

# The Taming of Red Butte Western

FRANCIS LYNDEN

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"That is where you are lame, Fleming. You don't know your man. Put it up to Hallock bare handed. If he comes in all right, if not, you'll put him where he'll wear stripes. That will fetch him. We'll be going in a few minutes. Do you want to meet Lidgerwood?"

## CHAPTER V

FOR the first few weeks after the change in ownership and the arrival of the new superintendent at Angels a sardonic laugh was heard in the land. The Red desert grunted like the famed Cheshire cat when an incoming train from the east brought mundry boxes and trunks said to contain the new boss' wardrobe. Its guffaws were long and uproarious when it began to be noised about that the company carpenters and fitters were installing a bath and other civilizing and softening appliances in the alcove opening out of the superintendent's sleeping room in the headquaters building.

Lidgerwood slept in the Crow's Nest not so much from choice as for the reason that there seemed to be no alternative save a room in the town tavern, appropriately named the Hotel Celestial.

It is a railroad proverb that the properly inoculated railroad man eats and sleeps with his business. Lidgerwood exemplified the saying by having a wire cut into the dispatcher's office, with the terminals on a little table at his bed's head and with a tiny telegraph relay instrument mounted on the stand. Through the relay, tapping softly in the darkness, came the news of the line, and often after the strenuous day was ended Lidgerwood would be awake listening.

At the bar paper covered, iron roofed Celestial where he took his meals, Lidgerwood had a table to himself which he shared at times with McCloskey and at other times with breezy Jack Benson, the young engineer whom Vice President Ford had sent upon Lidgerwood's request and recommendation to put new life into the track force and to make the preliminary survey for a possible western extension of the road.

On the line and in the roundhouse and repair shops the nickname "Collars and Cuffs" became classic and once, when Brannagan and the 117 were ordered out on the service car, the Irishman wore the highest celluloid collar he could find in Angels, reminding on the cloverway with a pair of huge stick-waist cuffs, which had once seen service as the coverings of a pair of maraschino bottles.

Lidgerwood ignored the jests good naturedly, rather thankful for the playful interlude, which gave him a breathing space and time to study the field before the real battle should begin.

"That a battle would have to be fought was evident enough. As yet the demoralization had been scarcely checked, and sooner or later the necessary radical reforms would have to begin. Gridley, whose attitude toward the new superintendent continued to be that of a disinterested adviser, assured Lidgerwood that he was losing ground by not opening the campaign of severity at once.

The fact that the master mechanic was continually urging the warring made Lidgerwood delay it. Just why Gridley's counsel should have produced such a contrary effect Lidgerwood could not have explained. The advice was sound, and the man who gave it was definitely and apparently ingenious.

But prejudice, like prepossession, are sometimes as strong as they are inexplicable, and, while Lidgerwood freely accused himself of injustice toward the master mechanic, a certain feeling of distrust and repulsion, dating back to his first impressions of the man, died hard.

Oddly enough, on the other hand, there was a prepossession, quite as unreasoning for Hallock. There was absolutely nothing in the chief clerk to inspire liking or even common business confidence. On the contrary, while Hallock attended to his duties and carried out his superior's instructions with the exactness of an automaton, his attitude was distinctly antagonistic.

As the chief subaltern on Lidgerwood's small staff he was efficient and well liked, as a man Lidgerwood felt he might as well be regarded as an enemy whose designs could never be fathomed or prefrugated, but under the crabbed and gloomy crust of the man the superintendent fancied he could discover a certain savage loyalty.

But under the loyalty there was a deeper depth of misery or tragedy, or both, and Lidgerwood, McCloskey,

for Gridley, Fred's boss. You won't believe it, but he has actually got the nerve to make love to Dawson's sister. And he a widow man, old enough to be her father!"

Lidgerwood smiled. It is the privilege of youth to be intolerant of age in its rival. Gridley was, possibly, forty-two or three, but Benson was still on the sunny slope of twenty-five. "You are prejudiced, Jack," he criticized. "Gridley is still young enough to marry again if he wants to and to live four weeks to spoil his grandchildren."

"But he doesn't begin to be good enough for Daisy Dawson," countered the young engineer stubbornly. "Isn't he? Or is that another bit of your personal grudge? What do you know against him?"

