

The Taming of Red Butte Western

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XII THE PLEASURES

THE freight wreck in the Crosswater hills, coming a fortnight after Ruford's arrest and deportation to Copah and the county jail, rudely marked the close of the short armistice in the conflict between law and order.

Thirty-two boxes, gondolas and flats, racing down the Crosswater grades in the heart of a dawless, crystalline summer afternoon at the heels of the Clay's big ten wheeler, suddenly left the steel as a unit to heap themselves in chaotic confusion upon the right of way and to round up the disaster at the moment of impact by exploding a shipment of plant powder somewhere in the midst of the debris.

Lidgerwood was on the western division when the news of the wreck reached Angels, wherefore it was not until the following morning that he was able to leave the headquarters station on the second wrecking train bringing the big 100 ton crane to reinforce McCloskey, who had been on the ground with the lighter clearing tackle for the better part of the night.

McCloskey's men were hard at work picking up what the fire had spared when Lidgerwood arrived. "Pretty clean sweep this time, eh, Mac?" was the superintendent's greeting when he had penetrated to the thick of things where McCloskey was toiling and sweating with his men.

"So clean that we get nothing much but scrap iron out of what's left," growled McCloskey, climbing out of the angle of crushed cars and bent and twisted ironwork. "The thing is to get the work to stand beside Lidgerwood on the main line embankment. Then to the men who were making the splash-bitch for the next pull. A little farther back, boys—farther yet; so she won't overbalance on you. That's about it. Now wig it."

"You seem to be getting along all right with the outfit you've got," was Lidgerwood's comment. "If you can keep this up we may as well go back to Angels."

"No, don't!" protested the trainmaster. "We can't get out these scrap heaps after a fashion, but when it comes to resurrecting the 195—did you notice her as you came along? We kept the fire from getting to her, but she's dug herself into the ground like a dog after a woodchuck!"

Lidgerwood nodded. "I looked her over," he said. "If she'd had a little more time and another wheel turn or two to spare she might have disappeared entirely—like that switching engine you can't find."

"I gave you all the pointers I could find two weeks ago," said McCloskey. "Whenever you get ready to put Hallock under the hydraulic press you'll squeeze what you want to know out of him."

This was coming to be an old subject and a sore one. The trainmaster still insisted that Hallock was the man who was plaguing the robberies and plotting the downfall of the Lidgerwood management, and he wanted to have the chief clerk systematically shadowed. And it was Lidgerwood's wholly groundless prepossession for Hallock that was still keeping him from forming the matter over to the company's legal department—this in spite of the growing accumulation of evidence all pointing to Hallock's treason. Subjected to a rigid cross examination, Judson had insisted that a part at least of his drunken recollection was real—that part identifying the voices of the two plotters in Cat Eiger's back room, as those of Ruford and Hallock. Moreover, it was no longer deniable that the chief clerk was keeping in close touch with the discharged employees, for some purpose best known to himself, and lately he had been dropping out of his office without notice, disappearing sometimes for a day at a time.

Lidgerwood was recalling the last of these disappearances when the second wrecking train came up to go into action. McCloskey shaded his eyes from the sun's glare and looked down the line.

"Best place," said the recent one shortly. Lidgerwood was looking at his watch.

"Williams will be due here before long with a special from Copah. I don't want to hold him up," he remarked.

"Thirty minutes?" inquired the draftsman without taking mind or eye of his problem.

"Oh, yes; forty or fifty, maybe."

"All right, I'll be out of the way," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Yes, he will!" was McCloskey's ironical comment when the draftsman had gone around to the other side of the great crane. "That crane won't pick up the 195 clear the way she's lying."

"Won't it?" said Lidgerwood. "That's where you are mistaken. It will pick up anything we have on the two divisions. It's the biggest and best there is. How did you come to get a fool like that on the Red Butte Western?"

McCloskey grinned. "You don't know Gridley yet. He's a crank on good machinery. That crane was a clean steal."

"What?"

"I mean it. It was ordered for one of the South American railroads and was on its way to the coast over the P. S. W. About the time it got as far as Copah we happened to have a mixup in our Copah yards with a ditched engine that Gridley couldn't pick up with the sixty ton crane we had on the ground. So he borrowed this one out of the P. S. W. yards, used it, fixed it and kept it, sending our sixty-ton machine on to the South Americans in its place."

