

# THE MAN WHO SAW SPRING.

BY JOHN G. NIEHARDT. Author of "The Lonesome Trail."

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It was late in October when the Jennie Lucas cast off her cables at the Fort Union landing, swung out into the Missouri, and under high pressure went grunting and snoring southward. Old river men about the fort watched her trailing cloud of smoke until she had disappeared, then shook their heads and muttered dark prophecy. For, although she was the lightest and fastest boat in the upper waters at that time (for which reason she was chosen to carry a very important message from the Fort to St. Louis), yet no boat is so swift as the prairie winter—and the winter was coming early that year. The old men read warnings upon the face of the heavens and sniffed treachery in the damp, south wind. They recalled other Octobers when the winter had swooped down suddenly; they spoke of blizzards; they recalled the names of companions who had perished; they talked of hunger.

But the Lucas, laden heavily with an ever-decreasing cargo of firewood, and groaning through all her strained machinery, raced into the South.

She had made only a hundred miles when a bolt head in the boilers gave way under the abnormal pressure of team, and it became necessary to lay up for repairs.

Jim Hanway, the head engineer, worked upon the boilers with a nervous haste that attracted the attention of the captain.

"Take your time, Jim," said the captain; "there's no hurry."

"No hurry?" Hanway grinned with twitching lips at the captain. "Take a look at the sky, will you? If we don't all turn up in some coyote's belly before spring, you can take me and this engine!"

The captain endeavored to laugh pleasantly, but succeeded only in producing a dry cackle. Certainly something had come over Hanway. The tall, gaunt, good-natured engineer was no longer good-natured. There was a drawn, set look in his face, and the whole engine room seemed filled with some strange disquieting influence, some subtle emanation from overwrought nerves.

The captain went up on deck. "Jim's got a case of cold feet," he said to the pilot; "nerves all frayed out to a ragged edge. Talks about us all turning up in some coyote's belly before spring! What do you think of that for Hanway?"

"The way he's been giving her the whip so far, he'll be blowing us to kingdom come more likely," said the pilot. "I yelled down the tube for less speed a dozen times, and he went right on slapping the speed to her. Want to look after him a bit, captain."

Meanwhile Hanway worked nervously at the boilers. He reinforced them with iron bolts and belted them with iron hoops, all the while muttering to himself. A deck hand, tottering under a log of wood, ventured to joke with the engineer. Hanway turned upon him and snarled with a savage lifting of the upper lip. "If you roosters don't get this engine room full of wood, before we start," he said, "I'll brain the last one of you."

The "rooster" deposited his load and with drew at a trot. On the morning of the second day of the delay the Lucas again started south. Hanway bawled up the tube to the pilot at the wheel: "Don't go yelling any more instructions down here to me! This boat is going somewhere!"

He turned to his engine, now throbbing mightily like an overtaxed heart. "Don't give up, old girl," he muttered. "Don't give up again! I know it's a killing pace, but hold together somehow!"

In the late evening the Lucas ran foul of a snag and came off with a shattered paddle wheel. This required two days repairing, during which time it began to snow with great, wet, lazily tumbling flakes that fell melting upon the deck like soft kisses of betrayal. Hanway grew more and more nervous as he helped at the repairing of the paddles.

"Are you sick, Jim?" asked the captain kindly; for Hanway fumbled the tools with shaking hands and dropped them often.

"No, not sick, cap," answered Hanway with a strange tremor in his voice. "But it seems like I can feel something coming—something—I don't know what—something big and black and terrible moving down upon us! I know it's foolish."

"Oh, this is just a little flurry," said the captain soothingly. "Too early for real winter, Jim. Better go to bed while and let the second engineer run her tonight. You're worn out."

When the damage had been repaired, the Lucas again started south with the second engineer at the throttle. The Lucas was now running night and day, for something of the dread of Hanway had come upon the captain.

In the middle of the night Hanway awoke with a start from a heavy sleep. He arose at once and went on deck, for he had not undressed. The snow had ceased falling and a northwest wind with a keen knife edge smote him in the face. He listened for a moment to the chug-chug of the revolving paddle wheels, the sigh of the waters about her sides, and the asthmatic snore of the exhaust. Suddenly he thought he caught the tinkling sound of small ice particles. He

rushed to the thermometer and, striking a match, gazed for a moment horror-stricken upon the mercury. It registered 31 degrees!

The match flared and went out. Hanway shivered in the sudden darkness as though he had just gazed upon the face of a corpse. He glanced at the pilot house and saw the pilot swinging a free arm about him to warm his numbed fingers.

