

. . . . Seemed Like the Engineer Was Annoyed at Whoever
Had Left That Truck Stalled on the Right-of-Way



EASTBOUND HOTSHOT

By KEITH EDGAR

WHEN I was a kid in high school they made us read a lot of stuff by some English guy named Shakespeare.

Most of it was pretty dull but once in a while he'd toss off a nifty, like in Richard III when the Duke of Clarence says:

"O, I have passed a miserable night,
So full of ugly sights, of ghostly
dreams. . . ."

Brother, does that apply to me! Never do I wish another horrible experience like my last trip on the eastbound hotshot. I've

heard tell that some people consider railroading a humdrum occupation where nothing ever happens. Huh! Let me relate what took place the other night!

It is Sunday evening and I'm over at Peggy McIntosh's house sitting on the verandah with the family and wishing her old man would shut up. Dark-eyed Peggy is my intended missus and I sure hope that she takes after her mother in many ways and not after her father. "Crazy" McIntosh may be the best darned hogger on the whole division, but he's also the meanest, stubbornest, most cantankerous old coot on the system, and that, if you know many railroad engineers, is saying a lot.

Oddly enough, his family thinks that the sun just rises and shines on the horse-faced old stringbean. There he sits, with his feet on the verandah railing, telling lies about the early days of railroading and inferring that the new generation of railroaders—meaning me—are a bunch of sissies. Peggy and her mother are just hanging on his words like he is an oracle or something. It makes me sick. However, things are fairly peaceful until Peggy happens to make a remark about us maybe getting married next year.

"Daughter," says Crazy sorrowfully, "ever since you was so high you been telling your Daddy you're gonna marry a railroad man."

"But," replies Peggy, her lovely dark eyes looking bewildered, "he's a brakeman on the railroad, Daddy."

"Humph," snorts Crazy, eyeing me with disapproval, "that don't make him a railroad man. It takes more than a rule book and a suit of overalls to make a railroader, it does."

Before I can think up a snappy comeback the phone rings, and the sarcastic old buzzard goes in to answer it.

I know by his grunts and groans that he is being ordered out on a run and am

thinking happily that this here's one Sunday evening I won't have to put up with him, when I hear him growl in a sort of delighted manner, "Yeah, he's here. Yeah, I'll tell him."

He returns to the verandah and grins at me. "Bub, you're called out on a hot-shot and you just got an hour to git ready."

"Who's the engineer?" I asks suspiciously.

"Me," leers Crazy, confirming my worst fears.

"My," smiles Peggy, "isn't it nice that you two can get the same trip now and then?"

B EING a born diplomat, I make no comment, but take a hasty leave to go home and change into my overalls and pack my basket. I hurry down to the yard office and sign out, then hunt up our caboose. Putting my basket away and digging some fusees and torpedoes out of the locker, I'm lighting my lantern when Graveyard Gorman, the conductor, comes in with Jonesy our rear-end brakeman. Graveyard is a dismal stoop-shouldered character who ain't never had an optimistic thought in his life. They call his caboose "The Hearse."

He sighs dolefully and says, "Are you a good jumper, Bub?"

"Huh?" I asks.

"Son," advises Graveyard, "if I was riding with Crazy McIntosh, I would keep myself ready to bail out in a hurry. Some night he is going to kill us all with his glory-driving."

"For the love of Pete!" I protests. "Crazy's been wheeling engines since before I was born and he ain't had a wreck yet. Just because he's the fastest hogger on the high-iron—" Then I realize that I am defending the old ache-and-pain and close my trap. I borrow a smoke from Jonesy and walk up to the depot. Our engine is

2458, a big hand-fired brute with plenty of power and a nice turn of speed. And there is Crazy, his bony frame draped in clean overalls, denim cap on backwards and goggles shoved up on his forehead holding a torch in one hand and a long-spouted oilcan in the other, grumpily inspecting the engine. A lugubrious expression occupies his gaunt face, one cheek of which is bulging with McAndrew's Plug (a strong chew for strong men), as he prods and pokes among the drivers looking for some bearing the hostlers might have missed.

He sees me, straightens, shifts his quid, expectorates disgustedly and bends over the drivers again.

Me, I ignore him and climb up into the cab to stow my fusees. The fireman, Dirty Dolan, is laying his fire and he don't even look up to greet me. I ain't hurt, however, as Dolan don't know no better, being just as dumb as he looks. The big ox, with his placid bovine face and huge shoulders, has just one good quality—he can fire a hog to suit Crazy. Also, being the silent type he gets along with the old wart.

CRAZY swings up into the cab, takes a gander at the steam gauge, and plunks himself on the seat just as the manifest, with Dusty Smith at the throttle, rolls in from Detroit right on her time. I forgot to mention that our train, number 92, is a redball. This means that she consists mostly of valuable merchandise and runs on a time-card like a passenger train. Tonight 92 has about sixty loads and ten empties. Well, anyway, the other engine cuts off and trundles over to the roundhouse. We back down to the train and I couple on. At the same time a switch engine is putting our caboose on the rear end.

Crazy is testing the air when Graveyard bustles over with our orders. He hands up the flimsies and hollers,

“We're running 'extra'!”

