

On The Excitement Special

by F. H. Richardson



"FATTY AN' ME RUBBERS AROUND AN' GAZES INTO TH' MUZZLES OF A COUPLE OF INFANT CANNONS."

"BILL, I hear you are a sure-enough, dyed-in-the-wool hero," remarked the engineer as he climbed into the cab, a clean suit of overalls under his arm.

"I dunno about th' hero end of it, but they's one thing I can tell you without any stutterin'."

"And what is that, Bill?"

"That I've had all th' excitement I'm hankerin' for, an' I don't want no more go-rounds with train-robbers now, hereafter, an' forevermore!"

"Tell me all about it, old man," said the engineer, seating himself comfortably to listen. "From what I've heard, it was a pretty hot proposition, all right."

“Say, you’re on th’ main line, sure enough! Hot? It was so hot that I won’t need a fire t’ keep me warm for some consid’able spell, I’m thinkin’.

“Y’ see, it was this way. When you said you was a goin’ to lay off las’ trip, I doped it out that I’d take a rest, too; but the hoodoo that rides straddle of my shoulders when I’m awake an’ sits on th’ bed-post while I’m sleepin’ got busy an’ set me figgerin’ how you’d only be off one trip an’ how much I needed th’ coin t’ keep up my end with Sue.

“Of course, after I’d rolled that dope aroun’ in th’ sawdust up in th’ top of my head for a spell, I concluded t’ stay with it. Anybody but me ’ud ’a’ had sense enough to ’a’ layed off; but you can bet your next month’s pay-check that if they’s any trouble closer than th’ moon, I’ll be in th’ exact geographical center of it with my hair in a braid.

“When you layed off, Fatty Burns, bein’ first out on th’ extra-board, drew th’ trip for his paticular prize. But I’ll bet forty-seven dollars against a plug of kill-me-quick that he’s busy right now wishin’ it ’ud ’a’ been th’ night shift on th’ leakiest, ornerest old switch-engine in the Chicago yards.

“Fatty’s a good enough throttle-pusher, all right; an’ I ain’t got no’ kick on him, only he ain’t got no sense, an’ he’s always buttin’ into trouble jus’ like me. Two hoodoos on one measly old tub of an engine at one time is too much. It’s sendin’ out a special invitation to trouble, an’ sendin’ it by telegraph at that.

“They wasn’t much happened on th’ down trip, excep’ a little fairy tried t’ make a mash on me when we stopped at Gainsboro, an’ I was so busy preventin’ her that I didn’t see th’ signal t’ pull out, an’ got a callin’ down from ole Fuzzy Whiskers, th’ con.

“He come trottin’ up th’ platform, puffed up like one of them bladder balloons, an’ handed me a bunch of compliments that made th’ fairy hop up th’ street with both

hands over her purty little ears. Ole Fuzzy can sure hand out a bundle of red-hot language when he gets real mad. But I got even with ’im—believe me.”

“How did you do that, Bill?” inquired the engineer.

“Easy: When we pulled out I leaned out of th’ gangway an’ yelled at ’im to go back an’ knock down a couple more dollars, an’ he’d feel better. Say, he tried t’ bite a chunk out of th’ baggage-car as it went by, an’ he was so busy shakin’ his fist at me that he near forgot t’ get on th’ train.

“Well, comin’ back we was flirtin’ with th’ landscape at th’ rate of about fifty-five per, just this side of Oakley. Everything was runnin’ as smooth as a new air-pump, an’ th’ trouble-train ‘peared t’ be backed clean off th’ map when things began to happen; an’ they kep’ on a happenin’ some more swift than this particular coal-pusher wants t’ see ‘em ag’in.

“Sue an’ me hadn’t had a scrap for more’n a week, an’ things was gettin’ so calm an’ slow that I was jus’ sayin’ to Fatty I wished they would something bust loose an’ stir ’em up an’ sorter make life worth livin’.