"What rank piracy!" Lidgerwood exclaimed. "I don't wonder they call us buccaners over here. How could he do it without being found out?"

"That puzzled more than two or three of us, but one of the men told me some time afterward how it was done. Gridley had a painter go down in the night and change the lettering on our old crane and on this new one. It happened that they were both made by the same manufacturing company and were of substantially the same general pattern. I suppose the P. S. W. yard crew didn't notice particularly that the crane they had sent out of the through westbound freight had shrunk somewhat in the using. But I'll bet those South Americans are saying pleasant things to the manufacturers yet."

"Doubtless," Lidgerwood agreed, and now he was not smiling. The little side light on the former Red Butte Western methods—and upon Gridley—was sobering.

"Mac, that handrail and take stick! Pay off, Darby," said Dawson to the boiler engineer. "More slack!"

The great tackling hook, as big around as a man's thigh, settled accurately over the 195.

"There you are!" snapped Dawson. "Now make your hitch, boys, and be lively about it. You've got just about one minute to do it in!"

"He's going to pick it up at one hitch—and without blocking!"

"Hands off, Mac," said Lidgerwood good naturedly. "If Fred didn't know this trade before he's learning it pretty rapidly now."

"You break something before he gets through."

But Dawson was breaking nothing. Having designed locomotives, he knew to the fraction of an inch where the balancing hitch should be made for lifting one; also machinery and the breaking strains of it were as his daily bread.

"Now, then, Billy, try your hitch! Put the strain on a little at a time and often. Steady! Now you've got her! Keep her coming!"

Slowly the big freight puller rose out of its furrow in the gravel, righting itself to the perpendicular as it came. Anticipating the inward swing of it, Dawson was showing his men how to place ties and rails for a short temporary track, and when he gave Darby the stop signal the hoisting cables were singing like piano strings, and the big engine was swaying boldly in the air in the grip of the crane tackle, poised to a nicely above the steel placed to receive it.

Dawson climbed up to the main line embankment where Darby could see him and where he could see all the parts of his problem at once. Then his hands went up to beckon the slacking signals. At the lifting of his finger there was a growling of gears and a backward racing of machinery, a groan of relaxing strains and a cry of "All gone!" And the 195 stood upright, ready to be hauled out when the temporary track should be extended to a connection with the main line.

"Let's go up to the other end and see how your understudy is making it, Mac," said the gratified superintendent. "It is quite evident that we can't tell this young man anything he doesn't already know about picking up locomotives."

On the way up the track he asked about Clay and Green, the engineer and fireman who were in the wreck.

"They are not badly hurt," said the trainmaster. "They both went home on 201."

Lidgerwood was examining the crossings, which were cut and scarred by the flanges of many derailed wheels.

"You have no notion of what did it?" he queried, turning abruptly upon McCloskey.

"Only a guess, and it couldn't be verified in a thousand years. The 195 went off first, and Clay and Green both say it felt as if a rail had turned over on the outside of the curve. The entire train went off so thoroughly that it passed the point where the

would begin before it tipped up. I was able to verify Clay's story—a rail had turned over on the outside of the curve."

"That proves nothing more than poor spike holds in a few dry rotted crossings," Lidgerwood objected.

"No; there were a number of others farther along also turned over and broken and bent. But the first one was the only freak."

"How was that?"

"Well, it wasn't either broken or bent, but when it turned over it not only uncracked the nuts of the fishplate bolts and threw them away—it pulled out every spike on both sides of itself and hid them."

Lidgerwood nodded gravely. "I should say you guessed already. I've found it. It lacks in the frame of the man who loosened the fishplate bolts and pulled the spikes."

"That's about all."

The superintendent's eyes narrowed. "Who was missing out of the Angels crowd of trouble makers yesterday, Mac?"

"I hate to say," said the trainmaster. "I don't want to put it all over any man unless it belongs to him, but I'm loosed every time it comes to that kind of a guess. Every bunch of letters I see isn't just an name."

"Go on," said Lidgerwood sharply. "Hallock came somewhere up this way on the 202 yesterday."

