

# Weird Tales



ALL STORIES NEW

JANUARY, 1946

NO REPRINTS

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# Ride the El to Doom

By ALICE B. HARCRAFT

*They said the iron horse on stilts had to come down—but there are singular forces beyond our ken that must be reckoned with first!*

JACK LARUE sat in the first half-empty coach of the elevated. His left hand was hooked over an old black lunchbox, his right elbow leaned on the rust-streaked window sill. The el clattered and vibrated along and Larue peered out at the dingy squalor that passed the window in three and four-story uniformity. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun caught the train in brilliance, but there was nothing left to sparkle or shine and the brightness only served to show up the worn seats and the lustreless metal and iron.

The train bent its stiff-jointed rigidity around a curve. The wheels groaned and squealed, and the clattering became a wooden-like rumbling as the cars headed up an incline onto the West River Bridge. Larue lifted his eyes from the swirling muddy water that ran beneath to the city beyond. He never failed to get a kick out of coming home from the foundry in the evening and seeing the city before him. His part in construction was small and humble, yet he never failed to marvel at the shining towers and edifices, evidence of the deeper purpose and achievement of a trade he felt a small part of.

Larue got to his feet and started heavily up the aisle toward the front. To the right of the aisle in his little compartment was the motorman. From long familiarity, Jack jerked the door open. "C'mon, Pete," he yelled above the clatter of the train, "you're gonna be late pulling into 109th Street!"

The aged man hunched over the controls as though a part of them, made

a noise that fell unrecognized over the growl and rumble of the train.

"You got the grumps, eh?" said Larue, making as if to playfully push the motorman.

"Don't do that, Jack," said the engineer. "I tol' you when I'm running this here train . . ."

"Aw, you're as old and grouchy as the el," said Jack. "Soon they'll come along and pull you down." The old man stiffened at that. The two said no more for a while.

"What would I do?" said Larue half to himself, peering out over the tracks as they ran up to the train in widening twin lines, only to fall away under the floor of the coach.

"What would I do?" Larue repeated. "Me, I'd have to find a new way to get over to the foundry and back. This has been good enough for me for ten years. And what about you?" He turned his head and laughed at the old man. "You were here when I started on the run. Guess you've been here since the el. Take her down and they'd take old Pete Nevers down, too, eh?"

Nevers was sitting like a ramrod. The train coasted off the bridge and flashed itself ungracefully around another curve.

"Never mind, Pcte," said the laborer. "Can't do without the el, can we," and he laughed off down the aisle as the cars slowed down for the 109th Street station.

HIS words were little less than prophetic; a forewarning in these days when cities everywhere were doing without els. For it was at lunch time several

weeks later that a casually turned paper in the hands of a fellow worker caught Larue's eye.

"Hey, wait a minute! Let me see that, Eddie, will yuh?"

"Huh?"

"Geeze, what do ya know! They're going to pull down the old West River Bridge el. Now how do they expect me to get to work!"

Eddie laughed. "Swim across, ya dope!"

Larue read the article all the way through. It seemed they were going to use the rails for scrap iron; the cars were to be sent to another part of the country where they were needed more.

Bus service across the bridge would be instituted.

That evening coming home on the el, Jack dug his boot into the door of the engineer's compartment. He was feeling the three drinks in him gulped down since the five o'clock whistle. When there was no answer to the third knock, he jerked the door open.

"Pete, I see they're going to pull down this el!"

The old man shook his head and then turned slightly to look at the foundry worker.

Jack went on, "That's what they say. I saw it in the paper. They're going to pull it down and we'll be taking busses across."

"They'll never stop the el," the old man rasped. "A thing like this, it ain't like a dog you can shoot or an old car you can throw in a junk heap. It's alive, I tell you! They can't kill it!"

Jack started at the vehemence in the old motorman's voice.

"Get out of here," the engineer said suddenly. "Get out of here, ya—"

Larue, taken aback, stood in the front of the car for a moment.

"Why you old devil!" he came back. "What's got into you? You're scared, eh? You're scared because they're going to take down this rotten old el. Yeh, because you know when the el comes

down, Nevers, you're finished, too. You ain't no good without it, are you? I know that. Nothing else you can do!" The laborer slammed the compartment door and departed.

That night in his little room on Nestor Street, Larue's conscience won through the liquor. He felt remorseful about old Pete Nevers. After all, he'd known the old man for years. Nothing too chummy, mind you, for Nevers kept everybody sort of at arm's length, but he had ridden the old man's train for what seemed like ages. Of course, it was tough to have them pulling down the el, taking away your means of livelihood, Pete. All of a sudden, Larue got the idea he must see Nevers. That was it. He knew the old man lived across the river near the desolate el yards where the old tired trains waited, some for eternity, others newer, for the next day, those next days that now were limited. Larue pulled on his jacket and barged down the stairs into the street.