“Say, talk about answers to your prayers! I hadn’t more’n got th’ words out of my grub-trap when somebody yells, ‘Hands up!’ an’ Fatty an’ me rubbers aroun’ an’ gazes into th’ muzzles of a couple of infant cannons, backed by two plug-uglies who was roostin’ on th’ coal back in th’ tank.

“They didn’t a’pear t’ be no absolute necessity of havin’ a pencil an’ a pad of paper t’ figure out what sort of a game we was up against. Neither me or Fatty had th’ least idea they was a couple of members of th’ Salvation Army, or even friends droppin’ in for a quiet talk.

“I’ll swear, though, bad scared as I was, I nearly had to laugh when I looked across at Fatty. He turned his head when th’ gentle request t’ elevate our fingers come, an’

started t' say, 'What th'—!' But jus' as he got half of th' second word out he caught sight of the artillery, an' his face sorter froze up, an' there he sat for about half a minute.

"Say, you could 'a' hung a couple of towels up on his face just as easy, usin' his eyes for nails!

"Th' missionaries of peace climbed down over th' coal-gate an' made their debut into th' cab, pokin' their armament right up under our noses jus' t' show they was nice, civil, well-disposed chaps that wouldn't hurt nobody, except by mistake.



"INSTEAD OF DOIN' IT, HE WHIRLS AN' AIMS AT TH' CHIEF OF TH' FINANCIERS."

"Say, did you ever examine th' business end of a gun real close when it was in th' hands of th' enemy, th' hammer drawed back an' the finger of a real, live, eighteen-carat, dyed-in-the-wool train-robber toyin' with th' trigger?"

"No, Bill, I cannot say that I have," replied the engineer. "Did you enjoy the experience?"

"Huh! Not so's you could notice it!

That big blunderbuss kep' growin' an' swellin' up till it filled th' whole back end of th' cab. Th' hole in th' end of it looked as big as a spike-keg, an' I could almost see th' bullet comin' out t' bat me one.

"Well, one of 'em continues his delectate attentions t' me, while th' other makes Fatty shut her off an' put on th' air, persuadin' him gentle-like by rubbin' th' business end of th' howitzer ag'in, his neck just under his west ear.

"I could see Fatty didn't like th' feel of th' thing any too well, for he kep'edgin' away an' jerkin' his head forward a little at a time, like he was bowin' t' some one real polite.

"Say," says Fatty pretty soon, jerkin' out his watch, 'number eight is due at Carbondale in twenty-six minutes, an' we meet her there. She has right of track, an' if we ain't there on time she'll come—'

"You shut up yer talk-trap an' get this train stopped," snarls Mr. Robber, 'if you ain't hankerin' t' be a candidate for wings real sudden. We don't care a wormy-apple core about number eight or anything else but th' coin in that express-car, an' we're goin' t' have that—see? If number eight comes along an' butts you off th' right of way after we're through, that's their lookout an' yours!'

"Gee! When that blasted bulldog-faced disgrace t' th' human race said that, I'd 'a' been willin' t' 'a' took a darn good lickin' t' 'a' pasted 'im one right square on th' end of his ugly nose; but th' trouble was he'd most likely have blowed th' top of my dome off before I could 'a' landed on him, an' what good 'ud I be with a tunnel through my thinkin' arrangements?"

"Well, when Fatty got her stopped some more of th' gang that we hadn't been favored with a call from yet uncoupled th' express-car, an' then they made us pull ahead about half a mile, emphasizin' th' request by playfully pokin' Fatty in th' ribs with a baby cannon.

"Fatty spent his time between edgin' away from th' artillery as far as he could an' swearin' under his breath. I couldn't hear him, but I know by th' look on his face he wa'n't recitin' poetry or practicin' baby-talk, even if there is a new kid jus' come to his house.

"When we got stopped again, one of th' amateur coin-collectors lit th' engine-torch an' got down on th' ground, his pardner herdin' Fatty an' me after makin' me take th' coal-pick along.

