

The Reinstatement of Dolan

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Francis J. Dickie

IF you look carefully on the map of a certain great Canadian transcontinental railway you will, after a little time and search, find Butze. It is a mere point of the road lying midway between divisions on the prairie section of the road most westerly toward the mountains. Just a sidetrack and a dismantled box car are there, the latter made habitable with added windows and sundry doors for the lone man who is night and day operator, ticket and freight agent, baggage—and express man—in fact the whole kaboodle.

It was to this spot that Dolan came. Dolan who three weeks previously had been chief train dispatcher at Edmonton, the division headquarters. Dolan had been liked by everyone there; chief among them had been Hazel King, the train-master's daughter.

But Dolan had a besetting sin. He liked his booze; so after many moons of self enforced sobriety had one day again succumbed to a craving that had been a mordant pain for so long a time. Result lost job—lost girl.

When lack of funds had caused him to sober up once more and necessity forced him back to work, he was, on account of his remarkable efficiency, sent to Butze in the above mentioned position—and Butze was the end of the world.

Darkness had fallen, and as he sat smoking Dolan was very lonely, sick already of the monotony of this little sun scorched spot. Roasted by day, mosquito pestered by night, always alone, had brought quick realization to him the value of his late held position. And too, a strange hunger was on him, a hunger for the sound of her voice and little gurgling laugh. The days were more utterly void now that Hazel King had passed out of his life.

Dolan wondered dully what she was thinking to-night, for two nights before his fall from grace he had held her hand and there had been something in her eyes that had made the man hope. But it was all useless now. He swore softly, but there was more of pathos than profanity in his tone, and struck with unwonted vigor at the singing pest that for a moment had lighted upon his cheek.

Suddenly the pounding of the keys caught his attention. Q.D., Q.D., Q.D., the call clicked out. Artland, first station east of Butze, was calling Chauvin, another flag stop twenty miles westward from Butze.

To an experienced telegrapher the keys create more than mere unemotional sounds, and in that quick repeated calling Dolan sensed danger and listened.

"Flag No. 1 and sidetrack her. Light engine running wild just passed here making sixty miles an hour."

For a minute there was silence then the operator at Chauvin pounded back.

"No. 1 just gone through hitting the grit forty miles an hour."

With a perception quickened by years of train despatching Dolan had grasped the details almost before the sounder ceased.

The passenger had left Chauvin on time and running on her schedule was due to pass Butze in thirty minutes while the runaway under her own steam and aided by the long gradual dropping grade, that existed between Artland and Butze, would cover the ten miles between these points in twelve minutes at the outside and passing meet the passenger almost half way between Butze and Chauvin.

And as Dolan grasped these facts he realized with horror the helplessness of his own position.

Had his side track been clear the simple throwing of the east switch would have deflected the runaway onto it, where in all probability the engine would, after running the length of the siding, derail upon striking the closed points of the west switch. But standing upon this track were two cars of cased dynamite for the One Girl mine and Dolan shuddered at the thought of the havoc that would be created should the engine strike these. Endless yards of both siding and main line would be twisted and torn away and he too would be blown to pieces without any good being attained. For the oncoming passenger, unwarned, would rush onto this twisted steel and derail with

perhaps even more fearful result than the head on collision that now portended.

For a minute Dolan sat striving for some solution, some way to avert the danger but there seemed none.

Then suddenly he leaped to his feet, set the board against No. 1 and grabbing a hammer that lay on the near window sill, rushed out and started down the track in the direction of the approaching runaway.

The remembrance of the deserted gravel pit, that joined onto the main line a little more than a mile east of Butze, had come to him and he prayed that there was time.

There was now little more than ten minutes left before the runaway would pass that point. As he ran he wondered if he could do it? Cover the mile and a quarter that lay between him and the old

abandoned switch and throw it in time to deflect the light engine.

For half a dozen telegraph pole lengths he ran easily, light-footed. Then his breath shortened. The vocation of operating does not tend to make a man's wind either lasting or sound and his late debauch had weakened him, left his tissues flabby.

A little farther on he slackened his pace. Though every second was precious he realized he could not last the distance at this speed.

