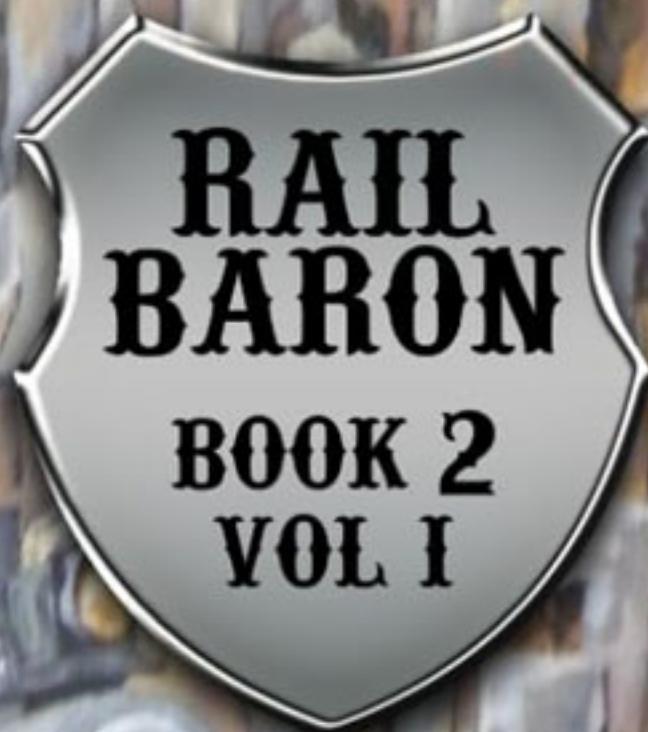


RAIL BARON



MARK MALMKAR

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HIGH IRON

Vol. I

Mark Malmkar

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High Iron is a historical novel about building a railroad in Colorado in the 1880's. It is book two, following the previous novel entitled *Rail Baron* which was about building railroads in Colorado during the 1870's. In the entire Rail Baron Series the actions and activities of the various railroads in Colorado are true to history. The fictitious *Rocky Mountain Central Railroad* is weaved through the plot to tell my story.

Characters such as William Palmer, David Moffat, Governor Evans, Jerome Wheeler, J.J. Hagerman, Thomas Wigglesworth, and others, are real people from Colorado railroad history. I hope my 'poetic license' does not distract from the contribution these men made to develop and improve Colorado.

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PART I

1887

CHAPTER ONE

Sean Dunigan stood in line on the front steps of the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado. He was in the back, middle. The photographer behind his camera on the tripod twenty feet away had set the taller men in the back row. It was becoming a warm mountain day in his new suit. He could smell the scent of pine wafting down from the mountains to the west.

There were seven of them in the graduating class June of 1887, all from the school of engineering. The other six young men were in their early twenties, unmarried and full of themselves. Sean thought of himself as more mature for his dozen years their senior.

“We should form up according to our final marks.” It was a suggestion from Victor Janning, but it sounded like a command. He quickly added, “Irishmen on the far corner.”

Sean tensed. That was pure cussedness on Victor’s part. The young twenty-one-year-old in the middle of the front three graduates had the highest final marks. The handsome blond-headed scholar would never let Sean live down being at the bottom of the class. The young man next to Sean moved to change places. Without reacting, Sean moved to the outer right position on the row of four in the back, even though he was taller.

“Hold up your diploma’s, in your right hand, chest high,” instructed the photographer. Sean held his rolled diploma chest high with his right. He quickly twisted both ends of his waxed handlebar moustache with his left hand to make sure they were together and even.

He knew he looked good. He was wearing the new gray suit and maroon tie Emma had made for him. The fit was perfect for his 5’8” frame. Whatever weight he’d gained prior to four years ago he’d lost

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during four years of Engineering School. He'd either studied it off or worried it off.

Sean felt good about his accomplishments at age 35, even though he graduated last in the class of seven. In the past ten years he'd gone from being a foreman of a track laying gang, to graduating with a degree in civil engineering. He owed it all to Emma.

"You got a job yet, Irish?" Victor Janning asked, without turning around. He knew Sean had not gotten an engineering job yet. All his classmates had job offers before they graduated. Sean had sent out a half dozen letters introducing himself but got no answers in return. He feared he'd end up going back to the railroad to pound spikes. He'd spent many years as a track worker, whom some people referred to as 'Track Monkey's'.

"Someday I'm going to prove to you that I'm as good an engineer as you, Victor Janning," Sean thought. He just needed a chance to start.

