

The Great K. & A. Train Robbery

BY PAUL LEICESTER FORD
AUTHOR OF.....

"The Hon. Peter Stirling," &c.

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(Continued.)

CHAPTER XIV.

"LISTENERS NEVER HEAR ANYTHING GOOD."

Before I had ceased chuckling over the sheriff's indignant declaration of the excess of etiquette I heard Mr. Cullen's voice demanding to know what the trouble was. It was quickly explained to him that I had escaped. He at once gave them permission to search his car, and went in with the sheriff and the cowboys. Apparently Madge went in, too, for in a moment I heard Camp say in a low voice: "Two of you fellows get down below the car and crawl in under the truck where you can't be seen. Evidently that cuss isn't here, but he's likely to come by and by. If so, nab him if you can, and if you can't fire two shots. Mostly, are you here?"

"Do I chaw tobacco?" asked Moseley, ironically, clearly insulted at the suggestion that he would travel without a gun.

"Then keep a sharp lookout and listen to everything you hear, especially the whereabouts of some letters. If you can spot their lay, crawl out and get word to me at once. Now, under you go before they come out."

I heard two men drop into the gravel close alongside of where I lay and then crawl under the truck of 218. They weren't a moment too soon, for the next instant I heard two or three people jump on to the platform, and Albert Cullen's voice drawl, "Aw, by Jove, what's the row?" Camp not enlightening them, Lord Raltes suggested that they get on the car to find out, and the three did so. A moment later the sheriff came to the door and told Camp that I was not to be found.

"I told you this was the last place to look for the cuss, Mr. Camp," he said. "We've just discomfited the lady for nothin'."

"Then we must search elsewhere," said Camp. "Come on, boys."

The sheriff turned and made another elaborate apology for having had to trouble the lady.

I heard Madge tell him that he hadn't troubled her at all, and then, as the cowboys and Camp walked off, she added, "And, Mr. Gunton, I want to thank you for reproving Mr. Camp's swearing."

"Thank you, miss," said the sheriff. "We fellows are a little rough at times, but we know what's due to a lady."

"Papa," said Madge, as soon as he was out of hearing, "the sheriff is the most beautiful swearer I ever heard."

For awhile there was silence round the station. I suppose the party in 218 were comparing notes, while the two cowboys and I had the best reasons for being quiet. Presently, however, the men came out of the car and jumped on the platform. Madge evidently followed them to the door, for she called, "Please let me know the moment anything happens or you learn something."

"Better go to bed, Madge," Albert called. "You'll only worry, and it's after three."

"I couldn't sleep if I tried," she answered.

Their footsteps died away in a moment, and I heard her close the door of 218. In a few moments she opened it again, and, stepping down to the station platform, began to pace up and down it. If I had only dared, I could have put my finger through the crack of the planks and touched her foot as she walked over my head, but I was afraid it might startle her into a shriek, and there was no explaining to her what it meant without telling the cowboys how close they were to their quarry.

Madge hadn't walked from one end of the platform to the other more than three or four times when I heard some one coming. She evidently heard it also, for she said:—

"I began to be afraid you hadn't understood me."

"I thought you told me to see first if I were needed," said a voice that even the distance and the planks did not prevent me from recognizing as that of Lord Raltes.

"Yes," said she. "You are sure you can be spared?"

"I couldn't be of the slightest use," said Raltes, getting on to the platform and joining Madge. "It's as black as ink everywhere, and I don't think I have anything to be done till daylight."

"Then I'm glad you came back, for I really want to say something—to ask the greatest favour of you."

"You have only to tell me what it is," said his lordship.

"Even that is very hard," said Madge. "If—Oh, I'm afraid I haven't the courage after all."

"I'll be glad to do anything I can," "It's—well—oh, dear, I can't. Let's walk a little, while I think how to put it."

They began to walk, which took a weight off my mind, as I had been forced to hear every word said thus far and was dreading what might follow, since I was perfectly helpless to warn them. The platform was built around the station and in a moment they were out of hearing.

Before many seconds were over, however, they had walked round the building, and I heard Lord Raltes say: "You really don't mean that he's insulted you?"