It was dark as he headed for the el station. On the platform at 109th he waited, vaguely wondering why he was doing this, and then thinking over a whole chain of circumstances, little kindnesses Nevers had done, money he'd lent Larue . . . and not all of it paid back the foundry worker recalled guiltily.

It always amazed Larue. The rest of the el workers were chronic complainers. "Hardly enough to keep your face fed," was their line, Nevers was not one to complain. Maybe a man like that could find something else. Certainly he was reliable. Larue considered the opportunities in his foundry. Watchman, or something. That was it!

A train rumbled into the station and Larue boarded it. This wouldn't be one of Nevers' runs. He'd made his last trip and was already through. The elevated scraped its way out of 109th and poked along between the glaringly lighted tenements and finally onto the West River Bridge. The night was warm, and Larue poked his bare forearm out the window, letting the hottish breeze nudge it as the train reached the peak of the bridge

middle and then started down toward the opposite end. Beyond was the West River stop, and then several minutes away was the Fender Street stop. Larue got off. He'd been up to Nevers' place once before.

**H**E WALKED along the still, dark streets until he came to a dingy building, even older and more run-down than his own. He mounted the steps to the third floor and knocked on the door. "Come in," said the old man's voice, and Larue went inside.

"Ah, my friend," said the motorman.

"Hello, Pete," said the foundry worker nervously. "I had to come over. Sorry about getting sore this afternoon. That was very dumb of me. After all, I know the time you've been in this business, it's kinda tough to have them take away your living, but—" he brightened, "I bet you can find plenty else. I was even thinking about the foundry. . . ."

"Jack," said the old motorman raising a hand, "don't worry about me or the el."

"Damn it, I don't care about the el," said Larue. "I just want to help you tie in to something else."

Nevers shook his head quietly. "I can't never leave the el," he stated simply.

Larue took some gum out of his pocket, bit into a piece and offered one to the old man.

"No thanks. Nice of you to come, Larue, but you see it's not so simple as me just changing jobs. It's like, well, like taking one of those cars and doing something else with it. I'm kinda the el, that's all."

Larue's glance took in the bare room. Poor old fellow, probably didn't have enough to eat as it was. There wasn't a sign of food anywhere.

"I just wanted to know how it was, Pete."

He crossed to the motorman and stuck out his hand. The old man grasped it appreciatively in a strong grasp. His handshake was surprisingly steel-like as he shook his head again and said: "I don't

worry. If the el, she goes, my troubles are over all the same."

Larue wrinkled his head perplexedly.

"I'd like to see if we couldn't do something for you at the foundry."

The old man disengaged his hand from the laborer's and put it heavily on Larue's shoulder.

"Thanks, lad," he said, "thanks, but I won't be needing anything."

Larue groped his way down the stairs and out into the street, feeling that he hadn't accomplished very much. There was a chilliness that he carried with him as he walked toward the Fender Street station. He remembered how very cold the old man's hand had been. Oh well, he'd done his best.

He shrugged and mounted the steps to the elevated platform. On the way home, from force of habit he stood in the very front of the first car as it rocked back across the river. But Larue found himself more and more concerned with the old man despite his unsatisfactory visit. His hands felt the metal sides of the car, and the coldness of the steel reminded him of the old man's handshake. He shook his head. Nevers probably wasn't any too well.

**N**OT many days later, Jack boarded the el and saw somebody outside Nevers' compartment at the head of the train. Another elderly gentleman, he was, with a frayed el-line coat and a heavy gold chain across his vest. Larue shrugged to himself. Even the conductors would be in a tough spot when they pulled down the old structure. As the cars neared Jack's station, he pushed forward to say hello to Pete. The other elderly man looked at him closely but seemed to accept him on Nevers' warm welcome.

"Well," said the conductor, whose name was Philpot, "looks like we'll all be looking for something new."

Pete shook his head with that same dogged stiffness that Larue had noticed before.

"Sure," the foreman of his foundry

told Jack, "sure Larue, we can use a reliable old codger around here. We just lost two men from the watchman detail."

That night Larue went again to Pete's lodgings to break the good news. Instead of Nevvers, he found the aged conductor, Philpot.

"Haven't seen him," said the old em-

ployec. "You know, Larue, he spends more and more time down at the yards just sitting. . . . Funny, ain't it? Yup, sitting in the empty el cars."

Larue scratched his head: "Well, what are you doing over here?"