As the photographer ducked under his black hood to double-check the framing of the photo, Sean looked at his family. They stood in the crowd fanning around in a semi-circle behind the photographer. Most were parents and siblings of the other graduates. All looked on with pride in their scholars.

His wife looked stunning in her favorite green traveling dress. He noticed where she'd let it out some, hiding the new seams with decorative cloth and lace. Delivering four children took a bit of a toll on her once slender body. Not much, mind you, but enough that she had to stretch the dress a little to feel comfortable. She was still attractive at age thirty-three, with light gray eyes, and a pretty face with several faint freckles. He liked her red hair, now down to the middle of her back, when she didn't put it up, like she has it now, in vertical rolls of curls touching her shoulders, under a stylish hat. She'd spent hours curling her hair. In a little over two weeks, he'll be married to Emma for eight years.

"Your wife is a looker, Irish," Victor Janning, remarked, his head turning sideways. He'd been calling Sean Irish for four years. At first, Sean protested, then let it go. All his years in America he had to fight the prejudice against the Irish.

"With that brood of yours," Victor continued, "you must get a little

woompah, woompah!"

Sean resisted the urge to put a fist through his teeth for the hundredth time in the past four years. He had enough dignity not to create a scene in front of his family and those of his classmates. He had to take on a new role as a professional.

The photographer came from under the camera hood. "Ready now! Diplomas up! Don't move!" He pressed the shutter.

Sean stood statue still, his eyes on his children.

John, the oldest at age fifteen, was quite a young man now. His high school marks were excellent. The boy will outshine his pa when he gets to college.

Samuel, age 7, was in elementary school, spending more time brushing off the little girls than studying. Emma says he takes after his father with the ladies.

Ariana, his precious daughter at age five, already decked out in the latest dress styles, thanks to her mother, the best dressmaker in Denver.

Kevin, age three, was being held at the collar by Emma's firm hand. The boy would run anywhere fast, without urging.

Their last daughter wasn't there. She died the day she was born the previous August. Emma had given her a name and painted it on the wooden plank now marking her grave in a Denver cemetery. Sean wouldn't look at it.

"That was the first take!" the photographer announced after the prescribed time. "One more. You can relax a moment."

Sean lowered the diploma and moved both feet, looking to his father-in-law, Henry, now a year away from sixty. He stood next to Emma. He owned a store in Denver. Henry was thin, almost gaunt, and had thinning brown hair, with a lot of gray at the sides. He wore spectacles, and now his head was covered with a wide brimmed hat.

Next to Henry stood the family friend, former miner, and business partner, Clarence Leininger. Clarence was in his forties. He was tall, husky, and had a bit of a paunch. He was clean shaven, round faced, and had big ears that probably could never be covered with the small amount of dark hair the man had. The miner preferred to go hatless. The pair of men was as different as night and day as they stood side by side.

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“One more photograph,” the photographer stated, sliding the photographic plate in, and removing the black shielding sleeve. “Diplomas up! Look towards me! Don’t move!”

He pressed the shutter.

Sean froze in place. As he stared at Emma, he thought about her dedication to him and their family to support his education. They talked about money, for months before he enrolled, and whether they could afford it. She insisted he become an engineer. They had some wealth accrued from the RMMR, Rocky Mountain Mining and Railroad Corporation. Sean owned stock and bonds. Emma was a corporate official without a title. As a clerk, she managed the accounts of stockholders and bondholders along with the official treasurer. Only those two knew all the finances. Everyone in the closed corporation trusted her. She owned a few corporate assets. But she only had a half a vote—only to break a tie. Clarence and Henry both owned stocks and bonds. Clarence also had wealth from various mining ventures.

Emma insisted the RMMR could support his education for four years. And she was right. To add to the dividends from the RMMR, Emma went back to her trade of dressmaking to add to the budget. With the sewing and the children, she fell into bed exhausted most nights. She insisted she could handle it. She insisted he study.

“Done!” the photographer shouted, slipping the sleeve over the dry glass plate, and removing it from the camera. He placed it in the storage box at his feet. “You may purchase copies at the shop tomorrow.”

The seven graduates took that as a cue to break formation and walk down the steps. Sean touched his feet on the sidewalk as Kevin came running to him. He’d gotten away from Emma—her hand empty.

“Pa!” the boy shouted, coiling his arms around Sean’s leg. Sean reached down and removed him from around his suit pants and picked him up as Henry came forward.

“I can take him back,” the older gentleman offered.

“I’ll hold him,” Sean shook his head. “I’m not staying around these young scholars any more than I have to.” They walked toward the others as the graduates met with their own families.

“Did you see your Pa standing on the steps?” Sean asked his son.

Kevin nodded, grabbing for the diploma.