"That is just what I do mean," cried Madge, indignantly. "It's been almost past endurance. I haven't dared to tell anyone, but he had the cruelty, the meanness, on Hance's trail to threaten that—"

At that point the walkers turned the corner again, and I could not hear the rest of the sentence. But I had heard more than enough to make me grow hot with mortification, even while I could hardly believe I had understood aright. Madge had been so kind to me lately that I couldn't think she had been feeling as bitterly as she

spoke. That such an apparently frank girl was a consummate actress wasn't to be thought, and yet—I remembered how well she had played her part on Hance's trail. But even that wouldn't convince me. Proof of her duplicity came quickly enough, for while I was thinking the walkers were round again, and Lord Raltes was saying:—

"Why haven't you complained to your father or brothers?"

"Because I knew they would resent his conduct to me, and—"

"Of course, they would," cried her companion, interrupting. "But why should you object to that?"

"Because of the letters," said Madge. "Don't you see that if we made him angry he would betray us to Mr. Camp and—"

Then they passed out of hearing, leaving me almost desperate, both at being an eavesdropper to such a conversation, and that Madge could think so meanly of me. To say it, too, to Lord Raltes made it cut all the deeper, as any fellow who has been in love will understand.

Round they came again in a moment, and I braced myself for the lash of the whip that I felt was coming. I didn't escape it, for Madge was saying:—

"Can you conceive of a man pretending to care for a girl and yet treating her so? I can't tell you the grief, the mortification, I have felt."

She spoke with a half sob in her throat, as if she was struggling not to cry, which made me wish I had never been born. "It's been all I could do to control myself in his presence—I have come so utterly to hate and despise him," she added.

"I don't wonder," said Lord Raltes. "My only surprise is—"

With that they passed out of hearing again, leaving me fairly desperate with shame, grief, and, I'm afraid, with anger. I felt at once guilty and yet wronged. I knew I had been ungentlemanly on the trail, but I had done my best to retrieve my conduct, and was running big risks, both present and eventual, for Madge's sake.

Yet here she was acknowledging that thus far she had used me as a puppet, while all the time disliking me. It was a terrible blow, made all the harder by the fact that she was proving herself such a different girl from the one I loved—so different, in fact, that, despite what I had heard, I couldn't quite believe it of her, and found myself seeking to extenuate and even justify her conduct. While I was doing this they came within hearing, and Lord Raltes was speaking.

"—with you," he said. "But I still do not see what I can do, however much I may wish to serve you."

"Can't you go to him and insist that he—or tell him what I really feel toward him—or anything, in fact, to shame him? I really can't go on acting longer."

That reached the limit of my endurance, and I crawled from my burrow, intending to get out from under that platform whether I was caught or not. I knew it was a foolish move—after having heard what I had a little more or less was quite immaterial. But I entirely forgot my danger in the sting of what Madge had said, and my one thought was to stand face to face with her long enough to—I'm sure I don't know what I did intend to say.

Just as I had got to the plank, however, I heard Lord Raltes ask:—

"Who's that?"

"It's me," said a voice, "the station agent." Then I heard a door close. Some one walked out to the centre of the platform, and remarked:—

"That 'ere local freight is late."

At least the letters were recovered.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SURRENDER OF THE LETTERS.

If the letters were safe, that was a good deal more than I was. The moment the station-master had made his agreed-upon announcement, he said to the walkers:—

"Had any news of Mr. Gordon?"

"No," said Lord Raltes. "And as the lights kept moving in the town they must still be huzzling for him."

"I reckon they'll do considerable more hunting before they find him we

on the doorway, as if she needed support, and the other covering her face. It was too far for me to see her face, but the whole attitude expressed such suffering that it was terrible to see. What was more, her position put her in range of every shot the cowboys might fire at the five as they charged. If I could have stopped them, I would have done so; but, since that was impossible, I cried:—

"Mr. Camp, I'll surrender the letters."

"Hold on, boys," shouted Baldwin. "Wait till we get the property he stole." And, coming through the crowd, he threw the noose off my neck.

"Don't shoot, Mr. Cullen," I yelled, as my friends halted and raised their rifles, and fortunately the cowboys had opened up enough to let them hear me, and see that I was free of the zone.

(To be Continued.)

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there," chuckled one man, with a self-important manner. "He's hidden away under this platform."

"Not right here?" I heard Madge cry, but I had too much to do to take in what followed. I was lying close to the loose plank, and even before the station-master had completed his sentence I was squirming through the crack.