Crazy leans out the cab window and asks politely, “What the hell's the idea?”

Graveyard shakes his head sadly. “There's been some robberies over on the Central. Cars was looted when they stopped in sidings. So the dispatcher ain't taking no chances with this train. You're pushing right through with a clear track.”

Dirty Dolan is already going out the catwalk to put the white flags in their sockets by the headlight, denoting we are running extra; but looking down at Graveyard, I can tell he's kinda wishing he'd stayed home.

You see, releasing Crazy McIntosh from the time-card also releases him from what he considers a lot of restraint. When he hits the high-iron he don't like to stop to count the ties. It makes for an exciting ride.

Crazy tests the air again, looks at his watch, then glances down at Graveyard still fussing around with his lantern. He hollers kindly, “Listen, you old bonebag, if you wanna ride this here train you better get the hell back to the Hearse.”

“Don't you worry about me, dang ya!” shrills Graveyard. “High-ball!” Then he turns and hot-foots it along the train as fast as he can travel. He's made many a trip with Crazy and knows what to expect.

Crazy grins sourly, stands up, swings the Johnson bar back into reverse, jerks the whistle cord three times and yanks on the sand, whoops the whistle twice and eases open the throttle. Old 2458 snorts, belches, and heaves herself back against the train, piling several car-lengths of slack into it before she stops.

Crazy throws the Johnson bar forward, turns on the sand, whoops the whistle twice and eases open the throttle. The big hog slides forward, bellows heavily. As the slack pulls out of the train, her drivers start to slip. Crazy eases off on the throttle,

gives her more sand, then more steam. 2458 lunges ahead like a willing horse, takes up the load, and, her exhaust thundering mightily, we start to roll.

I look back in time to see Graveyard's lantern going up the side of a boxcar. He ain't taking no chances on catching the caboose as it goes by. Crazy sees it too and brays gleefully, the mean old mule. This is a favorite stunt of his, making the conductor walk over the top of the train. It just shows you what kind of character he is.

As soon as the whole train is rolling Crazy hooks up the Johnson bar a little, shortening the valve stroke, and as we clear the yards our exhaust has sharpened to a quick hammering.

Crazy expels his quid at a crossing sign, fumbles in the pocket of his overalls, digs out a ratty plug of McAndrews, bites off a fresh chew and rolls the nasty stuff into his leathery cheek. Then he settles back, pulls down his goggles, glances at the water gauge, hollers, "Hey Dolan, give me a low glass!" and hooks the Johnson bar up some more. The beat of our exhaust quickens perceptibly. He leans out the cab window, wiggles his bottom into a comfortable position and notches the throttle back.

I climb onto my seat on the opposite side of the cab and watch Dirty Dolan stoking the old girl. He is swinging with an easy motion, timing his stroke exactly so that his big foot presses the compressed-air treadle just at the right instant to open the firedoors as the scoop hits them, letting the minimum amount of cold air into the firebox.

By the time we clear the junction our Johnson bar is riding in the company notch, the throttle arm is at the back of the quadrant, and old 2458 is thudding fast and furious like the hoofbeats of a galloping horse. I love these night runs,

with the exhaust pounding in racy rhythm and the engine rocking and pitching in time to it, with the hiss of the compressed-air treadle and the clang of the coal scoop making accompaniment as Dirty Dolan keeps her hot. There is the stirring smell of hot iron and steam, the feel of tremendous power under you, and the constant thrill of trying to beat the clock. It just gets into your blood—that's all.

OUR headlight bores a brilliant path through the dark, the telegraph poles slip by like ghostly pickets and the scream of our whistle splits the night apart as we thunder down on Aylmer with the order board on the green and the westbound in the hole to give us clearance.

We cannonball over the trestle at Tillsonburg and hit the long curve through Courtland. Crazy has been shifting the Johnson bar a notch this way and that, experimenting to get the best possible performance out of the engine, so that when we high-wheel onto the straightaway old 2458 is really wrapping her stack and running all out.

I look across the cab at Crazy McIntosh hunched over in his seat, one hand gripping the throttle, head and shoulders leaning out into the night, quid moving thoughtfully up and down in his cheek, peering steadily through his goggles at the track ahead. Just another engineer, you might say, doing a job of driving an engine. But somehow he always seems to drive them a little faster than the other hoggers, and so they call the guy "Crazy" and prophesy a bad end for him. They've been prophesying like that for a long time.

Well, anyway, there I am, practically thinking kind thoughts about Peggy's bad-tempered old man, swaying with the pitch of the engine and keeping a general eye on things. We are highballing along a lonely

stretch of track which runs through farmland west of Simcoe. The big hog banks into a curve, and as I'm on the inside of that curve it is my job to watch the roadbed because the engineer can't see around the long boiler.

I take one horrified look and yell, "SOAK HER!" An old jalopy of a truck is parked square on the crossing of a little side-road. In the glare of our headlight I can see quite plain that the cab of the truck is empty.

Crazy don't hesitate. He gives her the air, he gives her the sand, and he slams the throttle shut.