"Th' express-car didn't have no door in its front end, an' when we arrives at th' hind end they was two more get-rich-quick financiers waitin' fur us. One of 'em makes th' fact known real quick that he's president of th' Robbin Steel Company.

"Get a move on, you fellers,' says he, like a bulldog growlin'. 'What'd you think this is, anyhow—a funeral or a pink tea?

"Hey, you inside th' car!' he yells, 'th' engineer's goin' t' bust in th' door of your old cracker-box. You can shoot all y' want to, but y' won't hit nobody but him,' all of which must 'a' been mighty interestin' news t' Burns an' the man inside th' car, I'm thinkin'.

"Well, th' feller grabs th' coal-pick an' gives it t' Fatty, an' he steps up real prompt, as if he was goin' t' obey orders like a little lamb.

"They ain't no platform on them cars, you know, an' a man could stan' right on th' ties an' paste the lock of th' door.

"Fatty raises th' pick t' hand th' door one; but, instead of doin' it, he whirls an' aims at th' chief of th' financiers.

"Th' feller dodged, an' he missed 'im slick an' clean, an' durn near busted th' head of th' pick off th' handle when it come down on th' rail. It was a fool thing t' do, for, even if he'd 'a' laid out th' one he aimed at, they was three more of 'em with guns in their fists an' him with a coal-pick an' me with nothin' but my finger-nails t' fight with.

"Say! They was three pistol-butts

made connection with Fatty's dome before th' pick hit th' ground, an' he dropped like a ten-wheeler fell on him. I sure thought they had put out his headlight for good.

"It took 'em jus' three-fifths of a second t' present me with th' coal-pick an' my runnin' orders, an' you bet your pilot I got busy. Every one of them had a Gatlin' gun in each hand, ah' they was all pointed right square at your humble fireman.

"Say! I'd 'a' looked like a colander if they'd 'a' gone off! I was scared mad an' feelin' bad about Fatty, an' between th' three I was carryin' about all th' pressure I'm guaranteed for.

"It took jus' three licks t' bust th' lock of th' door, an' with th' last one the head of th' pick broke off, leavin' most of th' handle in my hands. I jumped back as th' door swung open, thinkin' th' messenger might accidentally send a few bunches of lead through, an' I didn't make no mistake. He sure lost no time in openin' up with his heavy artillery.

"It didn't do him no good, though, for one of th' robbers pitched something in at th' door, an' they was a flash an' a explosion like th' boiler of th' engine had let loose, an' then things was all calm an' peaceful inside th' car.

"Three of th' bandits climbed in, leavin' one with me so I wouldn't get lone-some. They hadn't no more than got in when one of 'em lets a yell out of him, an' my man rubbers in th' door to see what's doin'.

"Say! I had th' handle of that pick in my fist yet, an' I jus' handed th' gentleman a tap on th' dome with th' butt-end of it an' sprinted for th' engine. I'll bet th' dirt from my shoes went clear over th' express-car, an' I guess I hit th' ground three times between th' back end of th' car and the gangway.

"She had a big fire in when Fatty shut her off at th' request of our friends, an' she was still poppin' t' beat th' band. I chucked th' lever down in th' corner, opened th' sand

an' pulled her wide open. She never slipped a turn, an' th' way she yanked that express-car ahead was a sight.

"I hustled a fire into her, an' by that time she was sendin' th' skyrockets a hundred feet above th' stack, an' things was beginnin' t' hum.

"As near as I could guess, we was nine miles from Carbondale, an' I had jus' seven minutes to make it; an' you bet I was doin' some tall guessin' 'long about that time of th' night."

"I'll bet there was a surprised lot of men back in the express-car," remarked the engineer.

"Yep, they sure was. The messenger told me all about it when I went out to th' hospital to see him to-day. It was a dynamite cartridge th' whelps threw in th' door, an' it knocked him silly, besides breaking one of his wings."

"Wings, Bill?"

"Arm, Mr. Innocence! A-r-m, arm. It's a wonder you don't have t' have a map t' get over th' road with!

