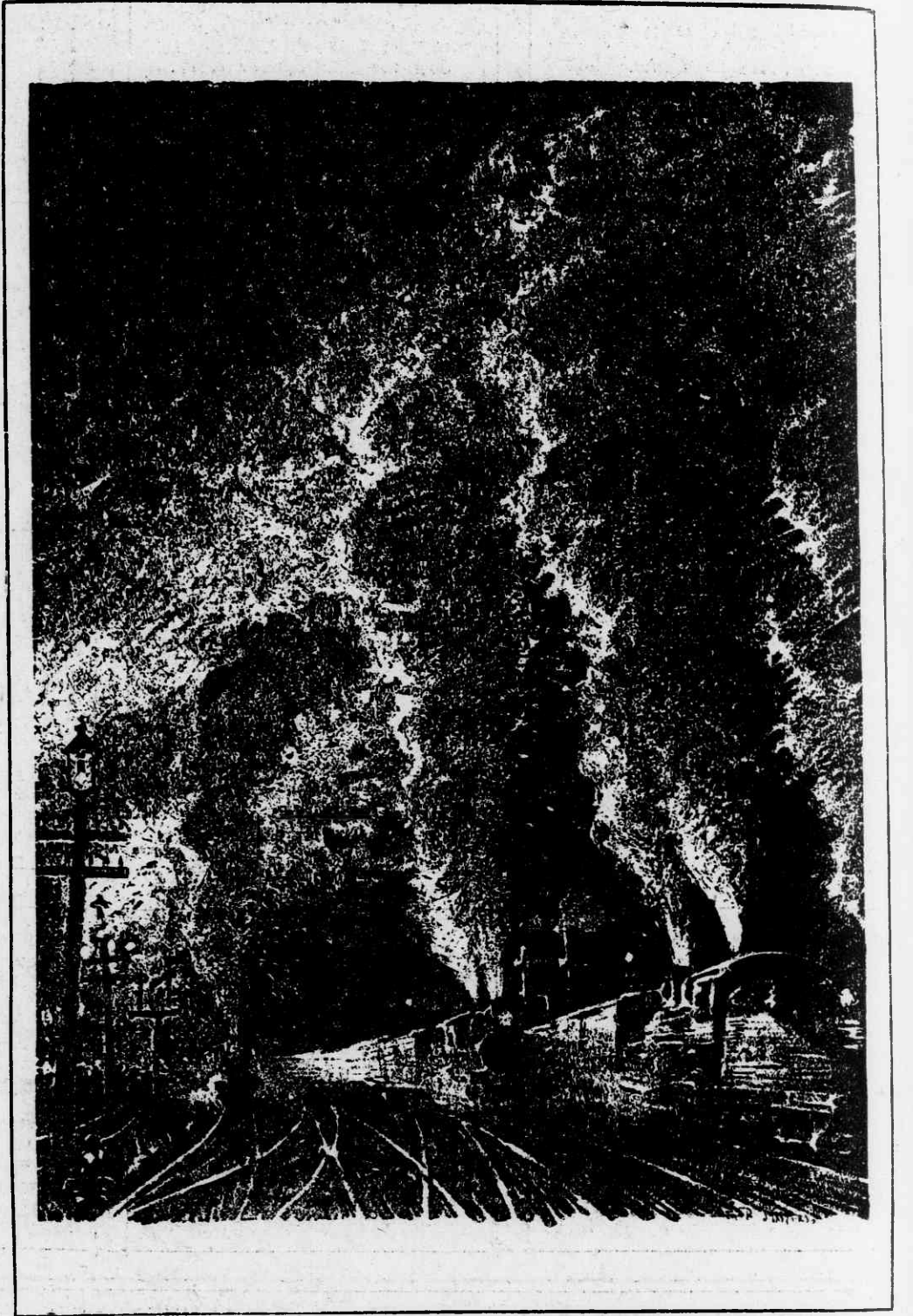
But Jimmie refused to be excited. Such emotion had no place in the traditions of his craft. He was a despatcher now and he proposed to act according to his own notions of one.

