

# ROMANCE OF THE RAIL

BY FREDERIC REDDALL

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A moment's reflection satisfied him that they must be stars and that he had at last reached the open air. A few feet more, and he emerged through a crevice in the rocks on a little beach of pebbles and water worn rocks, at the margin of which he could dimly discern the surface of a considerable stream, whose placid bosom reflected the glorious firmament overhead. Never was the sight of the canopy of heaven more welcome.

Though he did not know it then, he was on the west bank of the La Fontaine, or Fountain, river, which fed the



Each spring astride an animal and started at a hard gallop.

Each spring and whose gravelly margin was still wet and glistening with the high water mark caused by the cloud-burst of a few hours before. What next to do Ives did not know. He was a stranger to the country and totally ignorant of the lay of the land. To proceed in the darkness seemed well nigh impossible, yet to wait for morning would be a pitiful waste of time. He had no very exalted idea of Filley's good faith nor of that of the Dallons. In fact, he repented about as much confidence in the one as the other. If Filley bungled in any way, he dreaded to think of the consequences to those dear ones left in the clutches of as cold blooded a set of wretches as ever drew trigger or bestrode stolen horseflesh. Besides, he shrewdly suspected that Filley would take good care to look after No. 1 and if he failed to get the money might content himself with keeping out of personal danger and perhaps giving an alarm without heed to the fate of Draper and his party.

All these reflections flew through Chester's brain as he sat shivering and squeezing the water out of his clothes on the wet boulder. Casting his eyes around the horizon, he noticed a white glare off to the north, showing clearly in that marvellously pure atmosphere. That, he thought, must be the lights of Denver and in that direction would help most likely be found. So, weary and cold, with chattering teeth and aching in every joint, he set out along the bank of the little stream, stumbling and at times falling over the obstructions in the way. But after a couple of hours of this sort of tramping he was completely beaten. His thin city shoes were worn to shreds, and every step was acute torture. As the first pale streaks of lemon colored glow appeared in the east he sank by the way, his back against a rock and panting from exhaustion. He intended only to rest for a few moments, but fatigue gained the upper hand, and he soon sank into an uneasy sleep, from which he was awakened by lusty shouts and the cracking of a whip.

Opening his leaden eyes, he found the day all abroad and discovered that the uproar proceeded from a teamster who was standing up in the shafts of his wagon yelling like one possessed and snapping his heavy whip in order to attract the attention of the sleeper.

"Thought I'd fetch you," was the driver's first salutation. "Couldn't leave the team, you see, so I had to holler. What's the matter, man? Look as though you'd been through an ore crusher!"

Chester hobbled down the rock incumbered bank, a sorry spectacle indeed. A "gentleman tramp" would have seemed a Beau Brummel by comparison.

"How far are we from Denver?" was his first inquiry.

"Matter o' 30 miles or so. Want to git that? Jump up then!" was the cheery invitation. So Ives clambered up on the off side of the shafts, and immediately the heavy springless ore wagon went creaking and crashing along the rough road.

In a few brief sentences Chester acquainted him with the strange happenings of the past 36 hours.

"Gee whiz!" whistled the teamster. "That's Jim Dallons' gang, sure 'nuff! See here, podner, there's \$5,000 reward out for Jim! This'll be his last ride, I reckon! What you goin' to do?"

"Get help as quickly as possible," returned Ives. "You know the country and its customs; advise me. If those women are rescued alive and unharmed, I'll answer for it that John Draper will put another \$5,000 on top of the governor's reward to the man that does it."

"You don't say! Well, 'tain't none o' my business, but I guess I'll have to go you," was the matter of fact response.

"What do you s'pose that clerk o' his'll do? Has he got gumption?"

"Like as not," was the not very cheering response. During this colloquy they were making slow but sure progress toward the city, but to Ives the pace was tantalizingly tedious. Ben Gallup, the teamster aforesaid, uttered not a word for three or four minutes. Then, with a mighty crack of his whip, he exclaimed:

"By hokey, that's the dodge! Ged-dap, you lazy devils!" And, standing up on the shafts, he urged his team with voice and whip until they broke into a trot which doubled their speed. Then he condescended to speak.

"Don't know as they'll interfere, but you'd better try."

"Who, man, who? For God's sake be more explicit!" sputtered Ives.

"Over yonder a piece, at Littleton," said Gallup, pointing toward the northwest with his whip. "There's an old military camp there—Fort Denver it used to be called. They're the lads for you if they'll do the job. S'pose it belongs to the sheriff by rights, but I'll take too long. He'd be all day gettin' ready and swearin' out his warrants and habbuss corpses for Jack Doe and Dick Roe. A dose o' cold lead is the best medicine for them fellers, and then you can rest them afterwards."