"As I was sayin', it knocked 'im out for a minute an' broke an arm, an' when he got back on th' track th' three captains o' finance was in th' car, all ready for business, an' had impounded his gun for a starter.

"When I got t' th' engine an' yanked 'er open, he says it jerked th' whole outfit off their feet an' rolled 'em in a heap. By th' time they got up an' made up their minds what had hit 'em we was goin' so fast they couldn't get off.

"They was jus' wild, he said, an' one of 'em leaned out of each side door an' begun t' bombard th' engine, while th' other one—th' chief—chopped a hole in th' front end of th' car. They was a lot of iron rods, though, an' he couldn't make it big enough t' crawl through; but by gettin' up close t' th' top he could see over th' tank into th' cab an' pump bullets into it.

"I had her hooked up in six inches, an' th' throttle wide open an', what's more, she stayed that way until we sighted Carbondale.

"Run! Say, a streak o' lightning with a tin can tied t' its tail wouldn't 'a' been in it with us.

"I was leanin' out of your window, wonderin' whether I'd be a fireman or an angel in five minutes more, when *bing!* something took a chunk out of th' cab, an', lookin' back, I saw one of th' express-car passengers leanin' out of th' side, door, aimin' his cannon right at me an' swearin' like a pirate.

"I jumped over t' th' other side, an' th' same identical performance was bein' pulled off there, too. I didn't lean out of no more windows, you hear me! Willie kep' right in th' exact mathematical center of th' deck, you bet."



"Why didn't you stop and go ahead and flag number eight?" asked the engineer.

"Huh! How long d' you reckon I'd 'a' lasted if I'd 'a' stopped this old tub an' 'a' give them gents a chance t' get at me? They wa'n't puttin' in any of their time lovin' me jus' then, mind you."

Properly abashed, the engineer subsided. "You are right, Bill. Go ahead with the story."

"Betcher life I'm right, an', what's more, I'm alive, an' that's a durn sight more'n I'd 'a' been if I'd 'a' pulled off any fool stunts

like that. Th' old girl was beginnin' t' take th' curves, runnin' mostly on one side, an' I could see th' roof of th' express-car wabblin' aroun' like it was crazy. I was jus' goin' t' ease her off a little when, bing! something hit th' boiler-head beside me, an' lookin' aroun', I saw a hole in th' front end of th' car near th' roof an' one of them blunderbusses spoutin' fire an' lead like a volcano gone crazy.

"Willie took one look an' dropped down behind th' coal-gate out o' range. I didn't dast to raise up after that, an' had t' put in th' fires on my hands an' knees."

"Getting pretty warm, wasn't it, Bill?"

"Well, they did 'pear t' be some set on gettin' Willie's goat, an' that's a fact. Cheer up, though, th' worst is yet t' come.

"Th' infernal chump kept pumpin' lead into th' cab, an' pretty soon one of his bullets broke th' water-glass; an' then, you bet, I said my 'Now I Lay Me.' She was a jumpm' around th' curves like a circus-horse in a ring, th' coal rattlin' down through th' coal-gate until it was clear out on th' deck, th' cab full of , steam an' boilin' water, an' th' landscape, what little I could see of it through th' gangway, goin' by in a solid streak, an' th' bullets pingin' th' boilerhead an' cab!

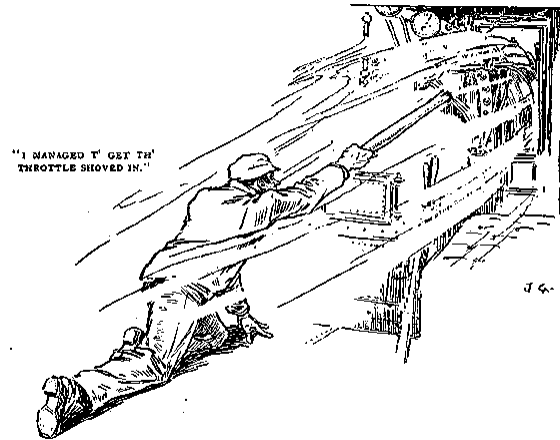
"Oh, it was a red-lemonade picnic, all right, all right. But Willie ain't lookin' for any more of 'em real soon.

