

# The Great K. & A. Train Robbery

BY PAUL LEICESTER FORD

AUTHOR OF.....

The Hon. Peter Stirling, &c.

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(Concluded.)

Escorted by Camp, Baldwin and the cowboys, I walked toward them. On the way Baldwin said in a low voice: "Deliver the letters, and we'll tell the boys there has been a mistake. Otherwise..."

"When he came up to the five, I called to them that I had agreed to surrender the letters. While I was saying it Miss Cullen joined them, and it was curious to see how respectfully the cowboys took off their hats and fell back.

"You are quite right," Mr. Cullen called. "Give them the letters at once."

"Oh, do, Mr. Gordon," said Madge, still white and breathless with emotion. "The money is nothing. Don't think that." It was all, but with Camp and Baldwin, now reinforced by Judge Wilson, I went to the station, ordered the agent to open the safe, took out the three letters and handed them to Mr. Camp, realizing how poor Madge must have felt on Hance's trail.

Just as he took them we heard outside the first note of a bugle, and as it sounded "By fours, column left," my heart gave a big jump, and the blood came rushing to my face. Camp, Baldwin, and Wilson dashed out of the door, and I wasn't two feet behind them. There was a squadron of cavalry swinging a circle round the station, and we had barely reached the platform when the bugle sounded "Halt," quickly followed by "Forward, left."

As the ranks wheeled and closed up, as a solid line about us, I could have cheered with delight. There was a moment's dramatic hush, in which we could all hear the breathing of the winded horses, and then came the clatter of sword and spur as an officer straggled from his saddle.

"I want Richard Gordon," the officer called.

"At your service, and badly in need of yours, Captain Singer."

"Hope the delay hasn't spoiled things," said the captain. "We had a cursed fool of a guide, who took the wrong trail and ran us into Limestone canyon, where we had to camp for the night."

I explained the situation as quickly as I could, and the captain's eyes gleamed. "I'd have given a bad quarter to have got here ten minutes sooner and ridden my men over those scoundrels," he muttered. "I saw them scatter as we rode up, and if I'd know what they'd been doing, we'd have given them a volley." Then he walked over to Mr. Camp and said, "Give me those letters."

"I hold those letters by virtue of an order"—Camp began.

"Give me those letters," the captain interrupted.

"Do you intend a high-handed interference with the civil authorities?" Judge Wilson demanded.

"Come, come," said the captain. "You have taken forcible possession of the United States property. Any talk about civil authorities is rubbish, and you know it."

"I will never"—cried Mr. Camp.

"Corporal Jackson, dismount a guard of six men!" rang the captain's voice, interrupting him.

Evidently something in the voice or order convinced Mr. Camp, for the letters were hastily produced and given to Singer, who at once handed them to me. I turned with them to the Cullens, and, laughing, said, "All's well that ends well."

But they didn't seem to care a bit about the recovery of the letters, and only wanted to have a handshake all round over my escape. Even Lord Ralles said, "Glad we could be of a little service," and didn't refuse my thanks, though the deuce knows they were badly enough expressed, in my consciousness that I had done an ungentlemanly trick over those trousers of his, and that he had been above remembering it when I was in real danger. I'm ashamed enough to confess that when Miss Cullen held out her hand I made believe not to see it, I'm a bad hand at pretending, and I saw Madge colour up at my act.

The captain finally called me off to consult about our proceedings. I felt no very strong love for Camp, Baldwin or Wilson, but I didn't see that a military arrest would accomplish anything, and after a little discussion it was decided to let them alone, as we would well afford to do, having won.

This matter decided, I said to the captain:—"I'll be obliged if you'll put a guard round my car. And then, if you and your officers will come inside, I have a something in a bottle recommended for removing alkali dust from the tonsils."

"Very happy to test your prescription," said Singer, genially.

