

The Great K. & A. Train Robbery

BY PAUL LEICESTER FORD

AUTHOR OF.....

"The Hon. Peter Stirling," &c.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PARTY ON SPECIAL NO. 218.

Anyone who hopes to find in what is here written a work of literature had better lay it aside unread. At Yale I should have got the sack in rhetoric and English composition, let alone other studies, had it not been for the fact that I played half back on the team, and so the professors marked me away up above where I ought to have ranked. That was twelve years ago, but my life since I received my marching has hardly been of a kind to improve me in either style or grammar. It is true that one woman tells me I write well, and my directors never find fault with my compositions, but I know she likes my letters because, whatever else they may say to her, they always say in some form, "I love you," while my board approves my annual reports because thus far I have been able to end each with "I recommend the declaration of a dividend of one per cent from the earnings of the current year." I should therefore prefer to reserve my writings for such friendly critics if it did not seem necessary to make public a plain statement concerning an affair over which there appears to be much confusion. I have heard in the last five years not less than 20 renderings of what is commonly called "the great K. and A. train robbery," some so twisted and distorted that but for the intermediate versions I should never have recognized them as attempts to narrate the series of events in which I played a somewhat prominent part.

I have read or been told that, unassisted, the pseudo hero captured a dozen desperadoes; that he was one of the road agents himself; that he was saved from lynching only by the timely arrival of cavalry; that the action of the United States Government in rescuing him from the civil authorities was a most high-handed interference with State rights; that he received his reward from a grateful railroad by being promoted; that a lovely woman, as recompense for his villainy—but, both; it's my business to tell what really occurred and not what the world chooses to invent. And if any man thinks he would have done otherwise in my position I can only say that he is a better or a worse man than Dick Gordon.

Primarily, it was football which snared my end. Owing to my skill in the game, I took a postgraduate at the Sheffield Scientific school, that the team might have my services for an extra two years. That led to my knowing a little about mechanical engineering, and when I left the "quad" for good I went into the Alton railroad shops. It wasn't long before I was foreman of a section; next I became a division superintendent, and after I had stuck to that for a time I was appointed superintendent of the Kansas and Arizona railroad, a line extending from Trinidad, in Kansas, to The Needles, in Arizona, tapping the Missouri Western system at the first place and the Great Southern at the other. With both lines we had important traffic agreements, as well as the closest relations, which sometimes were a little difficult, as the two roads were anything but friendly. And we had directors of each on the K. and A. board, in which they fought like cats. Indeed, it would only be a question of time when one would oust the other and then absorb my road. My headquarters were at Albuquerque, in New Mexico, and it was there, in October, 1890, that I received the communication which was the beginning of all that followed.

This initial factor was a letter from the president of the Missouri Western, telling me that their first vice-president, Mr. Cullen (who was also a director of my road), was coming out to attend the annual election of the K. and A., which under our charter had to be held in Ash Forks, A. T. A second paragraph told me that Mr. Cullen's family accompanied him, and that they all wished to visit the Grand canyon of the Colorado on their way. Finally, the president wrote that the party travelled in his own private car, and asked me to make myself generally useful to them. Having become quite hardened to just such demands, at the proper date I ordered my superintendent's car on to No. 2, and the next morning it was dropped off at Trinidad.

The moment No. 3 arrived I climbed into the president's special, that was the last car on the train, and introduced myself to Mr. Cullen, whom, though an official of my road, I had never met. He seemed surprised at my presence, but greeted me very pleasantly as soon as I explained that the Missouri Western office had asked me to do what I could for him, and that I was there for that purpose. His party were about to sit down to breakfast, and he asked me to join them. So we passed into the dining-room at the forward end of the car, where I was introduced to "My son," Lord Ralles, and "Captain Ackland." The son was a junior copy of his father, tall and fine-looking; but, in place of the frank and easy manner of his sire, he was so very English that most people would have sworn falsely as to his native land. Lord Ralles was a little, well-built chap, not half so English as Albert Cullen, quick in manner and thought, being in this the opposite to his brother, Captain Ackland, who was heavy enough to rock a ballast roadbed. Both brothers gave me the impression of being gentlemen, and both were decidedly good-looking.