Pressed thus sharply against the unyielding fact, Benson was obliged to confess that he knew nothing at all against the master mechanic, nothing that could be planned down to day and date. Gridley was well known to be a hard hitter, and now and then, when the blows fell rather mendaciously, the railroad colony called him a tyrant and hinted that he, too, had a past that would not bear inspection. But even Benson admitted that this was mere gossip.

"Where do I come in on all this, Jack? You have an ax to grind, I don't take it," said Lidgerwood.

"I have, Mrs. Dawson wants me to take my meals at the house. I'm inclined to believe that she is a bit shy of Gridley, and maybe she thinks I could do the better act. But as a get-between I'd be chiefly conspicuous by my absence."

"Sorry I can't give you an office job as the superintendent in mock sympathy."

"So am I, but you can do the next best thing. Get Fred to take you home with him some of these fine evenings, and you'll never go back to the Celestial, not if you can persuade Max Dawson to feed you. The alternative is to fire Gridley out of his job."

"This time you are trying to make the tail wag the dog," said Lidgerwood. "Gridley has taken my saddle-burst out. The S.W. board of directors. Besides, he's a good fellow, and if I go up on the mesa and try to stand him off for you it will be only because I hope you are a better fellow."

"Prop it up on any leg you like, only go," said Benson simply. "I'll take it as a personal favor and do as much for you some fine day. I suppose I don't have to warn you not to fall in love with Fairy Dawson, yourself, or a second thought, perhaps I had better."

"This time Lidgerwood's laugh was mirthless.

"No, you don't have to, Jack. You can safely depulize me, I guess."

"All right, and many thanks. Here's 200 coming in, and I'm going over to Navy on it. Don't wait too long before you make up your mind. You'll find him well worth while after you've broken through his shell."

When Lidgerwood began the drawing of the net a new time card was struck with McCloskey's co-operation, and when it went into effect a notice on all bulletin boards announced the adoption and proposed penalties in the "Book of Rules" and the trainmaster had a rising scale for unauthorized departure therefrom.

Promptly the horse laugh died away and the trouble storm was evoked. Grievance committees haunted the Crow's Nest, and the insurance threatened to involve the telegraph operator—threatened to become a protest unanimous and in the mass. Worse than this, the service, perhaps and enough before, now became a maddening chaos. Orders were misunderstood, whether willfully or not, no court of inquiry could determine wrecks were of almost daily occurrence, and the shop track was speedily filled to the brim with crippled engines and cars.

In the pandemonium of outward events McCloskey was Lidgerwood's right hand, toiling, smiling, striving and otherwise proving himself a good soldier. But close behind him came Gridley, always suave and good natured, making no complaints, not even when the reports were necessary by the innumerable wrecks, greiv, mountain high, and always consulting firmness and more discipline.

"Don't give in an inch. Show these muckers that you mean business, and mean it all the time, and you'll win out all right," said he.

In the small headquarters staff Hallock was the only "non-combatant." From the beginning of hostilities he seemed to have made a pact with himself not to let it be known by any act or word of his that he was aware of the suddenly precipitated conflict. The routine duties of a chief clerk's desk are never light. Hallock's became so exacting that he rarely left his office or the pen-like contrivance in which he entrenched himself and did his work.

When the fight began Lidgerwood observed Hallock closely, trying to discover if there were any secret signs of the satisfaction which the revolt of the rank and file might be supposed to awaken in an unsuccessful candidate for the official headship of the Red Butte Western. There were none.

McCloskey, being of Scottish blood and desert seasoned, was a cool fighter who could stand punishment without wincing overmuch. But at the end of the first fortnight of the new time card he cornered his chief in the private office and freed his mind.

"It's no use, Mr. Lidgerwood; we can't make these reforms stick with the outfit we've got," he asserted, in sharp discouragement. "The next thing on the docket will be a strike, and you know what that will mean in a country where the whisky is bad

and nine men out of every ten go for it." Nevertheless the reforms have got to stick," returned Lidgerwood definitively. "We are going to run this railroad as it should be run or hang it up in the air. Did you discharge that operator at Crow Canyon—the fellow who let train 76 get by him without orders last before last?"