Hanway ran down the aft stairs and burst into the engine room. He rushed up to the second engineer and glanced at the steam gauge. It registered ten pounds less than he himself had been carrying.

"Get to bed!" he hissed to the engineer.

"I don't go off till morning, Jim," replied the other kindly.

"You go off now—d'ye hear?"

Hanway grasped the second engineer by the shoulders, and, with the aid of a vigorous foot, hurled him bodily through the door, which he bolted. Then he strode over to the lounging firemen and lifted each to his feet with a violent kick.

"I want steam!" he growled. "What d'you think you're tending—a tea kettle?"

The firemen felt to work sullenly, and soon the Lucas felt the feverish will of her new master throbbing through her every fibre. Hanway stood before the steam gauge with his gaze fixed upon the rising indicator. She now carried fifty pounds. With the reinforced boilers he figured that she could carry fifty-five; after that she would probably blow up.

Fifty-one—fifty-one and a half—fifty-two—fifty-three—fifty-four—fifty-four and a half—

Hanway, with his gloved hand on the lever of the safety valve, muttered to his engine: "One quarter more, old girl! Hang on! You can't go back on me now! It's a good race and we can win—we can win—if—"

Hanway lifted the lever and the steam howled out through the valve, filling the room with vapor. The indicator had crept up within a hair's breadth of fifty-five. It now dropped back to fifty-four and a half. Hanway closed the valve, and again the pressure mounted slowly toward the danger mark. Backward and forward crept the indicator between the half and the number upon which Hanway gazed transfixed, his nervous hand clutching the lever.

He was racing with the winter, and the whips of his own dread goaded him. In his overwrought imagination he saw the pitiless Spirit of the North bearing steadily down upon the fleeing little Lucas like a great white bird of prey. He knew what it meant to be overtaken—five months of the great white waste and probably starvation. And so he was running, running. Down at St. Louis there was warmth and food and good cheer; and up in this savage wilderness there would be only the taunting devils of the frost and the hunger and the silence.

"Here, one of you!" he bawled to the firemen. "Scramble out on deck and tell me how the mercury stands!" One obeyed and came back with chattering teeth. "Twenty-nine," he said.

"Work lively with that wood there!" snarled Hanway, again turning to the steam gauge. The indicator had crept a hair's breadth across the danger mark. He set his teeth and held the valve down until the needle registered fifty-five and three-quarters. "She'll stand it!" he muttered with a nervous. "She's good for fifty-six!"

As a man who rides a thoroughbred in a race for life and loves the good brute for responding to the spurs, so Hanway loved his engine. Curiously enough, he felt that he and the machinery were one being, and he caught himself gritting his teeth and growling with the intense strain under which the engine sobbed and whined.

The boat was now quivering through all her timbers; so much so that the captain rushed down the aft stairs and through the engine room door which had been left unbolting by the fireman.

"For God's sake, Jim!" he gasped. "You'll blow us sky high! She's shivering like a man with the ague and running like a scared jack rabbit! How much are you carrying?"

Hanway turned a haggard face upon the captain. "I'm a licensed engineer, ain't I?" he said. "This is the biggest race of my life, and I'll win if I don't blow us all to powder! Do you hear that? Jim Hanway is running a 1,000-mile heat with the winter."

"But Jim," pursued the captain, endeavoring to reason with the engineer, for river engineers in the old days were very often autocrats below decks; "how much steam—"

Hanway, who was again staring at the indicator, threw his hat over the gauge and grasping a stick of wood, turned upon the captain. His face had a nasty, malevolent look.

"Go to hell, will you?" he snarled. His eyes had narrowed into two steely points of light in the dark sunken sockets that told of tense nerves and sleepless nights.

The captain withdrew—and Hanway held the steam at fifty-six. Morning crept in through the dirty little windows, and still Hanway stood with his hand on the lever and his haggard eyes fixed upon the gauge. When the second engineer

came down to go on duty Hanway coolly knocked him through the door. After that the crew fought shy of the engine room.

"This is my first trip with the devil for engineer," explained the recently ejected, walkin' the deck and nursing a bruised jaw. "But he's sure making the Jennie dance!"

All day Hanway stood at his engine, carefully scrutinizing every part and holding the steam up to the danger point. The boat tossed and groaned like a man with a fever. With an occasional snarled command, he kept the weary firemen at work fetching wood from the decks and feeding the furnace. Ever and anon he asked for the reading of the thermometer. The mercury fell steadily.