After the introductions, Mr. Cullen said we would not wait, and his remark called my attention to the fact that there was one more place at the table than there were people assembled. I had barely noted this when my host said, "Here's the truant," and turning, I faced a lady who had just entered. Mr. Cullen said, "Madge, let me introduce Mr. Gordon to you." My bow was made to a girl of about

20, with light brown hair, the bluest of eyes, a fresh skin, and a fine figure, dressed so natty as to be to me, after my four years of Western life, a sight for three eyes. She greeted me pleasantly, made a neat little apology for having kept us waiting, and then we all sat down.

It was a very jolly breakfast table, Mr. Cullen and his son being capital talkers, and Lord Ralles a good third, while Miss Cullen was quick and clever enough to match the three. Before the meal was over I came to the conclusion that Lord Ralles was in love with Miss Cullen, for he kept making low asides to her, and from the fact that she allowed them, and, indeed, responded, I drew the conclusion that he was a lucky beggar, feeling, I confess, a little pang that a title was going to win such a nice American girl.

One of the first subjects spoken of was train robbery, and Miss Cullen, like most Easterners, seemed to take a great interest in it, and had any quantity of questions to ask me.

"I've left all my jewellery behind, except my watch," she said, "and that I hide every night. So I really hope we'll be held up, it would be such an adventure."

"There isn't any chance of it, Miss Cullen," I told her, "and if we were, you probably wouldn't even know that it was happening, but would sleep right through it."

"Wouldn't they try to get our money and our watches?" she demanded.

I told her no, and explained that the express and mail cars were the only ones to which the road agents paid any attention. She wanted to know the way it was done; so I described to her how sometimes the train was flagged by a danger signal, and when it had slowed down the runner found himself covered by armed men, or how a gang would board the train, one by one, at way stations, and then, when the time came, steal forward, secure the express agent and postal clerk, climb over the tender and compel the runner to stop the train at some lonely spot on the road. She made me tell her all the details of such robberies as I knew about, and, though I had never been concerned in any, I was able to describe several, which, as they were monotonously alike, I confess I coloured up a bit here and there, in an attempt to make them interesting to her. I seemed to succeed, for she kept the table and were smoking our cigars in the observation saloon. Lord Ralles had a lot to say about the American lack of courage in letting trains containing 20 and 30 men be held up by half a dozen robbers.

"Why," he ejaculated, "both my brother and I have a double express with us, and do you think we'd sit still in our seats? No. Hang me, if I wouldn't do something!"

"You might," I laughed, a little nettled, I confess, by his speech, "but I'm afraid it would be yourselves."

"Aw, you fancy resistance impossible?" drawled Albert Cullen.

"It has been tried," I answered, "and without success. You can see it's like all surprises—one side is prepared before the other side knows there is danger. Without regard to relative numbers, the odds are all in favour of the road agents."

"But I wouldn't sit still, whatever the odds," said his lordship. "And no Englishman would."

"Well, my lord," I said, "I hope, for your sake, then, that you'll never be in a hold-up, for I should feel about you as the runner of a locomotive did when the old lady asked him if it wasn't very painful to him to run over people. 'Yes, madam,' he sadly replied. 'There is nothing that muzzes an engine up so.'"

"I don't think Miss Cullen liked Lord Ralles' comments on American courage any better than I did, for she said:

"Can't you take Lord Ralles and Captain Ackland into the service of the K. and A., Mr. Gordon, as a special guard?"

"The K. and A. has never had a robbery yet, Miss Cullen," I replied, "and I don't think that it ever will have."

"Why not?" she asked.

I explained to her how the canyon of the Colorado to the north and the district of the Mexican border to the south made escape so almost desperate that the road agents preferred to devote their attentions to other routes. "If we were boarded, Miss Cullen," I said, "your jewellery would be as safe as it is in Chicago, for the robbers would only clean out the express and mail cars. But if they should so far forget their manners as to take your trinkets, I'd agree to return them to you inside of one week."