"Get the files and the typewriters out," he said to the loyal Petey, who still stayed by for orders. "Then come back after the quad instruments if you can."  
"B-but ain't y-you going, too?"  
"Not now," snapped Jimmie. "I've got an order to give Seventy-six at Nortondale or there'll be a head-on. Hustle those files now!"  
The mad whirring clatter of gongs and the sound of galloping hoofs on frozen ground came up faintly from below as the despatcher, all alone in the upper part of the depot, began calling Nortondale. The fire had caught him with an uncompleted order out that made it imperative for him to reach Number Seventy-six with a second order at that point. But the Nortondale operator, usually prompt to answer, seemed to have left his key for the time being. The perspiration dripped from Jimmie's forehead as he called, "ND, ND, ND, DI." The ceiling was beginning to smoke. Again and again he clicked off the "o" of the despatcher's call, but from "ND" there came no answer.  
"I ain't coming back any more," panted Petey on his third trip with the typewriters. "It's too hot. You better come on out while you can."  
"In a minute," replied Jimmie, and he went on calling.  
Firebrands sailed blazing across the yards, driven by the wind that had sprung up. Switch engines shot up and down the ladder tracks, bumped into long strings of cars, and bore them out of danger with clanging bells and great puffing and whistling. In the glare he saw a lineman on top of a telegraph pole in front of the depot pouring water on it from buckets which were being passed up to him by comrades. On their efforts depended the safety of the wires. With a sinking sensation he remembered that the city firemen would let the poles burn down rather than run the risk of throwing water from hose on wires that might be crossed with others of a fatal voltage.  
"Keep it up, keep it up!" prayed Jimmie, and even as he spoke the glass in the transom cracked with the heat and the strangling smoke came drifting in. There were only a few minutes left, not time enough for him to make a dash for the South Tower in the yards and reach it before Seventy-six was due at Nortondale.  
"ND, ND, ND, DI, o, 9," he called.

Then the sounder went dead while the relay spoke on in a sort of brazen whisper. This meant that the fire had reached the local batteries in the next room.  
"Thank heaven, the main line is still working," Jimmie muttered to himself, and

hair of the two men, and the thick acrid smoke was slowly suffocating the despatcher. "The air's better down where he is," thought Jimmie dully, looking down on the prostrate form of the other. His watch told him that Seventy-six was four minutes

And as in a of had its platinues explic why a slight v are ou glan. Foxe ment t Frank It is resurre heap. on his looked manag Manu trail of player within Anot now as club ca The te injuries being Constit Mobil the rea old, did a class flung the ons got deliver easy sh Shortst Barons was in after as in runn third a fielded having someth



SWITCH ENGINES BORE LONG STRINGS OF CARS OUT OF DANGER



"HEY, YOU FELLOWS! THE BUILDING'S ALL ON FIRE!"

like the man that he afterwards proved to be under all the tinsel on top and said he would take the job. Jimmie's father was dead and his real trouble was his mother.

twelve depot and literally "the whole works"—operator, ticket agent, baggage-master, and porter rolled into one. When Knob Rocks proved too small for his abil-

After an hour in which all had gone well on his first night he had gained almost the confidence of an old-timer. The traffic was

After an hour in which all had gone well on his first night he had gained almost the confidence of an old-timer. The traffic was

overdue at Nortondale and he wondered if she had run past. If so, all his bitter fight had been in vain. His flesh seemed shriveling up and cracking apart in the awful heat, but until the train was reported by there was a hope, and he must stand by it. His mind went back to a mile race of his college days when his lungs were fairly bursting within him and he had forced himself over the last hundred yards to victory by will-power alone while something in his reeling brain repeated like an automaton, "One more step—one more step." So now in the same way, dazed and but half-conscious, he held himself at the key with, "One more call—one more call." The whole world seemed one vast agony in which wires, trains, flames, responsibilities, hopes, fears, and misery of soul and body blended and merged into a formless writhing horror from which for eons yet to come he could never escape. And just beside him a fiend hammered a huge brazen gong that seemed to boom out ceaselessly, "Call ND." At last, after countless centuries, the circuit broke and "I, ND, I" answered him.  
"Is '76 by?" asked the despatcher.  
"Not y—"  
"Hold her," he sent, but got no further. With a roar the fire burst through the inner wall, which tottered and fell, and Jimmie barely had time to seize the train-sheet and drop to the floor before a wave of flame swept the room. How he reached the window and the ladder, with the sheet under his arm and dragging the slightly revived fireman with him, no one ever quite knew, least of all Jimmie himself. But the watchers below saw him pause on the ledge and heave the other man on to the ladder, where he slid down until caught by the hands that awaited him. Then Jimmie, his clothing smoldering; hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes singed almost entirely off, and his left hand hanging useless, scuttled painfully down the ladder. For a moment he drank in great breaths of the cold keen air, then he started for the South Tower.  
"Hold on there, man; you're hurt!" called McKelly after him.  
"Hurt nothing!" responded the despatcher over his shoulder as he staggered along the tracks. "I've got to get to the South Tower before Ninety-one wants orders at Bristolville."  
And then Jimmie disgraced himself in his own eyes forevermore by fainting.

And as in a of had its platinues explic why a slight v are ou glan. Foxe ment t Frank It is resurre heap. on his looked manag Manu trail of player within Anot now as club ca The te injuries being Constit Mobil the rea old, did a class flung the ons got deliver easy sh Shortst Barons was in after as in runn third a fielded having someth