"Fort Denver, you say?" queried Chester, all on fire with impatience.

"Then drive, man, drive, as you love your own wife and daughters."

"Can you ride hossback?" queried Gallup.

"Yes, of course," was the quick reply.

"Then hold on a minute." So saying he drove the wagon to the side of the road, jumped down and began to unharness the team. Ives helping with nervous haste, quickly divining the honest fellow's intention. Rapidly knotting the traces and the lines, they each sprang astride an animal and started down the road at a hard gallop.

On they went for a couple of miles, and then there loomed up right ahead the trim white walls and the black muzzles of the two howitzers belonging to the little army post. A couple of sentries patrolled in front of the guardhouse and looked with wondering eyes on the strange outfit scampering past.

"I wish to speak with your commanding officer," said Ives. "Be good enough to hand him my card and say 'tis a matter of life and death!'"

"Yes, and it'll be wuss'n death if he ain't pretty darn lively," muttered Ben. Then as the orderly turned away he called after him: "Tell the cap'n Dallons' broke loose ag'n! They've stole a railroad train! Guess that'll fetch him," he chuckled.

In less than 60 seconds appeared the officer of the day, Lieutenant Crosby, holding between thumb and forefinger the limp and water soaked piece of pasteboard which Ives had sent in.

"This is Mr. Ives, I presume," he said, addressing the New Yorker and looking with polite amazement at his sorry plight.

"Yes, sir, and this is Ben Gallup, a teamster who picked me up on the road a few miles north of this place more dead than alive. The case is most urgent. Several women are in peril at the hands of the Dallons' gang."

"Pray step this way, Mr. Ives," was the courteous request, and seats were given them, while a messenger was dispatched to rouse Colonel Byng, the commandant. They had not long to wait. The mere mention of the Dallons' gang, as Ben Gallup had surmised, was enough, and the orderly returned almost immediately to say they were to proceed to the colonel's quarters.

They found that officer just finishing his breakfast, and after the necessary introduction Chester proceeded to tell his thrilling story, which was punctuated with sundry exclamations of "Ha!" and "So!" from the attentive soldier.

"Well, Mr. Ives," he said as the former ceased, pulling his gray mustache, "strictly speaking, this is no affair for the military arm; 'tis a job for the sheriff. But I'll take the responsibility and do the explaining afterward. Can you guide us to the mouth of the cave?"

while.

"Like a pictur' book!" was the laconic reply. "Why, I was one o' the last men to drive a pick in Bone gulch!"

"Then you're the man we want," was the clinching answer. "How many men shall you need, Crosby?"

"Scuse me, Cunnel Byng," broke in Gallup, "them fellers won't be caught asleep—not by no means. They must be took unawares. You'll want two squads at least."

"How many are in the gang?" inquired the lieutenant of Ives.

"Not over 20, I should say. But let me beg you to act quickly. Think of those poor women in the clutches of such miscreants!"

"Rely upon it, Mr. Ives, all shall be done that can be done, and that immediately. You will accompany the troops, I presume?"

"Most assuredly!" was the reply.

"Then in that case permit me to offer you a mount, and while the men are falling in you may as well refresh yourself. From what you say there is ample time. 'Tis not yet 12 o'clock. The two watchers will not begin to expect your friend Filley for three or four hours yet, and in any event they could not be back in Bone gulch before sunset, as they said. So your people are safe till then or even till tomorrow morning. Dallons' wants the money more than anything else, and he won't proceed to extremities until he is convinced there is no hope of getting the ransom."

"I trust it may be as you say," said Ives.

In less than an hour there rode forth a little company of mounted troopers, seasoned fighters all of them, numbering exactly 20, under the command of Lieutenant Crosby. By his side on either hand rode Chester Ives and Ben Gallup, the former much refreshed after a bath and a brush down. Thus, it will be seen, the expedition numbered just 23 men.

All that day the little force rode southward over the hot and dusty Colorado trail, treading their tortuous path among the foothills, piloted by Ben Gallup. At sunset they were less than two miles from Bone gulch, according to Ben, but as it was then too late to think of attacking that night the expedition proceeded to bivouac. No fires were kindled for fear of betraying their presence to any of Jim Dallons' pickets.

