

# IN FRONT OF THE STAMPED E.

A Story of the Frontier Railroad and the Plains.

By Alvah Milton Kerr.

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As claim adjuster in the department of lost and short freight, was, for the most part, "on the wing," knocking about over all divisions and branches of the road, at the head or tail of problems involving the company's money, or the want of it. One of the roundhouse foremen at Wagon, had helped me in fixing the responsibility of a shortage in the freighting of engine oil from an eastern town, and perhaps on that account, or from some sort of affinity, we became fast friends. Of course an ex-dispatcher like myself and an old engineer like Perth could hardly escape feeling an interest in each other; besides, Perth was a man of good intellect and eminently worthy of cultivation.

Sitting one day in his little office, he told me the story of Katie Lyons' great ride during Long Blanket's raid, and her race for life in the buffalo stampede.

"It was the first time a woman fired an engine," he said. "I was then a green lunk of a boy, only a couple of years off the farm. Eighteen months in the shops at Omaha had given me an ambition to push as possible, and wipers and firemen being plenty in my quarter, I came on to the mountain division and went into the roundhouse at Ludden. That was way back in the sixties, when the first road was being pushed across the western half of the continent.

"There was some question as to whether Ludden would continue as a divisional point, and partly on account of its possible removal, the roundhouse had been constructed of wood. Ludden consisted of building containing stalls for eight engines and stood some 200 feet from a creek. Into the creek emptied an eighteen-inch drain, carrying off the engine boiler with. But for this drain it is probable that Katie Lyons would never have taken her memorable ride.

"Jack Lyon, Katie's father, handled the throttle of the old 40. Jack was a middle aged man then, and the 40 was young. Both are in the scrap pile now. God bless them! The advanced front of construction was hurriedly loaded into box cars, most of the boys boarded other box cars, while two flat cars were thrown into the center of the train, each bearing a mounted howitzer and a staked breast-work of railroad iron and a complement of

openness of the prairie were terrible. She looked back across her shoulder to the town, hearing yells and the crack of rifles and the noise of fighting. She rode straight south selecting the lowest ground, and intending to turn southwest toward the fort when at a safe distance. She had progressed perhaps a mile, when, looking back, she saw a party of Indians on horseback shoot out from the edge of the town, ranging a little west to south. The girl's ruddy cheeks whitened, and her brown fingers clutched the rein nervously. "We've got to outrun them, Bess," she cried; "we've got to do it!"

"The lithe, white mare, with her light burden, went like an antelope, breathing softly, and taking the ground with a long, sweeping, steady lope. Let them do their best running first," she said, looking back thru her flying hair, "we'll set the pace at the end."

"The tough Indian ponies, urged by quirt and many a peeling yell, followed her like excited hounds, but kept to the west of her in their course. Clearly the Indians purposed getting between the girl and the fort before attempting to run her down. The racers were probably four miles out from Ludden when Katie re-

turned the mare straight toward us, and across the track. Under us a struggle of hulking forms choked the pass and shook the bridge. When the air cleared we saw that the work of the soldiers had divided and northward pack; it was lowing north and northward in two streams. Before us were swaths of slain birds; piles of the bodies lay against the train, and somewhere in that appalling confusion, Katie's horse was galloping.

"Weak and trembling, I climbed up into the engine cab. Lyon sat on the floor and across his lap lay Katie, limp and panting. Mommy—little Dan and Jimmy must go back! she was gasping. "All the folks are in the roundhouse—the Indians are there! I was going to the fort for help!"

"Lyon placed her on the fireman's cushion, and jumped to the reversing lever and threw it over, opened the throttle and whistled 'off brakes.' There was a clanking of couplings, and the train started eastward. In a few minutes Pope and the conductor came scrambling over the foot of the tender.

"Where are you going?" they demanded.

"To save my wife and babies," cried Lyon. "Black Calf and his brutes are at Ludden; they've got the folks shut up in the roundhouse; there'll be a massacre!"

"The folks where were needed, then," cried Pope.