"I know," was the quick reply. "I sent him out to Navajo to meet Crutkshanks, the cattleman with the long claim for stock injured in the Gap wreck two weeks ago."

"Did he stop at Navajo?" queried the trainmaster.

"I suppose so. At any rate, he saw Crutkshanks."

"Well, I haven't got any more guesses, only a notion of two. This is a pretty stiff up grade for 202. She passes here at 2:30, just about an hour before Clay found that loosened rail, and it wouldn't be impossible for a man to drop off as she was climbing this curve."

But now the superintendent was shaking his head.

"It doesn't hold together, Mac. There are too many parts missing. Your hypothesis presupposes that Hallock took a day train out of Angels, rode twelve miles past his destination, jumped off here while the train was in motion, pulled the spikes on this loosened rail and walked back to Navajo in time to see the cattleman and get in to Angels on the delayed 15 this morning. Could he have done all those things without advertising them to everybody?"

"I know," confessed the trainmaster. "It doesn't look reasonable."

"It isn't reasonable," Lidgerwood went on, arguing Hallock's case as if it were his own. "Bradford was 202's conductor. He'd know if Hallock failed to get off at Navajo. Gridley was a passenger on the same train, and he would have known. The agent at Navajo would be a third witness. He was expecting Hallock on that train and was no doubt holding Crutkshanks. Your guesses prefigure Hallock falling to show up when the train stopped at Navajo and make it necessary for him to explain to the two men who were waiting for him why he let Bradford carry him by so far that it took him several hours to walk back. You see how incredible it all is?"

"Yes, I see," said McCloskey. "You were saying something to Dawson about Williams and a special train. Is that Mr. Brewster coming in?"

"Yes. He wired from Copah last night. He has Mr. Ford's car, the Nadia."

"Suffering Moses, but this is a nice thing for the president of the road to see as he comes along."

Lidgerwood shook his head. "That isn't the worst of it, Mac. Mr. Brewster isn't a railroad man, and he will probably think this is all in the day's work. But he is going to stop at Angels and go over to his home in Ansel, which means that he will camp right down in the midst of the mixup. I'd cheerfully give a year's salary to have him stay away a few weeks longer. Who is your foreman, Mac?"

"Judson," said McCloskey shortly. "He asked leave to come along as a laborer, and when I found that he knew

infer that you don't expect me to improve," said Lidgerwood judicially.

"I can't fight for you when you're right and not fight against you when I think you are wrong, Mr. Lidgerwood. You can have my head any time you want it."

"You think I should break my word and take Judson back?"

"I think and the few men who are still with us think that you ought to give the man who stood in the breach for you a chance to earn bread and meat for his wife and babies," snapped McCloskey.

Lidgerwood was frowning when he replied. "You don't see the point involved. But this job I've given him isn't pulling trains."

"No, and if you have cooled off enough you may remember that I have not yet dismissed your action. I don't disapprove. Give him anything you like where a possible relapse on his part won't involve the lives of other people. Is that what you want me to say?"

"I was hot," said the trainmaster, gruffly apologetic. "We've got now too many friends to stand by us when the pinch comes, and we were losing them every day you held out against Judson."

"I'm still holding out on the original count. Judson can't run an engine for me until he has proved conclusively beyond question that he has quit the railway. Whatever other work you can find him doing, I don't disapprove of your action. I don't disapprove. Give him anything you like where a possible relapse on his part won't involve the lives of other people. Is that what you want me to say?"

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great fear held him upon him. None the less, the president's invitation was a little like the king's—it was in some sense a command. Lidgerwood merely asked for a moment's respite and went down to announce his intention to McCloskey and Dawson. Curiously enough, the draftsman seemed to be trying to ignore the private car. His back was turned upon it, and he was glooming out across the bare hills, with his square jaw set as if the ignoring effort were painful.

"I'm going back to Angels with the president," said the superintendent, speaking to both of them. "You can clean up here without me."

One-minute later the superintendent would have given much to be safely back with McCloskey and Dawson at the vanishing curve of scrap heaps. In that half minute Mr. Brewster had opened the car door and Lidgerwood had followed him across the threshold.