27—25—24—22—

The tireless pursuer was gaining upon him slowly, surely. But a strange exaltation seized upon Hanway. The rage of the born fighter mounted to his head like a strong liquor, and a sense of super-human might ran through his muscles. In a dazed way he longed to meet his pitiless pursuer face to face and grapple with it. He would set his teeth in its neck! He would crush it with his arms! Then he laughed joylessly at his strange conceit. His adversary was an omnipotent Nothing—an intangible, nerveless, fearless, pitiless Everything—an icy Abstraction, yet real as Death. And Hanway felt a transient thrill of joy at the thought that he alone defied this subtle, terrible Something—this gigantic Foe that fought like a coward.

In the evening, a fireman tottering under a load of wood, volunteered

engine and released the steam. Then, vaguely realizing that the race was lost and his adversary upon him, his legs gave way, and the light in his brain went out quickly like astuffed candle.

When he awoke the dirty day was filtering through the grimy windows. He was alone in the engine room. He lay still for some time, blinking at the wan light. He could hear voices of command up on deck and the creaking of windlasses. For a moment it seemed to him that he was already dead and these were sounds above his grave. Then realization of the situation came upon him. The Lucas was on a bar, and the crew was making ready to spar her off.

He staggered to his feet, and with a mighty effort of his enfeebled muscles shoved wood into the furnace. Then he set the pumps to work. They would need steam, he thought—they would need steam. As for him—he had lost. He no longer felt any interest in the affair. He had fought a good fight and he had lost.

He tottered up the stairs and went on deck. Considerable ice was running. The bow of the Lucas was thrust far up onto a bar and the ice was already lodging about her. He went to the thermometer and found the mercury at 5 degrees below zero. He grinned as it occurred to him that he had now been dead five days!

All night the crew heard the grinding and chugging of the ice about the Lucas. It was the forging of the chain. The fugitive had been captured, and the captor was fastening



"Upon the slippery edge of the roof he stood balanced upon his toes like a ballet dancer."

some information. "It's down to 10 degrees, sir; and the ice is running a bit!"

"You're a liar!" snarled Hanway, lunging at the man with a savage blow that sent him sprawling upon his head.

"Would she stand fifty-seven pounds?" muttered Hanway to himself; "the last reading was twenty-two. We've lost twelve—twelve what? Twelve years—no, twelve miles—no, degrees—"

By a curious mental process at which he himself wondered vaguely it seemed to him that zero was death. Why zero? He didn't know—but somehow, zero was death.

Turning to the firemen, he ordered one on deck to see how the mercury then stood. The man returned sneakingly.

"How is it?" asked Hanway. The bearer of ill tidings withdrew to a safe distance before he ventured to answer as one who confesses his guilt. It's no better, sir—I's worse, sir—I's dropped to nine, sir."

Hanway seemed not to hear. His eyes were riveted upon the gauge. The indicator had just touched fifty-seven.

At midnight the pilot bawled frantically down the tube for less speed. Hanway stured a handful for less speed. Hanway stuffed a handful of waste into the tube. A minute later there came a grinding, slushing sound. Then the Lucas shook herself, shrieking and groaning through all her timbers, reared like a frightened horse—and stopped stock-still.

Hanway was thrown to the floor. In a dazed mechanical way he scrambled to his feet again, shut down the

the night crept in through the thickening snow haze scarcely perceived. The five men sat huddled about the furnace in the engine room, listening for the voices of their returning companions. The wind boomed down the smokestacks and shrieked through the supporting cables.

Late in the night the captain proposed a game of poker. All except Hanway sat in. But though they staked their summer's recklessly, the gaming spirit was dead. Once, when a big jackpot had been opened, with all hands staying, a violent gust of wind beat at the door and howled hoarsely about the boat like the shouting of a desperate man. The second engineer dropped his cards face up, and, leaping to his feet, cried: "There! They're coming! They yelled!" Then he dropped into his seat and groaned.

And when the second pilot called an unusually stiff bet with a pair of trays the captain closed the game.

Morning came—a travesty of dawn. The day passed—a writhing, howling gray shadow. And the night came—a mere deepening of the twilight, felt rather than seen. On the evening of the third day the storm fell and the yellow sun went down smiling cynically upon the ghostly storm swept spaces. Then the white, pitiless night crept in with stars that were as bits of broken glass.

There were now only five men in the ice-bowl. Lucas—the captain, Hanway, the second engineer, the second pilot and a deck hand.

The temperature fell again after the storm; it reached twenty below zero, and the snow became crusted. In the long nights the dread-ridden crew heard the coyotes bawling their empty bellies and the ache of their frosted feet. All night the cables, drawn taut with the intense cold, sang dully into the frozen hollow that was the world, and the contracting timbers popped and groaned.