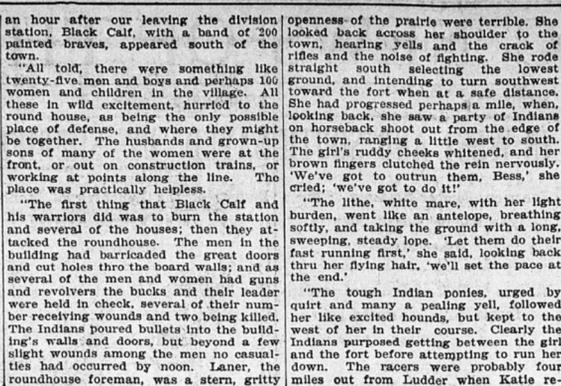
"Lyon pushed the 40 hard, and at the end of the hour the military train dashed into the division station. At sight of us Black Calf's forces broke and fled, followed and stung by showers of bullets. The soldiers began unloading their rifles at once, and mounting for the chase. The overjoyed prisoners poured out from the great doors of the engine-house and fairly overwhelmed us in their gratitude. Mrs. Lyon came running toward 40 to tell Lyon that Katie had probably perished, when to her amazement and joy, her husband jumped to the ground with Katie in his arms. What followed I could hardly describe, for, tough chap though I was, I couldn't see very plainly for the tears that filled my eyes. I only knew that Katie had a reception fit for a princess.

"What became of White Bess? Well, sir, she was found next morning standing, feeble and badly used up, in a gully about two miles north of the trestle; but we brought her back and turned her into Lyon's pasture, and a few weeks after again playing 'circus.' As for the children, Major Holmes crushed Yellowstone Sky at the front and beat off his followers and took the old chief prisoner, while Pope chased Long Blanket and Black Calf into the north hills and gave them a fine drubbing."

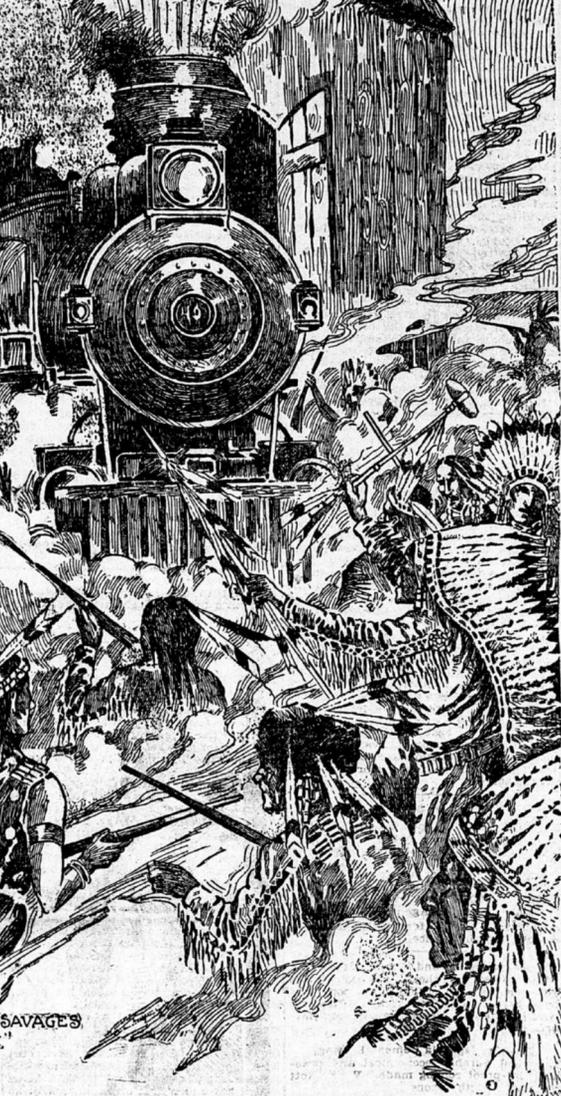
"What became of Katie, the heroic little girl?" I asked.

Perth smiled contentedly. "Well," he said, "if you'll come over to the house and take dinner with me you will meet her. We've been married a good many years and she is gray, but I think you will find her about the sunniest and most motherly woman that ever made a poor railroad feel equal to a millionaire."