The comfortable lounging room of the Nadia was not empty, nor was it peopled by a group of Mr. Brewster's associates in the copper combine, the alternative upon which Lidgerwood had hopefully hung the "wags" and the "w's."

Seated on a wicker divan drawn out to face one of the wide side windows were two young women, with a curly headed, clean faced young man between them. A little farther along a rather austere lady, whose pose was of calm superiority to her surroundings, looked up from her magazine to say, as her husband had said, "Why, Howard, are you here?"

Just beyond the austere lady and dozing in his chair took up a claim on the western slope of the ridge directly opposite Flemister. This man struck it pretty rich, and Flemister began to bully him on the plea that the new discovery was only a continuation of his own vein straight through the hill. You can guess what happened.

"Fairly well," said Lidgerwood. "Flemister lashed the other man out."

"He did worse than that. He drove straight into the hill, past his own lines and actually took the money out of the other man's mine to use as a fighting fund. Flemister put the other man to the wall in the end. There was some domestic tragedy involved, too, in which Flemister played the devil with the other man's family, but I don't know any of the details."

"Just then the waiter opened the door a second time to say that luncheon was served."

"Don't forget to remind me that I'm to tell you Gridley's story, Howard," said the president, rising out of the depths of his lounging chair and stripping of the dust coat. "Reads like a romance, only I fancy it was anything but a romance."

"I don't like that, Mac. It's a dirty business, not to be doing a man who has a right to suppose that you are trusting him. Is your dog out?"

"You mean you won't do it. I respect your scruples, Mr. Lidgerwood. But it is no longer a personal matter between you and Hallock. The company's interests are involved."

Without suspecting it the trainmaster had found the weak joint in the company's case. For the company's sake the personal point of view must be ignored.

"It is such a despicable thing," he protested, as one who yields reluctantly. "And if, after all, Hallock is innocent—"

"That is just the point," insisted Lidgerwood. "If the innocent man will be done, and Judson will become a witness for instead of against him."

"Well," said Lidgerwood, and what more he would have said about the conspiracy was cut off by the shrill whistle of a downcoming train.

"That's Williams with the special," he announced when the whistle gave him leave. "Is your dog out?"

"Sure. It's up around the hill—with a safe man to waggle it."

The main line was cleared before Williams swung cautiously around the hill with the private car. In obedience to Lidgerwood's uplifted finger the brakes were applied, and the Nadia came to a full stop, with its observation platform opposite the end of the wrecking track.

A big man in a soft hat and loose box coat dust coat, with twinkling little eyes and a curling brown beard that covered fully three-fourths of his face, stood at the handrail.

"Hello, Howard!" he called down to Lidgerwood. "By George, I'd totally forgotten that you were out here! What are you trying to do? Got so many cars and engines that you have to throw some of them away?"

"Hello, Howard!" he had not been thrown away upon the trainmaster. "It looks a little that way, I must admit. Cousin Ned. We tried pretty hard to get it cleaned up before you came along, but we couldn't quite make it. Coming over to camp with us awhile? If you are I hope you carry your commissary along. Angels will starve you otherwise."

"Don't tell me about that tin canned tape village, Howard. I know. I've been there before. How are we doing over in the Timanyon foothills—getting much ore down from the Copper ette? Climb up here and tell me all about it, or better still, come on across the desert with us. They don't need you here."

The assertion was quite true. With Dawson, the trainmaster, and an understudy Judson for bossess, there was no need of a fourth. Yet intention or whatever masculine thing it is that stands for intuition prompted Lidgerwood to say:

"I don't know that I ought to leave. I've just come out from Angels, you know."

But the president was not to be denied.

"Climb up here and quit trying to find excuses. We'll give you a better luncheon than you'll get out of the dinner pails, and if you carry your commissary along you may get a dinner invitation after we get in. That ought to tempt any man who has to live in Angels the year round."

Lidgerwood marked the persistent denial of the personal pronoun, and a

great fear held him upon him. None the less, the president's invitation was a little like the king's—it was in some sense a command. Lidgerwood merely asked for a moment's respite and went down to announce his intention to McCloskey and Dawson. Curiously enough, the draftsman seemed to be trying to ignore the private car. His back was turned upon it, and he was glooming out across the bare hills, with his square jaw set as if the ignoring effort were painful.

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