It was black dark. At first his legs responded easily and his strides were long and his feet lifted high; but as the yards diminished he grew heavy footed and stumbled often. The larger stones that were mingled with the new placed gravel hurt his feet and unevenly tamped ties threw him out of step sometimes almost overbalancing him.

Dolan got his second wind but now the pace was telling and he breathed in panting gasps. Once he fell and falling tore his

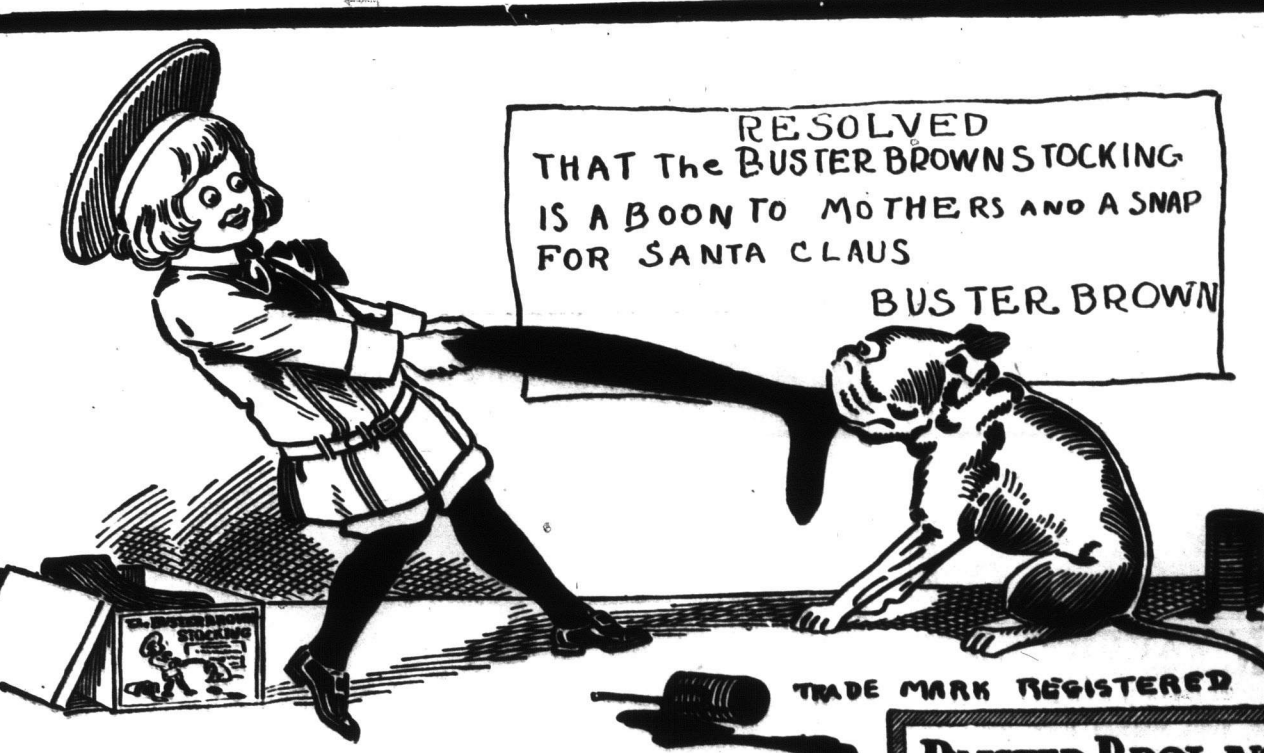
hand cruelly on the sharp edge of a half driven track spike.

Before half the distance was covered every step and quick drawn breath seemed to drive his lungs painfully against his shoulder blades and his diaphragm was a dead leaden weight.

A drop of blood dripped from his nose, then another till the fast flowing stream choked his breathing forcing him to gulp the air through his mouth. And the running blood poured over his open lips into his mouth and dripped down from his jaws like the slavering of a blood hound.

From away down the track came the rumbling roar of the engine. Dolan wondered if he could make it. His legs seemed impossible of faster movement but terror and the nearness of the goal brought new life and he ran with quickened step. He did not think collectedly any more now.

The switch—the switch—repeated over and over in his brain till it seemed almost



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