"Ohhh," the old conductor laughed, "I've kinda moved in here with Pete. You know the el ain't so high these days, boy. Not much money, and looks like even that was going to end when they start gouging and cutting and pulling us all to pieces."

Larue leaned against the door as Philpot began reminiscing.

"Yup, the iron horse on slits they used to call us. Those were the days when the el was the way to go places. Not all your fancy damn underground trains and busses and all that. You took the el, mister, or you didn't go."

"Yeah," said Jack, "Yeah, but don't waste time worrying about that, Mr. Philpot. You fellows got to get out and get something new."

"Mebbe, mebbe not," said the conductor. "I don't mind working, mind you. I never been one too look off center at work, but Pete, young fella, he worries me. This is getting him down. Since I moved in here—it's been a few days now—he hasn't et a thing." He paused, and then cackled as a thought occurred to him.

"I think he's living on that same juice as he sucks up into his train. He gets his nourishment sitting there at the throttle. No, sir, haven't seen him et a thing. 'Course he never was the kind of fella who brought the stuff in his pockets and munched away on the job. I never seen him do that in all the years I've worked

with him. But a man can't live on nothing, mister. Maybe it's like I say. It's the el power that keeps him going."

Philpot waved his hand under Larue's face, and Jack noticed the worn blue uniform coat.

"No siree, you can tell me about your other jobs and I'll say thank you and perhaps I'll take 'em and perhaps I won't, but tain't no use with Pete. He won't take anything else."

"But what'll he do?" persisted Jack. "I think I can work something over at the foundry. Watchman job. Pretty good pay."

Philpot leaned close. "Don't worry about him, mister. He'll get along all right. You know he swears he'll stay with the el."

"Aw, that's silly," said Jack. "What's the use of bucking the facts. The el's going to be blasted and pulled down. The paper knows it, I know it, you know it. You fellas will have to get something else or you'll starve."

Old Philpot cackled. "Don't worry, young fella. Pete lives without eating, and anyway, he says he's staying with the el."

Jack turned to go.

"Now don't get uppity, Larue. I calculated you might tell me a bit more about the job."

"Well, I'd really thought about Pete," said Jack from the door, "and it doesn't look like he's coming in."

"Never can tell," said the conductor. "He might be here most any time. Watchman, did you say?"

"Yeah," said Jack, thinking by now that the other man was probably a bit touched.

"That's fine," said Philpot, "I could do something like that."

Jack set his jaw loyally. "I'm telling you, Mr. Philpot, I was thinking of Pete."

"No, young fellow," said the conductor, then lowered his voice. "Here, let me show you something."

THE old man hobbled to a very old trunk with patched leather handles at either end and a lock that was rusted with age. Quickly a nailfile appeared in his hand and he dexterously pried at the lock. The trunk top yielded and he pulled it back.

"Look," he said. Jack leaned forward and peered into the interior curiously.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's a lot of metal—a lot of old metal parts!"

"Sure," said Philpot triumphantly. "You can see he's swiped levers and bars and facings off the el. Now that isn't the kind of man you want to be watchman!"

Larue was astonished.

"But why? Why would he take all that useless junk?"

"You can sell junk," suggested Philpot, wagging his head.

Just then there was an abrupt thud at the door. The metallic rasp of a key, and the next thing Peter Nevers himself stood in the entrance.

The three men stood silent for a moment, and then the motorman crossed quickly to the trunk, crashing the lid down with his hand. He turned accusing eyes on Philpot and Larue, eyes steely black with hatred. Larue stood there almost as a spectator. At first it seemed funny and then the vehemence of the man penetrated. Philpot was evidently in terror and he trembled and inched his way across to the door. Larue kept looking at the conductor to do the explaining, and when none was forthcoming, he turned to Pete himself and said simply:

"We just opened it up, Pete. Sorry. I had something I wanted to tell you about a job—"

Nevers raised a long, rigid arm until it pointed at the door in semaphore fashion.

"Get out!" he ordered. "Get out of here, both of you. Going through my things!"

He turned on Larue.

"And as for your job," Nevers said, "I don't need it!"

"What'll you do?" said the foundry worker.

"Stay with the el," growled Pete and started menacingly toward them, his big old hands spread with obvious intention. The two ducked into the hall and headed down the stairs.

"Whew!" said Philpot, "guess he didn't like that."

"It's your fault," Larue reproached. "You shouldn't have nosed into his things. That's what bothered him. He probably thought nobody knew. That was a damn fool thing to do!"

Philpot bristled: "I only wanted to show you. He shouldn't have got so sore. I meant no harm."

"It was your fault," Larue was stubborn.

The two headed out into the street, and Philpot slowed Larue's long lanky stride down, clutching at his sleeve.

"How about that watchman's job?"