"Dick Safford? Oh, yes; I fired him, and he came in on 202 today, lagging a piece of artillery and shooting at my mouth about what he was going to do to me—and to you. I suppose you know that his brother Bart, the killer, they call him, is the 'look-out' at Redlight Samray's farm some of the meanest devil this side of the Timanymont."

"I didn't know it, but that cuts no figure," Lidgerwood forced himself to say it, though his lips were curious dry. "We are going to have discipline on this railroad while we stay here. Mac, there are no two ways about that."

"McCloskey lifted his hat to the bridge of his nose, his characteristic gesture."

"I promised myself that I wouldn't join the gun toters when I came out here," he said, half musingly, "but I've weakened on that. Yesterday when I was calling Jeff Cummings for dropping that new shifting engine switch in broad daylight, he pulled on me out of his cab window. What I had to take while he had me 'hands up' is more than I'll take from any living man again."

"I wouldn't get down to the desert level if I were you, Mac," said the superintendent.

"I'm down there right now, in self defense, and the other fellow, 'rejoinder. "And if you'll take a hint from me, you'll beel yourself, too, Mr. Lidgerwood."

It was an hour or two later in the same day when McCloskey came into the private office again, but tilted to nose and the garçoyle face portraying frowny soul agonies.

"Standing on a pillaging now," he burst out. "The S.W. board of directors, saw Broderick using the 98, and when I asked him why he said he couldn't find the '68."

"Couldn't find it?" echoed Lidgerwood.

"No, nor I can't either."

"Where was it at last accounts?"

"That's the coal track under chute No. 8, where the night crew left it at midnight or thereabouts."

"But certainly somebody must know where it has gone," said Lidgerwood.

"Yes, and by gizzies, I think I know who that somebody is!"

"Who is it?"

"I should tell you, you wouldn't believe it, and, besides, I haven't got the time to go on a hunt for the proof, shaking a meaning tongue, and when I do—"

The interruption was the entrance of Hallock coming in with the payrolls for the superintendent's approval. McCloskey broke off short and turned to the door.

CHAPTER VI  
EVERY MAN'S SHARE

THE switching engine mystery opens up a field that I've been trying to get into for some while time, Mac," the superintendent began, after a day or two had elapsed and the trainmaster had returned to the private office.

"Wastage, you mean?" queried the trainmaster.

"That is what I have been calling it—a reckless disregard for the value of anything and everything that can be included in a requisition. There is a good deal of that, I know. The right of way is littered from end to end with good material thrown aside. But I'm afraid that isn't the worst of it."

The trainmaster was naming, knew and screwing his face into the redemptive scheme of distortion.

"Those things are always hard to prove. If a company employee wants to steal and there isn't enough money to hold him down he can steal fast enough and get away with it."

"By jimmies, yes, but not in quantity," pursued Lidgerwood. "I'll make up to the outer office and open it with a quick jerk. There was no one there."

"I thought I heard something," he said. "Didn't you think you did?"

Lidgerwood shook his head.

"Hallock has gone over to the storekeeper's office to check up the time rolls. He won't be back today."

McCloskey closed the door and returned to his chair.

"I'll say what I think you'll be asking me for proofs, Mr. Lidgerwood, and I have none. Besides, I'm a prejudiced witness. I don't like Hallock."

Quite unconsciously Lidgerwood picked up a pencil and began scribbling idly on his desk blotter. "I don't want to do Hallock an injustice," he went on, after a hesitant pause; "neither do I wish to dig up the past for him or for anybody. I was hoping that you might know some of the inside details of the truth. I can't believe that Hallock was culpably responsible for the disappearance of the money."

"I am not a fair witness," reiterated McCloskey. "There's been gossip, and I've listened to it."

"About this building and loan mess?"

"No; about the wife."

"To Hallock's discredit, you mean?"

"You'd think so. There was a scandal of some sort, I don't know what it was—never wanted to know. But there are men here in Angels who hint that Hallock killed the woman and sunk her body in the Timanymont."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Lidgerwood under his breath. "I can't believe that

Mac. "I don't know that I do, but I can tell you a thing that I do know, Mr. Lidgerwood. Hallock is a devil when it comes to paying a grudge. There was a freight conductor named Jackson that he had a shindy with in Mr. Ferguson's time, and it came to blows. Hallock got the worst of the fist fight, but Ferguson made a joke of it and wouldn't fire Jackson. Hallock bided his time like an Indian and worked it around so that Jackson got promoted to a passenger run. After that it was easy."