As I freed my legs I heard two shots, which I knew was the signal given by the cowboys, followed by a shriek of fright from Madge, for which she was hardly to be blamed. I was on my feet in an instant and ran down the tracks at my best speed. It wasn't with much hope of escape, for once out from under the planking I found, what I had not before realized, that day was dawning, and already outlines at a distance could be seen. However, I was bound to do my best, and I did it.

Before I had run one hundred feet I could hear pursuers, and a moment later a revolver cracked, ploughing up the dust in front of me. Another bullet followed, and seeing that affairs were getting desperate, I dodged round the end of some cars, only to plump into the arms of a man running at full speed. The collision was so unexpected that we both fell, and before I could get on my feet someone plumped down on top of me, and I felt something cold on the back of my neck.

"Lie still, yer sneakin' coyote of a read-agent," said the man, "or I'll blow yer neck into jash."

I preferred to take his advice and lay quiet while the cowboys gathered. From all directions I heard them coming, calling to each other that "the skunk that shot the woman is corralled," and other forms of the same information. In a moment I was jerked to my feet, only to be swept off them with equal celerity, and was half-carried, half-dragged, along the tracks. It wasn't as rough handling as I have taken on the football field, but I didn't enjoy it.

In a space of time that seemed only seconds I was close to a telegraph pole; but, brief as the moment had been, a fellow with a lariat tied round his waist was half-way up the post. I knew the mob had been told that I had killed a woman in the hold-up, for the cowboy, bad as he is, has his own standards, beyond which he won't go. But I might as well have tried to tell my innocence to the moon as to get them to listen to denials, even if I could have made my voice heard.

The lariat was dropped over the cross-piece, and as a man adjusted the noose a sudden silence fell. I thought it was a little sense of what they were doing, but it was merely due to the command of Baldwin, who, with Camp, stood just outside the mob.

"Let me say a word before you pull," he called, and then to me he said, "Now will you give up the property?"

I was pretty pale and shaky, but I came of stiffer stock, and I wouldn't have backed down then, it seemed to me, if they had been going to kill me alive. I suppose it sounds foolish, and if I had had plenty of time I think my common sense would have made me crawl. Not having time, I was on the point of saying "No," when the door of 218, which lay about 200 feet away, flew open, and out came Mr. Cullen, Fred, Albert, Lord Raltes and Captain Ackland, all with rifles. Of course it was perfect desperation for the five to tackle the cowboys, but they were game to do it, all the same.

How it would have ended I don't know, but as they sprang off the car platform, Miss Cullen came out on it, and stood there, one hand holding

the doorway, as if she needed support, and the other covering her face. It was too far for me to see her face, but the whole attitude expressed such suffering that it was terrible to see. What was more, her position put her in range of every shot the cowboys might fire at the five as they charged. If I could have stopped them, I would have done so; but, since that was impossible, I cried:—

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Elevating the Painter.

A Scotch journal says that a certain well known painter went to a seaside village to paint a picture and put up at a small public house. One day while in his room he heard a commotion, and on running down stairs found that the chimney was on fire. Two or three men were trying to put out the flames by sweeping the soot down with brooms, but the blaze was too high to be reached in this manner. Seeing their want of success, the painter caught up a thick mat, ran with it to the roof, and, climbing up the stack of chimneys, placed it on the top of the one that was on fire. His idea was, of course, to obstruct the draft. It happened that a stiff breeze was blowing, and, as the mat was in danger of being blown off, the artist sat on it to hold it down. He was just comfortably seated when he found himself lifted bodily and landed upon the tiles of the roof. What had happened? That was more than he could imagine till he went down stairs. No one knew that he had gone aloft, and when the landlord saw that sweeping down the soot was ineffectual he tried the old-fashioned remedy of lighting a charge of gunpowder. This it was that removed not only the soot, but the mat and the painter.

Wales and Lady Romney.

Wales gets huffy with women on account of the slightest trifles. Though on the most familiar terms with them, he will turn them down remorselessly. It is a shame that he should possess the power. Here is an instance: One night he was talking to Lady Romney at a ball. "I hear, Lady Romney," he leered, "that Lord Romney has a nickname. What is it?"

Instead of answering the question, Lady Romney said, "Sir, I hear that you are called 'Tummy.' Is it true?"

Without a word he turned with a scowl and walked away, leaving her an object of rude attention.—New York Press.

Spain's wretched showing in agricultural pursuits is said by the British consul at Cadiz to be due to the use of primitive implements of the time of Julius Caesar.

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