**EIGHTH DAY.**  
STRONG HEARTS AND WILLING HANDS.

It would be difficult to say who were the more surprised, Chester's friends or his enemies, when he was missed on that Monday morning. Dallons' was clearly uneasy. He was very "ugly" and berated and abused every one unmercifully. Every foot of the cave was searched, and scouting parties were sent out along Bone gulch as far as the railroad spur without any trace of the fugitive being discovered. The gang dared not show themselves outside the gulch, for by this time Dallons' knew that search parties would be patrolling the railroad track in quest of the lost cars.

Draper and his party knew not what to think. The consternation of the bandits was so evidently genuine that no suspicion of foul play was possible. They were forced to the same conclusion—that Chester had escaped, but how? None of them dreamed of the water course as a possible means of exit. So after a deal of bad language on the part of Dallons' and his minions all hands, captors and captured, settled down to wait for Monday's sunset, before which hour it was futile to expect Filley's return with the money.

Slowly the long hours slipped away in the semidarkness of the cavern. The ladies bore up well under the circumstances, but the ordeal was a trying one, and Mrs. Hurst declared she should die if she had to spend another night there. Uncle John, as may be imagined, had his hands full.

Madge was perhaps the hardest to manage. She pestered him with questions, she imagined all sorts of horrors, she begged Dallons' to "tell her the truth and not to keep her in suspense," to which appeal that worthy replied that he "hoped the blank-blank-blank idiot had broken his neck," whereupon Madge retorted with flashing eyes that the aforesaid Dallons' was "a callous brute" and then burst into tears.

The last rays of daylight faded from the patch of sky visible from the mouth of the cave, and still no tidings of the messengers. Nine, 10, 11, 12 o'clock, and yet no news!

Dallons' was getting furious. For the tenth time he put John Draper through a rude cross examination as to the possible causes of delay.

"I told you it was risky," the president quietly replied. "If there has been any slip up, I am not to blame, and I don't believe Filley has bungled." He tried to keep a "stiff upper lip" before both Dallons' and the ladies, but his

own danger, but at the perils menacing those more dear to him than life itself. There was no telling to what lengths the villains would proceed if once they became convinced that their plans had miscarried, and what was one man against so many!

So in order to stave off the evil moment Draper professed to believe that the delay was not unreasonable and expressed it as his firm conviction that Filley and the money would turn up before morning. Yet in his own mind he feared that something had gone wrong. But he threw out a mental anchor to windward in nourishing the secret hope that young Ives had been successful in getting clear and that he would bring help of some sort. So it will be seen that on Chester Ives he really pinned his faith and not unjustly, as the sequel proved.

Reuben Filley and his guards rode all Sunday night, and daybreak on Monday found them on the outskirts of Denver. Here they put up at a roomy side saloon, where a team was hired to take Filley to the city and to which place he was to return with the money. He went straight to the bank and presented the draft as soon as the doors were opened, secured the cash and carefully disposed of the bills in his inside pocket. Then he drove around to a livery stable, where he put up the horse and buggy, saying:

"I would call for them again in the afternoon. Next he turned his steps to the Union depot, bought a ticket for San Francisco and boarded the first west bound train.

These treacherous moves were the result of some serious cogitations during his midnight ride. It was clear that he stood no chance to win Miss Granillas. It was also more than probable that his forgeries could not be concealed, thanks to this crazy western trip. If John Draper got wind of these, then he, Reuben K. Filley was a ruined rogue, and he could never show his face in New York again. With \$50,000 in cold cash he could start afresh in another country—Australia, for instance. He would disappear, and people could put any construction thereon that they liked. Most probably the two robbers would be blamed for it.

With black rage in their hearts they ordered their horses and as soon as darkness fell took the trail on the return to Bone gulch from their bootless errand. All that night they rode. Dawn was just breaking when they approached the vicinity of the robbers' retreat. All unconscious of danger, they were riding carelessly, their horses perforce proceeding at a walk, when out of the gloom ahead came the sharp challenge:

"Halt! Who goes there?" accompanied by the rattle of carbines.

"Who the blank are you?" was the defiant response, and this betrayed them, to which came the quick retort:

"Throw up your hands or you're dead men!" emphasized by a series of ominous clicks—sounds too well known by the marauders to need any repetition. Letting fall the reins on their horses' heads, they elevated their hands on a level with their ears and in this posture made out a squad of "dismounted" cavalrymen drawn up across the trail.

"Dismount!" came the command from Lieutenant Crosby, and, covered by the weapons of the troop, the crest-fallen villains slid out of their saddles as best they could, whereupon they were speedily searched, their pistols confiscated and their arms securely pinioned.

"Game's up, boys!" was the ironical salutation of the lieutenant.