To Boston and returned at One Fare For the round trip from Chicago via Nickel Plate road, for Christian Scientists' meeting in June. Tickets on sale June 25th, 26th and 27th, with extended return limit of August 1st. Stopover at Niagara Falls, in either direction, without extra charge and at New York returning on payment of fee of \$1.00. No excess fare charged on any of our trains. Write John Y. Calahan, General Agent, 113 Adams St., Room 298, Chicago, for detailed information.



THE ENGINE SWEEPED THE SAVAGES OUT OF THE DOORWAY.



fellow, and he and the station agent took command. They put all the children and most of the women—for some of the latter fought side by side with the men—into the ash-pits, so that bullets coming thru the walls and doors passed over their heads. Mrs. Lyon held her place with the fighters, while, at her command, Katie and the twins crouched in one of the pits. There were two engines in the house, one with steam up.

"A little after noon the redskins massed against the big doors, making a mad attempt to crush their way in. It was then that Loner did a remarkable thing. He suddenly jumped into the cab of the 53, the engine with steam on, and yelled to the men to open the doors before her. As the doors swung back he jerked the throttle wide open and leaped off. The engine swept the savages out of the doorway, plowed thru the mass of bucks before the building, shot across the turn table and main track and rolled over on her side, 200 feet away. Twenty odd Indians were killed or maimed by this master stroke. The rest scattered in all directions, but presently returned, fearful, to the fort. However, they kept at a safe distance from the front of the building after that.

"The men began to hope then that the bloodthirsty wretches might be beaten for a time, at least during daylight. But when night should come, what then? The building would certainly be burned by the Indians, and the lives of all the whites be lost in massacre. If there were only some means of getting word to the fort, or to Pope and his men. Katie heard this, and five minutes later disappeared.

"Presently a boy in the asphalt cried that some one was halloing thru the train pipe. A man went down and listened, then called Mrs. Lyon. 'Katie's in there,' he said, breathlessly. Mrs. Lyon sprang down in the pit, and with white face knelt at the end of the drain, far away voice. 'I'm going to wade down the creek to the bank. I'll hide along under the bank. I'm going to fetch White Bess and see if I can't get some help.'

"Mrs. Lyon screamed for Katie to come back, but the voice that came thru the drain only said: 'Good-by, ma; don't worry about me. There isn't an Indian pony on the plains that can catch White Bess. Tell Mr. Loner I'll bring the soldiers. Good-by, ma.' Mrs. Lyon swung her hands and implored, but no answer came back. Katie had slipped into the creek from the mouth of the drain and had started on her dangerous mission.

"For 300 feet more she crept on her hands and knees close along under the bank; then, getting somewhat out of the range of view, hurried in crouching posture on the ground, and kept behind a fence she reached the stable. Shipping a bride on the white mare and strapping a folded blanket to the front of the animal, she turned her into the pasture. The animal went at once to the creek to drink, and Katie again crept along the fence and escaped from sight under the bank. A moment later she was leading White Bess down the bed of the shallow stream and away from the town. When the village lay a half a mile or more behind her she led the mare through a clump of cottonwoods on to dry ground and mounted. Katie leaned forward, and patting the horse's arched neck, 'We must bring the soldiers, Bessie, she said imploringly; 'Don't fail, and don't ever give up if they chase us. Mommy and little Dan and Jimmy may never see the light of morning if we fail.'

"To Katie the strong light and broad

of this astonishing figure we saw eight or ten Indians on ponies and in war paint, straining toward the north, with the hurdlng black mass not 600 feet behind them. Even while we looked we saw one of the ponies fall, and the Indian rider leap to his feet and disappear from under in a moment and disappear from sight.

"In the thrill and horror of the prospect, I did not regard my immediate surroundings, until we suddenly rushed upon the trestle and stopped. Then I saw that a large body of Indian horsemen were riding west, galloping along on the north side of the track. Long Blanket and his braves, caught in their work of tearing up the track, were trying to get beyond the range of the stampede.