"Go to the foundry and find out for yourself," disgustedly advised the laborer.

"Aw, be a good fellow!"

"I didn't look that up for you," persisted Jack.

"I don't know why you should kick. He doesn't want it," hissed Philpot, digging his fingers into the young man's arm. "Now I'll tell you something, mister. Pete ain't quite all right. He isn't exactly like other folks am. Me," Philpot shrugged again, "some folks think I'm getting a bit touched," and he thumped his forehead grinningly. "Silly, ain't it? But Pete, mister," his face became all seriousness again, "Pete is sort of touched all over. I'm telling you, he's not the same as us. I wouldn't want him watching anything of mine!"

Without another word Jack walked away, unmindful of the other's pleas.

Larue didn't notice either of the old el employees again until the momentous day when the el was to support its last load, the last trip through the stations and across the river, for then the old

rusting cars were to be nuzzled into their final resting place in the yards and the rails were to be torn up immediately for other, more vital usages.

THE el train that last trip was packed with dignitaries and reporters, the Mayor, and other notables, but still Jack managed to get aboard. There was much excitement, and the Sanitation Department band played bright, hopeful airs on the 109th Street platform. This depressed Larue even more than he had expected to be affected by his last trip. He wondered why the death of something should be celebrated by a band, and a poor one at that, playing off-key military marches. It seemed unfair. Taps maybe, like they do over a dead hero. A bugle and some guns fired off. Damn it, he was going to miss the old rattler.

He reached into his hip pocket as best he could in the crowd and felt reassuringly of the bottle cached there. The train jerked to a start and there were huzzahs from the small crowd on the platform. The Sanitation band tooted enthusiastically, its horns and inexact melody blaring off into the distance as the train put worn ties between itself and the starting point.

Larue cautiously began to edge his way forward. Between cars he made himself small, reached into his hip and got the bottle there up to his lips. He took a good enough swig to half empty the precious Scotch, then with more elan he shouldered his way forward again.

Slowly, as though reluctant to complete its last journey, as though clinging to every moment, every familiar squeak and rattle, as though caressing for the last time each inch of used and faithful track, the el cars nosed their way around serpentine bends and clickkited out onto the West River Bridge. Pedestrians waved from the bridge way, Jack noted, as he peered out the side windows. He also noted that crews were already standing by to begin the work of demolition. The crowd in the el cars was happy and carefree. Here and there,

the foundry worker recognized a face that had crossed back and forth with him many times in the past. He didn't know them beyond a nod or a smile, but they were the veterans who, he felt, could sense the real tragedy of this thing as he did. The others, the petty officials, the nosing sour reporters, Chief of Police Frost—a man Larue recognized by his pictures, large-jowled, blank of expression despite the smile frozen on his face—all these did not belong. The el to them was a source of revenue or a cause of lack of revenue, the source of a story, or just a responsibility. For all of them, its iron and steel frame and heart and guts could be wrenched and torn asunder and hauled elsewhere to be scalded and molded into new unrecognizable forms.

Larue finished the rest of his Scotch, picked up in spirit correspondingly, and reached the front of the foremost car, all about the same time. Some of the joy-riding passengers had pulled open the windows and were looking curiously out. Larue stuck his head through and looked back the way they'd come. Already, like the wake of a speedy motor launch coming together in the distance, little ants of men had flung themselves from either side upon the track. Even at the steadily increasing distance, Larue could see the morning sun glinting on a swung pick or raised crowbar. He pulled his head in as the train rattled off the bridge ramp. A couple of florid-faced, straw-hatted men in the back of the car, with construction buttons on, started a few bars of Casey Jones, but the song died a self-conscious death. Larue looked at them with contempt. Construction, bah. Destruction, that's what it was.

He nodded at an old-time passenger he knew and lurched forward against Pete's door. The train was slowing as he leaned against the compartment and pulled at the knob.

"Hello, Pete," he mumbled as the door opened. There was Nevers sitting as ever, hunched and intense over his controls. Nevers said nothing.

THERE were more people at the Fender station. Some little school children were lined up on one side of the platform. As the train pulled in, they waved the small flags in their hands and started to scream. Larue cursed and turned back to Pete.

"It's terrible, isn't it? All this noise!"

He wanted to slap the old man on the back, but Nevers stared intently ahead. A few more people got on at Fender. A few got off. The run now was to the station in the yards where the el cars had made their home for so many years.

Larue spoke several times to Pete and still got no reply. The whiskey fumes in his brain befuddled him. He knotted his fists into balls. He became slowly angry, angering that made him want to reach over and shake the imperturbable Nevers.

"Whazza matter, Pete? You sore at me about something? Aw, snap out of it. I'm even going to pay you that ten bucks I owe you soon." Larue giggled idiotically.