I started to go with him, but I could not resist turning to Mr. Camp and his friends, and saying:—

"Gentlemen, the G. S. is a big affair, but it isn't quite big enough to fight the U. S."

CHAPTER XVI. A GLOOMY GOOD-BY.

At that point my importance ceased. Apparently seeing that the game was up, Mr. Camp later in the morning asked Mr. Cullen to give him an interview, and when he was allowed to pass the sentry he came to the steps and suggested:—

"Perhaps we can arrange a compromise between the Missouri Western and the Great Southern?"

"Come into my car," Mr. Cullen assented. "Come into my car." He made way for Mr. Camp, and was about to follow him when Madge took hold of her father's arm, and, making him stoop, whispered something to him.

"What kind of a place?" asked Mr. Cullen, laughing.

hand, and the world knows about as well as I how the contest was compromised by the K. and A. being turned over to the Missouri Western, the territory in southern California being divided between the California Central and the Great Southern, and a traffic arrangement agreed upon that satisfied the G. S.

The next day a Missouri Western board for the K. and A. was elected without opposition, and they in turn elected Mr. Cullen president of the K. and A.; so when my report of the holding-up went in he had the pleasure of reading it. I closed it with a request for instruction, but I never received any, and that ended the matter. I turned over the letters to the special agent at Flagstaff, and I suppose his report is slumbering in some pigeon-hole in Washington, for I should have known of any attempt to bring the culprits to punishment. Mr. Cullen had taken a big risk, but came out of it with a great lot of money, for the Missouri Western bought all his holdings in the K. and A. and C. C. But the scare must have taught him a lesson, for ever since then he's been conservative, and talks about the foolishness of investors who try to get more than 5 per cent. or who think of anything but good railroad bonds.

As for myself, a month after these occurrences I was appointed superintendent of the Missouri Western, which by this deal had become one of the largest railroad systems in the world. It was a big step up for so young a man and was of course pure favoritism, due to Mr. Cullen's influence. I didn't stay in the position long, for within two years I was offered the presidency of the Chicago and St. Paul, and I think that was won on merit. Whether or not, I hold the position still, and have made my road earn and pay dividends right through the panic.

All this is getting away ahead of events, however. The election delayed us so that we couldn't couple on to No. 4 that afternoon, and consequently we had to lie that night at Ash Forks. I made the officers my excuse for keeping away from the Cullens, as I wished to avoid Madge. I did my best to be good company to the blue-coats, and had a first-class dinner for them on my car, but I was in a pretty glum mood, which even champagne couldn't modify. Though all necessity of a guard ceased with the promise, the cavalry remained till the next morning, and, after giving them a good breakfast, about 6 o'clock we shook hands, the bugle sounded, and off they rode. For the first time I understood how a fellow disappointed in love comes to enlist.

I turned about to go into my car, I found Madge standing on the platform of 218 waving a handkerchief. I paid no attention to her and started up my steps.

"Mr. Gordon," she said—and when I looked at her I saw that she was flushing—"what is the matter?"

I suppose most fellows would have found some excuse, but for the life of me I couldn't. All I was able to say was:—

"I would rather not say, Miss Cullen."

"How unfair you are!" she cried. "You—without the slightest reason—suddenly go out of your way to ill-treat, insult me, and yet will not tell me the cause."

That made me angry. "Cause?" I cried. "As if you didn't know of a cause. What you don't know is that I overheard your conversation with Lord Ralles night before last."

"My conversation with Lord Ralles?" exclaimed Madge, in a bewildered way.

"Yes," I said, bitterly. "Keep up the acting. The practice is good, even if it deceives no one."

"I don't understand a word you are saying," said she, getting angry in turn. "You speak as if I had done wrong, as if—I don't know what—and I have a right to know to what you allude."

"I don't see how I can be any clearer," I said. "I was under the station platform, hiding from the cowboys, while you and Lord Ralles were walking. I didn't want to be a listener, but I heard a good deal of what you said."