"I'd got her goin' all right, an' she was sure goin' some, too; but, supposin' she stuck to th' rails until we got to Carbondale, *how in thunder was I goin' t' get her stopped?*

"Th' apostle of peace was keepin' th' air full of bullets; an' if I raised up t' shut 'er off an' put on th' air, I'd stan' a fine, large, fat, juicy chance of stoppin' a pound or so of lead, which might upset my digestive machinery.

"Then, to add to th' pleasure of th' occasion, th' steam from th' busted water-glass filled th' cab, so I couldn't see a thing, or even see enough outside t' tell where we

was; though, judgin' by th' speed, I was calculatin' we ought t' be at least half-way across th' United States.



"I couldn't even see my watch, an' was jus' beginnin' t' hold my breath, waitin' for th' smash, when we met number eight, an' was wonderin' how it 'ud feel t' be ground' up into sausage, when one of the blitherin' robbers did th' only decent stunt they pulled off all through th' mess. He busted out th' glass in the front cab-window on your side with one of his lead pills. Th' steam blowed out of that side of th' cab, of course, an' give me a chance t' do something. They was a piece of bell-cord behind your seat-box, an' keepin' down low, out o' range of th' bombardment, I got it out an' made a slip-noose on one end.

"Then I took a chance, an' raised up an' slipped it on th' whistle-lever an' pulled th' thing wide open. I tied th' other end of th' rope t' th' coal-gate.

"Say, th' net results was sure a peach! As th' tank 'ud bob up an' down, it 'ud wobble th' whistle-lever along with it. Th' durn'd thing sounded like a steam calliope gone plum' ravin' crazy.

"Just as I got that done I seen th' Carbondale mile-board go by like a ball out of a cannon. It was then sure up t' me t' do something real sudden unless I wanted t' introduce myself an' a lot of other folks t' th'

hereafter in a minute.

“Th’ bullets was still a plumpin’ in. I guess that robber chap ’ud gone clean batty, an’ didn’t know a thing but trigger-pullin’. Reachin’ up with th’ coal-pick handle, I managed t’ get th’ throttle shoved in; an’, after pluggin’ at th’ air-handle with lumps o’ coal, I hit it a smash an’ knocked it clear round to emergency.

“Pretty soon they was a slappity bang, smash—an’ she rolled over t’ one side, like she was goin’ t’ turn over at least half a dozen times. Afore I knowed what had happened, she was standin’ still as a pet lamb, an’ folks was crowdin’ into th’ cab an’ askin’ questions at th’ rate of fifty-two to th’ second.

“Y’ see, number eight happened t’ have a passenger for Carbondale, an’ for th’ first time in a month stopped at that town. Just as they was pullin’ out, th’ eagle eye caught a glimpse of my headlight an’ heard th’ tune th’ tank was playin’ on th’ whistle.

“He s’picioned they was something

unusual comin’ off, an’ had sense enough t’ stop again an’ have his fireman skip down an’ throw th’ switch for th’ sidetrack—an’ he didn’t do it a second too soon, either. We stopped right opposite th’ last car of number eight.

“Th’ express-car passengers, after pausin’ t’ say a short prayer for th’ repose of my soul, skipped, of course; but th’ sheriff got ’em afore daylight, an’ th’ coin was safe, all right, all right! Mebby th’ express company’ll come in with a check for ten dollars after a while. Wouldn’t surprise me a bit.

“Fatty wa’n’t hurt much, only three dents in his dome that th’ sawbones says’ll get well all right. Th’ feller I paid my compliments to with th’ pick-handle was still peacefully sleepin’ when we got back t’ th’ train, an’ th’ sheriff gathered him in an’—there you are.

“It’s time we was gettin’ this old mill ready for some slower runnin’ than that she done last trip, I’m thinkin’.”