High Iron

"I'd better keep that," Sean held it away. "It's an important paper."

"Congratulations!" Clarence reached out his hand as Sean approached.

Sean changed hands with the parchment and shook the miner's hand. "I may be the bottom of the class, but I did it," he smiled.

"You're always at the top of my class!" Emma smiled, leaning forward to kiss him. She'd powdered her face and colored her lips for the event.

"Thank you, my lovely colleen," Sean returned the kiss. Colleen was an Irish term for girl. Sean used it as a term of endearment.

"Good job, Pa," John smiled, extending a hand. Sean took it and felt the hard grip his boy was giving him. "You can coach me on college when I get there."

"Are you sure you want my advice?" Sean looked sideways at the fifteen-year-old young man. "You know I was at the bottom of my class." Sean wasn't proud of the fact, but he wouldn't deny it either.

John reached over and touched the parchment in the hand with which Sean was supporting Kevin. "This tells the world that you succeeded in that elite school." John grabbed his Pa's bicep and gave it a gentle squeeze. "This is your diploma from the school of hard knocks! You've got that degree over those other greenhorns!" Sean had talked with John at length the past couple of years about experience versus education.

"Papa." Ariana stretched her arms upward for Sean to take her. He told Kevin that he had to put him down, did so, then picked up his daughter. "Can I see?" she delicately touched the diploma as Kevin ran away. Her dark hair and dainty features came from some bloodline way back in Ireland. John's hair was almost blond. Sam and Kevin's hair was sandy brown like Sean's. He and Emma anticipated at least one child with red hair. None yet.

"It's my diploma."

"This is for your practice sheets?" Ariana asked, softly touching the parchment with her small finger.

"Something like that." Emma had begun teaching Ariana simple numbers and letters, letting her practice on newsprint. Ariana called the pages 'practice sheets'.

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“Did you get a rainbow?” the girl asked, looking into her father’s eyes. For the best renditions of numbers and letters, Emma colored a rainbow on her daughter’s page for a job well done.

“No,” Sean shook his head. “My teacher doesn’t give out rainbows for good work. Rainbows are something only your mother can give out.”

Ariana looked at Emma, three feet away. “Will you give Papa a rainbow for his practice sheet?”

Sean looked at his wife. “Do I deserve a rainbow?” he asked.

“Absolutely! But I’d better not mess up the parchment.” Her lips smiled, but her gray eyes didn’t.

“It’s my diploma. Ariana thinks I deserve a rainbow, so color me one.” He smiled and reached out for Emma again, drawing her close. “You also deserve a rainbow; for four years of mothering these young ones, scrimping, and saving, sewing, and helping keep the corporation profitable. I should find you a big diploma for being the best mother and wife. I’d color a rainbow on it for you and frame it, placing it on the wall, where every guest could see it.” He wrapped his free arm around her waist and kissed her again.

Clarence changed the direction of the conversation as several of the other graduates were leaving the school grounds with their families. “I’ll buy dinner this evening,” he said. “I told Mary Ulbrecht that we’d be coming around six—to save us a table.” Mary Ulbrecht was a German widow who opened her house in the evening and for Sunday noon so guests could purchase a sumptuous meal. She even had the front bed chamber wall removed to make room for two more tables.

Sean noted, “I think we need two tables.” He took his bowler hat from Clarence who’d held it during the photographs and placed it on his head. Ariana ducked down as he did.

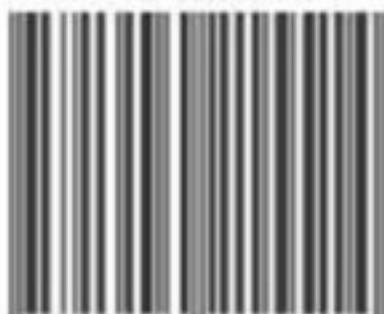
“She told me that tonight’s menu is fried chicken, potatoes, gravy, creamed corn and creamed cabbage,” Clarence went on as the group began walking down the hill to the two carriages that brought them. “Fresh picked cherries made up two pies for dessert, just for us.”

“Can you afford dinner out, for all of us?” Emma asked.

“Sweet little Emma,” Clarence nearly always referred to her as sweet little. He’d known her since she was seventeen in the mining

Sean Dunigan, a railroad track worker, a spiker, known out on the right-of-way as a 'track monkey', wants more out of life. He graduates from the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado in 1887. It had been a tough four years with persecution for his being Irish. Now he seeks a job as a civil engineer. His goal is to build his own railroad someday. Can he get past his heritage and position in society? Can he manage being in love with two women: Emma and Rachel?

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