"But I didn't walk with Lord Ralles," she cried. "The only person I walked with was Captain Ackland!"

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"What kind of a place?" asked Mr. Cullen, laughing.

"A good one," his daughter replied. Of the interview which took place inside 218 I can speak only at second

hand, and the world knows about as well as I how the contest was compromised by the K. and A. being turned over to the Missouri Western, the territory in southern California being divided between the California Central and the Great Southern, and a traffic arrangement agreed upon that satisfied the G. S.

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"I never dreamed of despoiling you," I said. "I only thought, of course—No, that is—I mean—well—Oh, the beast!" I couldn't help exclaiming.

"Oh," said Madge, blushing. "You mustn't think—there was really—you happened to—usually I managed to keep with papa or my brothers or else run away, as I did when he interrupted my letter writing, but the night of the robbery I forgot, and on the trail his mule blocked the path. He never—there really wasn't—you saved me the only times he—that he was really rude, and I am so grateful for it, Mr. Gordon!"

I wasn't in a mood to enjoy even Miss Cullen's gratitude. Without stopping for words I dashed into 218, and, going straight to Albert Cullen, I shook him out of a sound sleep, and before he could well understand me I was alternately swearing at him and raging at Lord Ralles. Finally he got the truth through his head, and it was nuts to me, even in my rage, to see how his English drawl disappeared and how quick he could be when he really became excited. I left him hurrying into his clothes and went to my car, for I didn't dare to see the exodus of Lord Ralles through fear that I couldn't behave myself. Albert came into 97 in a few moments to say that the Englishmen were going to the hotel as soon as dressed, the captain having elected to stay by his brother.

"I wouldn't have believed it of Ralles. I feel jolly cut up, you know," he drawled.

I had been so enraged over Lord Ralles that I hadn't stopped to reckon in what position I stood myself toward Miss Cullen, but I didn't have to do much thinking to know that she would not know that right through the whole I had never quite been able to think badly of her. I went into 218, and was lucky enough to find her alone in the dining-room.

"Miss Cullen," I said, "I've been ungentlemanly and suspicious, and I'm about as ashamed of myself as a man can be, and not jump into the Grand canyon. I've not come here to ask your forgiveness, for I can't forgive myself, much less expect it of you. But want you to know how I feel and if there's any reparation, apology, anything, that you'd like I'll"—

Madge interrupted my speech there by holding out her hand.

"You don't suppose," she said, "that after what you have done for us I could be angry over what was merely a mistake?"

"That's what I call a trump of a girl, worth loving for a lifetime."

Well, we coupled up, No. 4 that morning, and started east, this time Mr. Cullen's car being the "ender." All on 218 were jubilant, as was natural, but I kept growing bluer and bluer. I dined on their car the night we were due in Albuquerque, and afterward Miss Cullen and I went out and sat on the back platform.

"I've had enough adventures to talk about for a year," Madge said, as we chatted the whole thing over. "And you can no longer brag that the K. and A. have never had a robbery, even if you didn't lose anything."

"I have lost something," I said, a little sadly.

Madge looked at me quickly, started to speak, hesitated, and then said, "Oh, Mr. Gordon, if you only could know how badly I have felt about that and how I appreciate the sacrifice!"

I had only meant that I had lost my heart, and for that matter, probably my head, for it would have been ungenerous even to hint to Miss Cullen that I had made any sacrifice of conscience for her sake, and I would as soon have asked her to pay for it in money as have told her.

"You mustn't think"—I began.

"I have felt," she continued, "that your wish to serve us made you do something you never would have done otherwise. Well, you—any one can see how truthful and—and it has made me feel so badly that we—Oh, Mr. Gordon, no one has a right to do wrong in this world, for it brings such sadness and danger to innocent—and you have been so generous"—

I couldn't let this go on. "What I did," I told her, "was to fight fire with fire, and no one is responsible for it but"—

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"I should like to think that, but I can't," she said. "I know we all tried to do something dishonest, and while you didn't do any real wrong, yet I don't think you would have acted as you did except for our sake. And I'm afraid you may some day regret"—

"I shan't," I cried, "and so far from meaning that I had lost my self-respect, I was alluding to quite another thing."