The train clattered on at increased speed and the hubbub of the passengers behind rose and fell.

"Now Pete," said Larue, "you're not going to high-hat your old friend, are you? That's no way to treat me."

He reached out and touched Nevers' shoulder.

The motorman turned at that, and for the first time spoke, his eyes full on the laborer's face.

"Get out," he said between closed teeth.

At that, Larue saw red. Without thinking, he aimed a lusty punch in the direction of the engineer's body. He let fly, and as he connected, felt the shock of impact through the back of his hand and up his arm, but Nevers wasn't hurt. With his free hand, the motorman shoved Larue away viciously. The foundry worker crashed heavily into the opposite side of the aisle. Nevers' compartment door slammed and there was the click of a lock. Larue sputtered and pulled

himself upward, helped by one of the old-time passengers and a bored reporter who saw in the antics of the drunk some release from the monotony of this final el ride.

"I'm all right," insisted Larue, shaking off his helpers. "Lemme alone." He shook his head. He felt bewildered and dazed by his fall and the liquor. Before him loomed the unrecrossing visage of Chief of Police Frost. Larue waved his hand and insisted again: "I'm all right. Lemme alone."

The train docilely began to slow for the yard. The last station was ahead. One of the reporters tried knocking at the motorman's compartment, pounding with his fist and then shaking his head dourly and slapping the pad and pencil he had in his hand back into his pocket.

"He's a devil," said Larue. "Don't go near him, fella."

The reporter smirked and headed back along the aisle. The train came to a shuddering stop and Larue found himself carried along with the outpouring passengers. He noted a foreman of the elevated line and old Conductor Philpot standing near the front of the train. Walking down the steps was a feat. When he reached the bottom, everything became increasingly hazy. He headed for the nearest bar and threw himself into the wooden seat of a little cubicle. Beers added to the Scotch made him sleepy, and his last act consisted of waving a five-dollar bill at the disapproving barkeep.

Unaccountable time later, Jack woke up on a bench across the street from the tavern. He felt gingerly of the throbbing lump on the back of his head and his emotions flamed up in anger at Pete. His shoulder was sore, too, where he had been shoved into the side of the el car by the motorman.

Larue got laboriously to his feet. He staggered uncertainly back across the street and headed into the tavern again, but as he crossed the threshold, the barkeep spotted him and started lumbering forward with a meaningful jerk of the head.



"Look, Bud, I had a hard enough time gettin' you outta here before!"

Larue turned around: "All right, all right, just wanted to know what time it was."

The barkeep yelled out at him: "Stay out of here, you bum!"

The foundry worker trudged along the dark streets. The cool summer air lapped at his hair and cleared his brain of some of its alcoholic vagueness. An illuminated clock or a jeweler's window showed that it was 9:30. Good lord, he'd been out for hours! That blow on the head Nevers had caused him—temper flared up in the man and his footsteps became sure. Even in his befuddled state he found Nevers' place quickly and mounted the steps, his anger a hard swollen something within him. His fists knotted into tight balls . . . mumbling, he climbed the stairs to Pete Nevers' room. He rattled at Nevers' door but there was no answer. He was about to turn away when a noise from within attracted his attention.

SO NEVERS was in there, was he, hiding from him! He pounded again at the door. Still no response. Mad-dened, the laborer put his shoulder to the door and forced the cheap lock. The panel flew inward and Larue lurched into the chamber, his hands out in front of him aggressively. Then he saw the figure on the floor near the bed.

"Hey you," Jack muttered in surprise. He came closer. It was Philpot! The old man was white as the plaster wall behind him. There was blood oozing thickly from a cut on his head.

"Philpot, what happened? You're hurt!"

The old man raised a gnarled talon of a hand and waved it weakly.

"Nevers," he gasped. "He's crazy. He ain't human!"

"Nevers!" gritted Larue. "He hit you, too, huh? Yeah, he swung on me this morning in the el, the dirty—!"

"Wait, Larue," said the old conductor weakly, "the man's gone mad. He's a killer. He ain't human. And he's headed

back to the yards. Call the police, Larue. He's going back for no good, I tell ya. I tried to stop him and look what it did me!"

The scene had sobered Larue. Plainly, old Nevers had gone out of his head.

"I'll get him! I'll go after him myself."

"No," choked the old man, shaking his head painfully. "Won't do, Larue. Got to get the police right away."

"Aw, police," said Larue disdainfully. "I'll find a doctor for you and head to the yards myself."