"How so?"

"It was the devil's own game. Jackson was a handsome young fellow, and Hallock set a woman on him—a woman out of Cat Biggs' dance hall. From that to holding out fares to get more money to squander was only a step for the young fool, and he took it. Having baited the trap and set it, Hallock sprung it. Jackson's got a couple of years to serve yet, I believe."

Lidgerwood was listening thoughtfully. The story which had ended so disastrously for the young conductor threw a rather lurid side light upon Jackson's accuser. Yet the superintendent was just enough to distinguish between gross vindictiveness and an evil which bore no relation to the vengeful one.

"A financially honest man might still have a weakness for playing even in a personal quarrel," he commented. "Your story proves nothing more than that."

"I know it."

"But I am going to run the other thing down," Lidgerwood insisted. "Hallock shall have a chance to clear himself, but if he can't do it he can't stay with me."

At this the trainmaster changed front so suddenly that Lidgerwood began to wonder if his estimate of the man's courage was at fault.

"Don't do that, Mr. Lidgerwood. Don't stir up the devil in that long haired knife fighter at such a time as this," he begged. "The Lord knows you've got trouble enough on hand as it is without digging up something that belongs to the has-beens."

"I know, but justice is justice," was the decisive rejoinder. "The question is still a live one, as the complainant of the grievance committee proves. If I dodge, my refusal to investigate will be used against us in the labor trouble which you say is brewing. I'm not going to dodge, McCloskey."

"You haven't asked my advice, Mr. Lidgerwood, but here it is anyway," said McCloskey. "From the way the owner of the Wire Silver mine over in Timanymont Park, was the president of that building and loan outfit, he and Hallock are at daggers drawn, for some reason that I've never understood. If you could get them together perhaps they could make some sort of statement that would quiet the wickers for the time being, at any rate."

Lidgerwood looked up quickly. "That's odd," he said. "No longer than yesterday Gridley suggested precisely the same thing."

McCloskey was on his feet again and fumbling behind him for the door-knob.

"I'm all in," he grimaced. "When it comes to running with Gridley and Finlister and Hallock, all in the same breath, I'm done."

Lidgerwood made a memorandum on his desk calendar to take the building and loan matter up with Hallock the following day. But another wreck intervened, and after the wreck a conference with the Red Butte mine owners postponed all office business for an additional twenty-four hours. It was late in the evening of the third day when the superintendent's special steamed home from the west, and Lidgerwood, who had dined in his car, went directly to his office in the Crow's Nest.

He had scarcely settled himself at his desk for an attack upon the accumulation of business when Benson came in. It was a trouble call, and the young engineer's face advertised it.

"It's no use talking, Lidgerwood," he began. "I can't do business on this railroad until you have killed off some of the thugs and highbinders."

Lidgerwood fung the paper knife aside and whirled his chair to face the new complaint.

"What is the matter now, Jack?" he snapped.

"Oh, nothing much—when you're used to it, only about a thousand dollars' worth of dimension timber gone glimmering; that's all. It's the Gloria bridge. We had the timbers all ready to pull out the old and put in the new, and the shift was to be made today between trains. Last night every stick of the new stock disappeared."

Lidgerwood was not a profane man, but what he said to Benson in the cursing minute or two which followed resolved itself into a very fair imitation of profanity, inclusive and world embracing.

"And you didn't have wit enough to leave a watchman on the job," he chafed. "By heavens, this thing has got to stop, Benson. And it's going to stop if we have to call out the state militia and picket every mile of this rotten railroad!"

"Do it," said Benson grimly, "and when it's done you notify me and I'll come back to work. And with that he was out and was too angry to remember to close the door.

Lidgerwood turned back to his desk savagely out of humor with Benson and with himself and raging inwardly at the mysterious thieves who were looting the company as boldly as an invading army might. At this the most inauspicious moment possible his eye fell upon the calendar memorandum. "See Hallock about B-L," and his finger was on the chief clerk's bell push before he remembered that it was late and that there had been no light in Hallock's room when he had

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