



THE Big Tank, an American engine—No. 99, Class Wa, New Zealand Railways—was climbing noisily up the Short Hill where the grades rise in places to one in forty. Rain was falling as it had been doing for two days—in a steady downpour—and the 3.15 suburban she was hauling carried very few passengers.

In places the storm-water from the hill-side splashed on to the foot-plate, and Dan Jefferson, the driver, was prepared to meet a fall of earth round any of the many curves. But he reached Thomsontown, and thence proceeded on to Bluff Bridge, which is on the sea-coast.

Here the Big Tank waited on a siding, dozing uneasily, until she heard the Star-Duster's chime-whistle calling through the twilight away along the coast where the road is level for miles. When she heard fit she awoke and prepared to receive the mail-train, which waltzed into Bluff Bridge at the tail of the Star-Duster—a beautiful Baldwin ten-wheel locomotive. She was numbered 1182, Class M, in the railway list, but among the enginemen she was called Star-Duster, because the exhaust from her funnel flew so high that it threw a dimness over the stars.

In a few minutes the flyer whirled

her ten full carriages into the station, and paused for breath before tackling the hill. The Big Tank was then sandwiched between the express engine and the train, for the grades between Bluff Bridge and the city are too heavy for fast running with one engine. The Star-Duster was not especially suited for hill work, but it did not pay to keep a big engine solely for so short a distance, and she and the Elephant, one on the morning, and one on the afternoon train, made good time with an engine like the Tank to help them.

The guard blew his whistle, and the Star-Duster's sweet chime echoed through the gloaming, followed by the Big Tank's deep bass. And the engines rushed up the line, winding and twisting among the hills, the Star-Duster roaring her speed-song—a song of the level plains, "We're running on time!—on time!—on time!"

The Tank always slipped her wheels when the chorus came. Jefferson said it was because her piston-power was too great for her tractive force, i.e., her wheels were not pressed to the rails enough. But the Big Tank put it down to nervousness. They tore over tall viaducts and through echoing tunnels that sometimes rained loose