"Larue," said the old man, "you've got to call the cops right away. Larue, come closer." The old man's voice sank to a whisper. It was plain he was losing strength fast. The foundry worker bent over the old el employee, his ear close to the man's mouth. Philpot whispered to him, his words barely audible. Larue straightened, aghast, and he wheeled and almost ran from the room.

"I'll get a doctor for you," he called back.

He ran downstairs three at a time and out into the street. Two and a half blocks of running brought him to a policeman. He told the officer the bare details and then took off again in the direction of the el yards.

Finally he reached the stairs leading to the elevated's burial ground. He sprinted up the steps and looked around. Everything seemed quiet. But where was the watchman? As far as he could see were silent sentinels of cars, standing in somber lines of two and three and four. He cursed his lack of matches or any other light as he picked his way along the rotting ties. Gradually his eyes became more accustomed to the dark. Then, suddenly, he came upon a body sprawled against the base of the platform. It was one of the guards. Even to the inexperienced eye, the man no longer possessed that indefinable spark called life. The feeling of death was here and everywhere in these yards now. The watchman had been biudgeoned to death, Larue saw. His head was marked with many blows such as the one Philpot had received.

LARUE got up from his scrutiny. The pit of his stomach tingled and his body felt dampish. That crazy, wicked Nevers! By god, he'd get him. So he was a killer! He had shoved him, Jack Larue, and he'd killed one, maybe two. But where to look in this maze of silent black coaches squatting everywhere on rusty rails dreaming of the past?

The problem was solved suddenly for him. To his right, several blocks away, the metallic jerk of an el starting shocked him. The headlamp lit up, and against the light-reflected back, Larue could see a three-car train moving slowly along parallel to the platform he was on, toward the switch that opened into the now-condemned line. Ghostlike the whole scene was, incredible as some distorted, fevered dream. For there seemed no life here but Larue and the remote, twinkling stars above. The train that moved could not, should not be real. It was a trick of his imagination. It was the liquor he had consumed. This yard, these cars were dead, dead as the watchman who lay crumpled over the platform.

Yet even as he thought these things, Larue sprinted forward. He headed across the yard, alternately leaping and stumbling over tracks. Ahead, luring him on with a peculiar, horrible, and magical magnetism was the squeaking, rumbling thing gathering speed, its three funereal black cars sliding wraithlike through the yards. Larue was close by now. He grabbed at a side rail and missed. It was Nevers he knew running the train. Nevers who'd killed, but most of all, who'd pushed him, Jack Larue. People didn't push Larue. The anger flowed back into him and charged blood and energy into his lagging legs. He sprinted mightily and caught the rail at the end of the last car. He pulled himself upward and then lay panting on the back platform. His head still throbbed where Nevers had shoved him earlier that day.

With a series of ominous jerks the train gained speed and Larue watched the black ties flash out from under the belly of the car. Not until then did the impossibility

of his situation strike him. The train was going too fast by now for him to get off . . . running a trip that had never been meant, for the el was no more after noon that day. This unscheduled run was sheer madness. Suddenly, with horror, the memory of the demolition crew on the bridge came back to Larue. Good God, by now a lot of those bridge rails would have been pried and ripped and loosened. What was Nevers thinking of . . . if it was Nevers!

Larue got to his feet and started into the interior of the coach, feeling his way up the black aisle, his hands guiding him as he touched the worn backs of the seats. The train lurched around a curve and Larue teetered to keep his balance. Never in his years of riding the elevated had it traveled so fast, of that he was sure. Lights from houses they passed flickered feebly through the dirty glass windows and the seat backs took on the sepulchral outlines of ghostly monsters. He forced himself onward and gained the division between car number three and number two.

Looking ahead along the aisle, he could see through the open front the swath cut by the headlight. Lord, there was something eerie about this. He fought back the whimpering cry that rose in his throat. Suppose no one was aboard. Suppose the train were running by itself! Even as the superstitions of his ancestors threatened to crowd his mind, Larue's reason fought them back. Of course, there was a man up there. It was Nevers, he thought. Or maybe it wasn't Nevers. Could be there was some reason for this trip. An inspector going down the line a ways for some purpose. A thin chance, but the idea bolstered him.

HE STUMBLED through the silent middle car and came to the first. His steps slowed, his fears powerful within him again. The car grew brighter around him as the train thundered into a more brightly lit section. The Fender Street station loomed ahead. But desolate tonight. No persons watching, no lines of children with flags, no band,

no dignitaries. Only loneliness. They flashed through the station and out. As the el thundered along in its cavern between buildings, here and there Larue fleetingly glimpsed a face at a tenement window or a person gesticulating.