"Time?" she asked.

"No."

"What?"

"Something else you have stolen."

"I haven't," she denied.

"You have," I affirmed.

"You mean the novel," she asked, "because I sent it in to 97 to-night?"

"I don't mean the novel."

"I can't think of anything but those pieces of petrified wood, and those you gave me," she said, demurely. "I am sure that whatever else I have of yours you have given me without even my asking, and if you want it back you've only got to say so."

"I suppose that would be the very best course," I groaned.

"I hate people who force a present on one," she continued, "and then, just as one begins to like it, want it back."

Before I could speak, she said, hurriedly, "How often do you come to Chicago?"

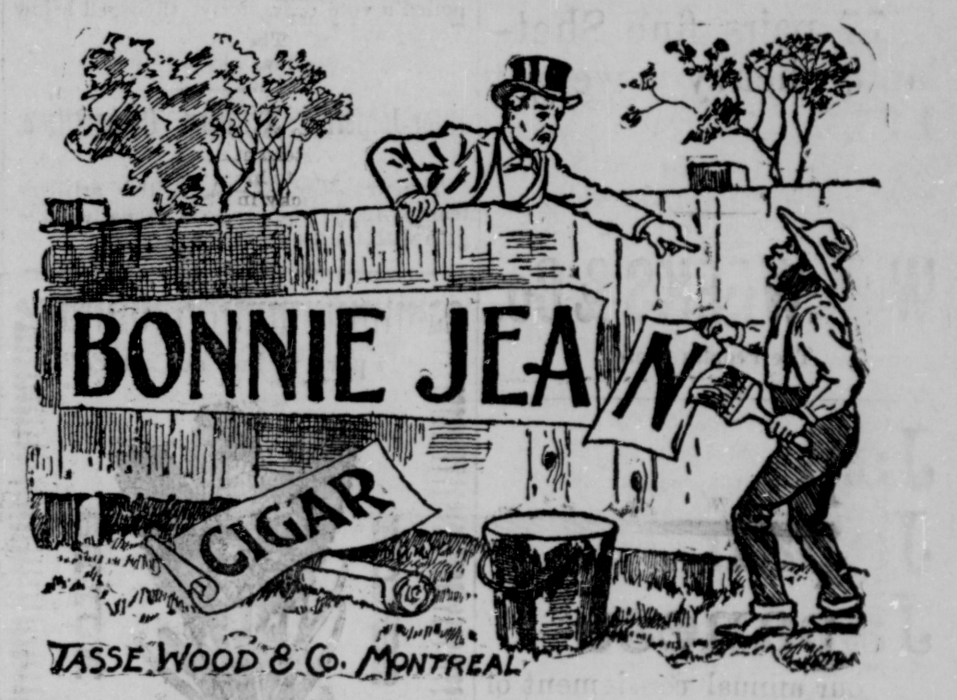
I took that to be a sort of command that I was to wait, and, though longing to have it settled then and there, I braced myself up and answered her question. Now I see what a duffer I was. Madge told me afterward that she asked only because she was so frightened and confused that she felt she must stop my speaking for a moment.

I did my best till I heard the whistle the locomotive gives as it runs into yard limits, and then rose. "Good-by, Miss Cullen," I said, properly enough, and she responded, "Good-by, Mr. Gordon," with equal propriety.

I held her hand, hating to let her go, and the first thing I know I blurted out, "I wish I had the brass of Lord Ralles."

"I don't," she laughed, "because if you had I shouldn't be willing to let you"—

And what she was going to say and why she didn't say it is the concern of no one but Mr. and Mrs. Richard Gordon.



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