One night in late December the captain dreamed a pleasant dream. It seemed to him that the winter had broken up; the spring rains fell; the good smell of the earth, mixed with the odor of wet grass, filled his nostrils. He felt the lift of a flood beneath him. He heard the snoring of the engines; felt the eager trembling of the boat as she nosed the flood and took the swirl of the current southward.

Then suddenly it seemed that the Jennie Lucas shook herself like a wet dog, and he awoke with the sound of splintering wood in his ears. The boat was vibrating! The machinery was moving!

He leaped out of his bunk and ran on deck, for he had not undressed. There was a light down the aft stairs. He rushed down into the engine room and found the boilers sizzling with heat and the machinery working under forty pounds pressure, which was steadily mounting, for the safely valve had been tied down.

He cut the cords that held the valve and shut down the engine. Then he looked about for Hanway, but he was not in the room.

"Where is that idiot?" muttered the captain; "he's busted the paddle wheels! I'll—"

He had reached the top of the stairs when a strange wailing moaning cry, like and unlike that of a coyote, pierced the silent night like a pang. The sound seemed to come from the after deck. There the captain ran and beheld Jim Hanway on his hands and knees in the snow, with his haggard face lifted to the sky, sending forth doleful answers to the heartbroken plaint of the coyotes.

"What the deuce, Hanway—?" began the captain.

Hanway raised himself to his knees, and turning his drawn face upon the captain, pointed off down the white river and said with a weak, expressionless voice: "I told you she'd have supper ready, didn't I, cap? Seems like I did—let's see. She's sitting up by the fire waiting—and I'm not coming home—because, cap, I can't get the throttle open somehow. Throttle's busted, somehow—and she's waiting—been waiting—and supper's getting—getting—hub?"

Hanway passed a shaking hand across his brow and fell to sniveling like a frightened boy.

The captain put Hanway to bed and explained matters to the others who had turned out: "It's nothing but Jim—just a bit off his head—thought he was driving her south."

But the captain paced the deck till dawn, muttering to himself. He was haunted with a premonition that he would never see spring. He too felt a "something big and black and terrible moving down upon him," as Hanway had put it. The awful stillness seemed pregnant with disaster.

The dawn crept like a shivering thing across the white expanses, and the sun lifted a pale face above the ghostly bluffs. Hanway slept heavily in his bunk, and the captain did not appear. The three others fried the bacon for their breakfast and ate in silence. Then they sat about in the engine room and waited. Waited for what? They did not know; but the monotonous winter hush seemed ever about to bring forth some unutterable horror. The perishing of their five companions in the blizzard and the madness of Hanway were having their effect.

Conservation seemed impossible. A question called forth only a laconic reply. Late in the afternoon the second pilot leaped to his feet and with clinched fists paced up and down the engine room.

"Why don't you talk?" he growled. "Why don't you talk? Hang you, why don't you sing or yell or talk?"

His two companions turned blank faces upon him for answer.

"You're all infernal lunatics—that's what you are!" whined the second pilot, pacing the floor. "The devil's got it in for the Lucas! I tell you, you're a parcel of—"

Just then the great outer silence was broken by a wild song sung in raucous tones. The three leaped to their feet. Who had dared to shout so loud into that terrible stillness? It seemed like a challenge to some invincible sleeping enemy.

They rushed out on deck and high above them on the curved roof of the pilot house they beheld the captain, looming huge against the sky. He was without coat and hat, and his hair fell in tangles about his bloated face. He was evidently very drunk.

Upon the slippery edge of the roof he stood, balanced upon his toes like a ballet dancer, leaning down upon the suddenly appearing audience. Then, bowing low, he raised a thick voice: "Entertainment the (hic) coyotes! (hic). Good m, doncha think?"

Then he suddenly began his song again and swung off into the dizzy mazes of a rowdy dance. He clogged, he shuffled, he pirouetted, he chassed. Keeping time with one giddy foot, he kicked high for the edification of an imaginary bald-headed row.

Louder and wilder grew the song; Louder and wilder grew the song; faster and faster he danced. Then, swinging too near the slippery edge of the roof, he went off in a whirling spray of snow, struck the hurricane deck, and bounded off, landing at the feet of the three spectators.

He lay very still. A sluggish stream of blood oozed from his head and reddened the snow about him. The three gazed horror-stricken. This was the something that had been waiting about them in the silence.

For many minutes they stared upon the quiet face that seemed to them the visible centre from which emanated the awful hush. At length they carried the body into the engine room; but the captain was dead.

In the evening they chopped a hole in the ice and thrust the body into it. There was no ceremony; they wanted this quiet thing out of sight.