"Well, you needn't be so blamed chipper about it," growled Leather Jack. "Tain't our fault. Jim just bit off more'n he cud chew, that's all!"

"See what comes o' trustin' a tenderfoot," remarked Bill Root, expectorating savagely.

Lieutenant Crosby stood by, regarding their dismay and disgust with grim amusement.

"I suppose you know what you've got to expect?" he inquired dryly.

"This means 30 years at least. We've got Jim Dallons' and the whole lot of you just where we want you, and by this time tomorrow you'll all be in Arapahoe county jail."

"Will we?" sneeringly remarked Leather Jack, truculent to the last.

"Yes, and you are going to help," was the lieutenant's confident response.

"As how?" inquired Leather Jack in the same skeptical tone.

"By showing us the nearest way to that cave of yours and thereby earning a commutation of sentence for yourselves."

This cast a new light on the subject, and the two rascals looked inquiringly at each other. They realized that the game was up, as Lieutenant Crosby had said. Better make the best terms they could while the chance offered. A few minutes' reflection determined their choice.

"All right, lieutenant. We're with you," said Jack nonchalantly. Then, "Better leave them horses here. There're no good on this trail."

So the troop horses and Mr. William Root were left hobbled with two of the cavalrymen as guards, and at the order to march the men started in single file.

Suddenly the bright moon of the cave, which faced the east, was darkened by a number of stalwart forms. The troopers had crept silently down the hidden approach and ranged themselves in line across the entrance. Once again rang out the frontier challenge to surrender:

"Throw up your hands!"

It was a complete surprise. Dallons' himself was scarcely awake when he was pounced on by a couple of soldiers and dragged kicking, struggling and cursing into the daylight. Not a shot had been fired and hardly a blow struck, yet there was the notorious Dallons' gang in the toils of Uncle Sam!

Chester Ives was among the first to rush into the interior, and in a few strides he was among his friends, with Miss Madge in his arms, her head on his shoulder and shaking hands with all the others. A great deal may be taken for granted at such a time.

"I knew you'd do it," she sobbed coherently.

"However did you manage it, Mr. Ives?" inquired Mrs. Hurst, who tremulously beamed on the young man.

"You'd never guess, my dear Mrs. Hurst," he replied, "but 'twas easy enough, though rather wet. But let me introduce Lieutenant Crosby," he continued as the gallant officer approached, the erstwhile captors having in turn become the captives and being all secured, some of them already on their way

to jail under a strong guard. "You must thank Lieutenant Crosby and his men for the rescue."

John Draper made due acknowledgments, and then more introductions followed, not forgetting Ben Gallup.

"What can have become of Reuben Filley?" queried Uncle John. "I hope no harm has befallen him."

"We've got his escorts," said Crosby, and they swear they haven't seen him since yesterday morning when he left them in Denver to proceed to the bank."

"Strange—very strange," remarked Draper. "But it may be that there was some difficulty over the money, though I did not anticipate any."

"Well, let us hope that you have saved your money and that he has saved his skin," laughed the lieutenant. "Then he inquired:

"Now, Mr. Draper, what can I and my men do to help you further?"

"Why, the first thing is to get to Denver, I suppose," replied the railroad president, looking inquiringly at the ladies of the party as he spoke.

"By all means," replied Mrs. Hurst. "But we cannot go in this plight," she said, spreading out her hands and motioning toward the soiled and disordered dresses of herself and the two younger ladies.

"Cannot we get back to the Mirandaz?" inquired Miss Granillas.

"Oh, yes, do," Uncle John begged Madge. "Then we can fix up and get something to eat and go into town in style after all!"

"Why, my dear, I don't even know if the cars are where we left them. These villains may have wrecked them, or the railroad people may have discovered them and hauled them away," was the reply.

"Well, can't we go and see?" queried the irrepressible Madge. "We've only got to take the back track the way we came."

"Assuredly the best thing you can do," Mr. Draper said Crosby, looking at the high spirited Madge with evident admiration. "Even if the cars are not there, that will be the easiest way for the ladies out of the gulch, and you'll then be within easy reach of the telegraph at Castle Rock."

So it was decided. The entire party set out, guided by Ben Gallup. Lieutenant Crosby had to make his address his duty being with his command and the captives, promising to see them in Denver and assuring them that they were perfectly safe from further molestation. Ben knew the way blindfold and led them as straight as the uneven trail would permit to where the railroad spur terminated against the rocky wall of the canyon.

There, sure enough, rested the Mirandaz and the Pullman, dusty and travel stained, but otherwise in all appearance sound and unharmed.

"But how are we to get out of here?" queried Ives.

"[To be continued.]"

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