These people knew the el. They had lived with it for years just as he had, lived with its noise and rattle and dirt, and they knew it had died at noon that day, died forever-more, and yet here was this monster ghost thundering again, this magic symbol of the railroad on stilts that refused to die. He could tell from some of the flash glances that they were startled, disbelieving what they saw—a yellow finger of light and then the rumbling clattering black train following the thin cone of brilliance, speeding through the night on the condemned el. And they knew as he knew that the train must stop, for men had killed the creature called the el. They had cut at it and torn at it and broken its structure. Larue's mouth went dry. Thin factory funnels, gray in the night, loomed past outside.

From that he knew they weren't many blocks from the ramp that led up onto the bridge. And the bridge tracks, he knew, were already in a state of partial demolition. He staggered forward, then again the car swayed beneath him. As he edged closer to the motorman's compartment at the very front and right of the first car, the fear that no one would be within that compartment took him by the throat and seemed almost to shake him in rhythm to the swaying of the car.

With a great effort of control, he threw himself ahead, wrenching at the motorman's door. He pulled it open and the words burst forth then.

"Oh, Pete! God, man, I'm glad to see you! Look, you've got to pull this thing down. You know the tracks are down up ahead!"

Gone was the picture of the watchman lying back there in the yards, for here instead of nobody, instead of some ghost, was old Nevers crouched reassuringly as always over his controls.

"Pete," said Larue again, grabbing the

man's craglike shoulder, "slow her down. The bridge's not far away."

But the old man just sat there, his eyes staring ahead.

The moment of relief was gone for Jack Larue. The foundry worker cursed and pleaded. He wedged himself into the tiny compartment with the motorman. He screamed at Nevers.

"For God's sake, man, don't you understand? There's no more track up ahead. I saw them pulling it up myself. You'll wreck her, I tell you, Pete. You've got to listen to me."

The el jiggled balefully around the corner and then Larue sensed rather than saw its upward pull. The grade leading toward the ramp Larue screamed then and looked ahead. The yellow cone of light fumbled through the darkness and then picked out the ramp far ahead. Larue looked away and at Nevers again.

"You're crazy, man," he screamed. "Stop her, Nevers, for God's sake!"

**B**UT the motorman sat his seat with steely determination. The light that fell in irregular squares in the compartment seemed to strike and reflect from Nevers. There was a quality about the man that terrified Larue. Suddenly he flung himself across the motorman's body and lurched frantically at the controls. He got one hand on the brake and the other hand closed over the long metal lever that controlled the speed. His arms and back strained with the frenzied effort to move them against Nevers' strength and will. He could not. The old man possessed a superhuman steel-like strength. The metallic resonance of the steel el structure suddenly gave way to the ominous hollow-like rumble of the ramp. The wooden cross-beams beneath the ties echoed back the thumping of the train like evil demons pounding in derision. Larue redoubled his efforts and each split second seemed an eternity of fear and struggle and decision.

He jerked his hands from the levers and turned them on Nevers. He struck the man with all the strength of his hard workman's body. His hand cracked and bled and broke against the rocklike un-

yielding creature before him. His flayings caught the whistle cord and the ban-shoe hoot of the train joined in mournful discord to Larue's own scream. His pleas were incoherent now. He must kill this man before him or he would die!

The ramp vibrated hollowly beneath the coach. The laborer shot a fearful glance ahead up the ladder of light that groped along the ties in the distance. The rails were still there as far as he could see, but out in the middle of the West River Bridge, out over the swirling dark water dozens of feet below, there were no tracks and the train would suddenly be out of its element, helpless, forsaken. The image of this morning lighted up in Larue's mind. Looking back out of a window as the el rumbled the other way across the West River . . . looking back and seeing the crews coming together with their tools attacking the rails and destroying their section by section. That was ahead, he knew. The incline grew steeper and the echoes from the ramp fell away to become deeper, longer. They were on the bridge!

Larue started to back out of the motor-man's compartment. He looked ahead, and there, oh God, there he could at last see the shining reflection of the rails was broken, somewhere out there ahead near center-bridge. With ghastly suddenness he felt a hand of iron close on his wrist and turned away from the sight ahead. Nevers had turned his head and was looking at him. A glinting skull-like visage leering with evilness. The face was like an old carving.

"Pete, for God's sake!" Larue screamed. "We've got to jump. It's our only chance."

But the look from the other man told him what Nevers meant to do, and Larue's only thought desperately was to get free, to hurl himself out the front to one side. The space he still had to go, the seconds he had to fight with, both were shortening.

Larue hurled his body backwards, clawing at the arm that imprisoned his own. He then realized suddenly what he was up against. This was a monster—no creature of God, of flesh and blood.