"That makes it all the jollier," she cried, eagerly. "We could have the fun of the adventure and yet not lose anything. Can't you arrange for it, Mr. Gordon?"



Introduced myself to Mr. Cullen.

Ralles a chance to show us how to handle those gentry, but it's not to be done." I really should have been glad to have the road agents pay us a call.

We spent that day pulling up the Raton pass, and so on over the Glorietta pass down to Lamy, where, as the party wanted to see Santa Fe, I had our two cars dropped off the overland, and we ran up the branch line to the old Mexican city. It was well-worn ground to me, but I enjoyed showing the sights to Miss Cullen, for

by that time I had come to the conclusion that I had never met a sweeter or jollier girl. Her beauty, too, was of a kind that kept growing on one, and before I had known her twenty-four hours, without quite being in love with her, I was beginning to hate Lord Ralles, which was about the same

thing, I suppose. Every hour convinced me that the two understood each other, not merely from the little asides and confidences they kept exchanging, but even more so from the way Miss Cullen would take his lordship down occasionally. Yet, like a fool, the more I saw to confirm my first diagnosis, the more I found myself dwelling on the dimples at the corners of Miss Cullen's mouth, the bewitching uplift of her upper lip, the runaway curls about her neck, and the curves and colour of her cheeks.

Half a day served to see everything in Santa Fe worth looking at, but Mr. Cullen decided to spend there the time they had to wait for his other son to join the party. To pass the hours, I hunted up some ponies, and we spent three days in long rides up the old Santa Fe trail and to the outlying mountains. Only one incident was other than pleasant, and that was my fault. As we were riding back to our cars on the second afternoon we had to cross the branch roadbed, where a gang happened to be at work tampering with the ties.

"Since you're interested in road agents, Miss Cullen," I said, "you may like to see one. That fellow standing in the ditch is Jack Drute, who was concerned in the D. and R. G. hold-up three years ago."

Miss Cullen looked where I pointed, and, seeing a man with a gun, gave a startled jump and pulled up her pony, evidently supposing that we were about to be attacked. "Shan't we run?" she began, but then checked herself as she took in the facts of the drab clothes of the gang and the two armed men in uniform. "They are convicts?" she asked. And when I nodded, she said, "Poor things!" Then, after a pause, she asked, "How long is he in prison for?"

"Twenty years," I told her.

"How harsh that seems!" she said. "How cruel we are to people for a few moments' wrongdoing, which the circumstances may almost have justified!" She checked her pony as we came opposite Drute and said, "Can you use money?"

"Can I, lady?" said the fellow, leering in an attempt to look amiable. "Wish I had the chance to try."

The guard interrupted by telling her it wasn't permitted to speak to the convicts while out of bounds, and so we had to ride on. All Miss Cullen was able to do was to throw him a little bunch of flowers she had gathered in the mountains. It was literally casting pearls before swine, for the fellow did not seem particularly pleased, and, when, late that night, I walked down there with a lantern I found the flowers lying in the ditch. The experience seemed to sadden and distress Miss Cullen very much for the rest of the afternoon, and I kicked myself for having called her attention to the brute and could have knocked him down for the way he had looked at her. It is curious that I felt thankful at the time that Drute was not holding up a train. Miss Cullen was on. It is always the unexpected that happens. If I could have looked into the future, what a strange variation on this thought I should have seen!

The three days went all too quickly, thanks to Miss Cullen, and by the end of that time I began to understand what love really meant to a chap and how men could come to kill each other for it. For a fairly sensible, hard-headed fellow it was pretty quick work, I acknowledge, but let any man have seven years of Western life without seeing a woman worth speaking of and then meet Miss Cullen, and if he didn't do as I did I wouldn't trust him on the tail-board of a locomotive, for I should put him down as defective both in eyesight and in intellect.

(To be Continued.)

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