The next morning only two men appeared on the boat—Hanway and the deck hand. A fresh trail would southward down the valley. The second engineer and the second pilot, taking the last gun and the greater share of the grub, had fled in the night from the evil-starred Lucas.

Of the two who remained, one had lost his reason and the other kept continually drunk; for having despairingly followed his deserting companions, since there were no more grub, he consoled himself with a keg of liquor which he had discovered in the captain's room.

The wolves, grown bold with hunger, came close to the boat at night and filled the darkness with wailing. And through the day the two men stared vacantly down the white valley into the south. They seldom spoke to each other, for an unreasoning fear, an insane suspicion held them apart.

In the latter part of February a sudden change came over Hanway. He seemed as one who had been aroused from a long sleep. In a vague way he again realized the situation, and a longing to live and see the spring grew upon him until it was an obsession. Now, for the first time, he knew the grub was running short, that there was only two men until the spring thaw. But there was enough for one.

He would be that one!

The will to live grew big in his weakened brain and filled it full, until there was no place for pity. He got up in the night, seized the bacon and the liquor and hid them in the engine room. All the next day he sat in the engine room with a stick of wood in his hand, guarding the priceless stuff which alone could enable him to see the spring.

And the deck hand threatened and cursed and begged piteously by turns—but Hanway guarded his treasure. He would see the spring again.

But in the middle of the third night the deck hand, grown desperate, was creeping stealthily down the aft stairs when Hanway awoke from a momentary doze. They met on the stairs.

"Great God, Hanway," begged the deck hand, "give me just a rine to chew at, and I'll go away—please, Jim!"

Hanway laughed hideously in the man's face. An dthey fought. It was the battle of hungry brutes, and Hanway was the larger. All the while the wolves about the boat kept up the ancient hunger cry.

At length, Hanway tottered to his feet and fled into the engine room. He bolted the door with palsied fingers. But the other lay quietly as the stairs.

Then there came a confusion of sounds as of a thousand devils swooping in upon the boat. The wolves were fighting over the thing on the stairway.

But Hanway, shrieking with fright, piled log after log against the door. He would keep the devils out. He would see the spring!

In the middle of March a steamboat from Sioux City, forging its way up the stream that still ran low, met a pitiful ghost of a boat. Both her paddle wheels were shattered, and she was scarred from stem to stern with the ice. Idly swinging about with the swirl on the heavy spring current, she came down like a floating corpse.

When the crew boarded her, they found the stripped skeleton of a man on deck. They went through the cabin and discovered no one. But after much battering at the door at the foot of the aft stairs, they entered the engine room.

In a corner of the room a gray-haired, gray-whiskered thin, not totally unlike a man, crouched and whimpered with fear.

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## Madness Akin to Happiness.

BY PROF. CESARE LOMBROSO.

like people of mere talent, they are frequently unbalanced. Therefore geniuses are despised and misunderstood by the majority, who do not perceive their points of contact with the rest of mankind, but who do see their eccentricities of conduct and the fact that their views disagree with those generally accepted. "There never has been a liberal idea," writes the famous novelist Faubert, "which has not been unpopular; not a true thing that has not scandalized the multitude."

Cardano, the Italian physicist and mathematician, declared himself the seventh genius of creation adding that only one was born every ten centuries. He affirmed that he learned Greek and Latin in three days, and solved 48,000 problems, and made 200,000 discoveries. He claimed that he had risen again after death. That man was haunted by the notion that he had innumerable enemies who were conspiring against his life, and he accused the faculty of the university at Padua of attempting to poison him. Cardano was in the habit of wearing a suit and headress of thick weathered leather. In the daytime he would wear a sword weighing eight pounds and at night would rove around armed to the teeth, his face covered with black cloths.

Geniuses indeed enjoy moments of supernatural felicity. These are the moments of creative frenzy which in many respects resemble the paroxysms of epileptics only, since an ordinary brain is being agitated by a convulsion but a great mind, and instead of some atrocious bestiality of dark crime there results a world of lofty character. Beaconsfield, who had felt as if there were but a step from his mental concentration to madness. He said he could hardly describe what he felt in those moments when his sensations were abnormally acute and when he was everything about him seemed to be alive, that he seemed to be ravaged and was scarcely certain that he really existed.

Analogue are the impressions of St. Paul, Nietzsche, and Dostojewski. And the illustrious Beethoven says: "Musical inspiration is to me a mysterious state in which the whole world appears to shape itself into a vast harmony where every feeling and every thought I have seems to be sound within me, where all instruments of nature seem to become instruments of my mind, where my whole and my soul are, with violent shivering and my hands stand up on end."