On either side was the blackness of empty air. Somewhere far down there was the water. Ahead, much too near now, was the beginning of the destroyed sections. Rails pulled aside, twisted and bent, missing. Larue charged forward then, straight at the creature who opposed him, his hard body rammed against the other. Every muscle developed from years at the foundry came into play. The thing before him gave ground slightly to counter this new assault, then Jack's free hand came down in a wicked slash over the hand that held him. He reversed his direction and lurched backward toward the opening in the front of the train. His monster opponent, surprised, came with him for a few groaning, precious feet. Larue gained the front of the car vestibule and levered his shoulder around the coping. The guard chain across the front broke. The thing named Nevers groaned. There was a sudden scream of twisting metal, a distinct snapping sound, and Larue was free. The least horror of the moment was that Nevers' hand unaccountably had come with him as though wrenched from its very socket. He was staggering, flying out onto the side to fall clear in a somersaulting, bouncing heap along the right of way on the bridge. The train rumbled on past.

Jack raised himself up. He was still clutching in his hand the weighty something. The train was silhouetted for a splendid moment against the lights of the city as it charged relentlessly onto No Man's Land where tracks had been razed. With reeling senses the foundry worker watched the spectacle. The train suddenly bucked. The first car went up in the air as though it had gone over a gigantic bump. Then it slid sideways at incredible speed, dragging the other two along. All this seemed soundless to Larue. The el glided sideways then and tumbled off the bridge. Only then did he become aware of the sounds. The awful shrieking and grinding of iron upon iron, the crash of impact, the rending noise of rubbing, protesting metal, the bump and whining, and then from below a long-drawn out splash . . . and silence!

For a time he lay there, too stunned to do other than look weakly around him on the ghost-like bridge. Then he got to his feet. He forced himself to the side of the structure and looked over. The water below was running silently, covering its loot without trace. Trembling violently Jack stumbled on across the bridge and found his way home, still clutching a bulky weight in his hand. This horror—something he was too dazed to look at and appraise, afraid that it was what he most feared, no more incredible than anything else his evening—Nevers' hand!

**BY NOW**, sirens were sounding in the streets below and Larue knew that rescue squads were on the way to the piers. So much had happened that evening that the foundry worker's mind was numb. Still hypnotized with horror, he dropped the something he had sneaked home with him from the bridge in a corner and hurriedly covered it with newspapers. Then he went down into the street again, down to a waterfront excited and packed now with eager, watching people. In addition to the apparatus at the wharves, there were police launches and small craft of all types cruising around in the river directly beneath the bridge. On the span itself he could see figures moving. Searchlights were shining down onto the water. Larue watched for hours as people around him came and went, and as dawn finally streaked the sky to the east. The boats drifted and crossed in eccentric lines around the center of the river, their white wakes criss-crossing over the grave of the el train.

Full morning came and Larue reluctantly left to have breakfast in a little restaurant and then headed for work. Somehow he got through the day. He bought all the evening papers. "A mentally deranged employee of the el line," it is stated, "stole a train last evening after fatally beating his roommate and a guard, both employees of the el, and ran the train of three cars off the West River Bridge where demolition of the tracks had already started. Police stated that they expected Nevers' body would be

recovered when wreckage of the el could be raised."

Larue worked his time at the foundry in a daze. For him, the river had a morbid, fateful fascination. He was on hand when the smashed cars of the el train began to come up, caught and drawn up laboriously with grappling hooks. But Nevers was not found. Still the police trawled the river, for, as was pointed out in the newspapers, the engines were supplied with an automatic device that caused the train to stop of itself if the motorman left the controls. Somehow, the press speculated, Nevers' body might have wedged itself through a window and was even now somewhere at the bottom of the river.

Larue knew at last, and he lived with his terrible secret, not wishing to confirm it, clinging to the doubt, slim though it was, that he was crazy, that his memory of that night was wrong. A nightmare delusion, although the livid bruises still apparent on his body testified otherwise. Days passed, and the foundry worker shunned the corner of his room. After several weeks, the police and press admitted grudgingly that possibly Nevers had escaped on the bridge just before the train went off. Police nets were spread for the deranged murderer and Larue watched the papers closely. More time passed and nothing new was uncovered.

Finally, very desperately, the foundry worker went to the corner of his room one night and dug out the object which had rested there for so many weeks under an increasing pile of newspapers. He took what he found there in trembling hands, horror-stricken, and headed out through the foggy darkness for the wharves, the bundle under his arm. He got to the water's edge and stood for a moment looking around to see if he was observed. Satisfied, he took the paper covering off and held Nevers' arm in his hands. Something the dead Philpot had said came back to him poignantly. No, the motorman hadn't been human.

And Larue dropped the metal throttle lever he'd been holding into the water to join the rest of Pete Nevers of the el.