"The trestle was some fifty feet in length, and apparently stretched across the almost dry bed of what once had been a small river. The stringers and ties at the highest point were more than ten or twelve feet above the ground. Upon these the engine and two cars stood, the balance of the train reaching out along the grade eastward. Along the trestle I heard shouting and stern orders as the thunder of the stampede grew in volume and rolled toward us. Whether the rushing and shouting were from the west or the track away and go over it, leaving us all lifeless, or would break and eddy around us, no man could say. I was fast on the ground, my immediate surroundings, until we suddenly rushed upon the trestle and stopped. Then I saw that a large body of Indian horsemen were riding west, galloping along on the north side of the track. Long Blanket and his braves, caught in their work of tearing up the track, were trying to get beyond the range of the stampede.

"A kind of frayed sweep thru me at that, such a leap of the pulses as I had never felt before. I sprang down upon the ends of the ties and reached my hands toward her, shouting in sort of a frenzy, then, suddenly, as by inspiration, the only possible course of action was revealed to me. I slipped down between the outer ends of the ties and hung on to the outside of the outside stringer. I saw that Katie was riding the jaded mare straight toward us. In truth, her eyes had been fastened upon her father's smoking engine for more than a mile.

"As I hung there, with my face toward the oncoming ocean of hairy forms, I felt Lyner's hand gripping my wrists and heard him appealing to me for help. At that horrible mass came thundering toward us I could see Katie kept the lead. She was lying low and close over the horse's neck, urged her with a series of startling screams. The Indians, seeing the move, put their horses to top speed, and hiding across the inside of the angle made by Katie's course, sought to cut her off.

"But White Bess ran like a deer and the Indians crossed her course an eighth of a mile to the rear. They fired no shots and ceased yelling, evidently not wishing to frighten or press the girl until they could get the advantage of position. They now pointed their course slightly to the south, plainly hoping to ally the girl's fears and gradually drive her northwest and away from the fort. Evidently they felt that a straight race after the fleet mare would end in their defeat.

"In spite of her intention Katie drew gradually toward the west in trying to keep away from her pursuers. She must have been twelve miles from Ludden, and White Bess was wet and breathing hard, when she struck the buffalo at the eastern end of that living lake which we had seen from the train west repairing the track.

"It was a terrible blow to Katie's hopes, for she saw that she could not reach the fort unless she could get on the south side of the mighty herd, and such a course would throw her well nigh into the arms of the savages. For a moment she pulled the reins, looking toward the west, and for miles away to the south and west that hairy, awful sheet of dark forms stretched before her. Panting and horrified she set her feet on the ground, and the mare straightened up and came in to the fort from the south or west. Yelling wildly, the Indians came after her, the nearly ponies striking to the chase like dogs. Katie's face grew drawn and white; her red lips turned ashen and parched. She patted the neck of the dripping mare, praying her not to fail. 'We must beat them, Bess! Oh, we must! We must!' she kept pleading.

"That was about the hour in the afternoon when we of the train were repairing the last break before we should turn the bend beyond which lay the trestle of which Lyon had spoken. We had scarcely completed the repairs, when we suddenly saw that the whole black mass of life trailing across the southeast was rolling toward us like a mighty wave. 'Pull ahead, Lyon! Get on the trestle, if it is still standing!' shouted the conductor. Lyon gave the 40 steam, and we whirled away toward the bridge.

"I fancy there was not a man on the train who did not feel his skin creep with fear and horror at sight of that resistless avalanche, animals leaping toward us. The dark billow was miles wide and its rear was lost in clouds of dust. A band of Indians, by Long Blanket's order, in an attempt to break thru the front of the herd, had stamped the mightiest herd of bison ever seen upon the plains. The front of the herd was like a long, uneven wall of rushing water, from the lower edge of which gushed out a curling surf of dust, and beneath which all life that fell or was overtaken was drawn and trampled into fragments. Hundreds of thousands of hoofs beat the earth, and the road from the rushing sea of flesh was like a strange new thunder. Coyotes, antelopes and wild horses ran before it for their lives. We saw what was apparently a child on a gray horse, leaning forward over the animal's neck, and riding madly in the race with death. East

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