I am remembering Graveyard's advice about bailing out and I dive for the gangway to join the' birds, but we are still travelling at a devil of a clip, even with the air in the big hole and the brakeshoes screaming all along the train.

Now Crazy can see the truck and note the fact that it is empty, so he releases the air and guns the throttle. Being on a curve like we are with brakes locked, the impact might easily derail our engine, particularly if some metal gets under our wheels. He tries to avert this danger by hitting the truck hard enough to toss it clear of the track. But there's still a chance of derailment, so I scramble up over the coal in the tender and roll onto the water tank just as we hit.

There's a metallic crash and pieces of truck go whizzing in all directions. Then Crazy throws on the air again and we squeal to a stop. By the stream of purple language pouring out of the cab I can tell our engineer is annoyed at whoever left that truck stalled on the right-of-way.

I GET to my feet and draw a deep breath, and suddenly I am aware that it is awful quiet around here. Crazy has stopped swearing. I don't hear nothing but the hiss of steam and the soft thump of the air

pumps. Curious, I look over the headed-up coal down into the cab—and so help me, I see *four* men there! And they are all in kinda odd poses. Dirty Dolan is standing dumbly with both hands up in the air, still holding the coal scoop in one mitt. Crazy McIntosh is gripping the edge of his seat, cheek bulging with his quid, and staring in pop-eyed anger at two galoots who are waving guns around.

It's a stick-up!

Being naturally a quick thinker, I realize what has happened. These crooks have parked their truck across the track to make us stop so's they can rob the train. What a low-down trick!

Now, personally I am as brave as a lion, and besides they can't see me. To think is to act with yours truly, so I grab some lumps of coal and start throwing.

Unfortunately due to the darkness, my aim is a bit off and the first hunk bashes Crazy McIntosh on the side of the head, the second piece shattering on the fire-box.

The two gunmen are startled and whirl around. Dirty Dolan brings down the hand holding the scoop and whangs one of them over the head. He drops like a ninepin. At the same time, groggy but game, Crazy McIntosh kicks the other in the gizzard and squirts tobacco juice in his eyes, disconcerting him somewhat. Dolan administers the coup de grace with his shovel. So there they are, cold as iced herrings.

Seeing as how I am a hero, I can almost hear those wedding bells ring as I slide down into the cab again. To my surprise, Crazy snatches the coal scoop from Dirty Dolan and takes a swipe at me.

"Ya cussword idiot!" he screeches. "Tryin' to kill me, was ya? Jumpin' at the chance to murder me, was ya?" I duck fast and scramble back up to the tender. Imagine my hurt astonishment! Just because my aim was a bit faulty, he's got

to get all riled up! The old stinker is still screaming, "Come n down here, ya cussword murderer, so's I kin beat yer cussword head in!" and I am hastily trying to explain that it was a pure accident, when one of the hold-up guys groans and tries to get to his feet. Crazy pauses in his tirade to bop him again with the scoop, so I point out that we'd better fix them monkeys and get on our way.

Crazy grudgingly agrees, but is still eyeing me balefully while I help Dirty Dolan truss the crooks with bell-cord. Crazy tosses their guns in the locker under his seat, and when Dolan closes the firedoors which have been opened to prevent the hog from popping her safety valve, he whoops the whistle and goes through a whole lot of the motions of starting.

But the locomotive won't steam. Crazy looks baffled. He jumps down off his seat, grabs the torch, a long brass tube with an inch-thick oil-soaked wick, ignites it in the firebox, and disappears out along the catwalk. In a minute he reappears, preceded by a thick fog of profanity, and whistles for the rear-end brakeman to protect the train. Then he snatches a hammer from the locker, hollers for Dolan to follow him, and drops to the ground. I get my lantern and trail after them, first checking the orders to make sure there is no westbound due along to complicate things.

WHEN I get up to the front of the engine they are standing on the pilot examining the smoke-box doors, and for once, Crazy ain't swearing. I inquire what is the trouble and Crazy tells me mildly that some heavy part of the truck has cracked the smoke-box door, letting cold air into the front end and killing the suction, which is why the engine won't steam. Meanwhile, Dirty Dolan is beating

back the dogs with the hammer, and when he swings open the smoke-box door a hunk of it falls right off. I expect Crazy McIntosh to blow his top again, but he calmly raises his torch and peers into the front end.

Suddenly he turns and yells down at me, "Hey, Bub! Git me a saw!"

"A saw?" I inquire.

"Yeah, a saw," nods Crazy, "and some boards."

"What do you want them for?" I asks, naturally dumfounded at such a request. Here we are with a broken-down engine in the middle of nowhere and he wants to do some carpentry work. I am bewildered.

Crazy jumps down off the pilot and, waving the torch, shoves his ugly face close to me. In the flickering smoky light he looks like one of them gargoyles. "Ya knock-kneed hunk of misery!" he hollers, "All I want is a saw and same boards! Now do I get them or do I wring yer scrawny neck here and now?"

"Oh, well," I says, retiring hastily, "if you want them real bad I'll see what I can do." As I hurry back along the train toward the caboose, I hear him telling Dolan to return to the cab and sit on our two prisoners.

It is a beautiful night, with the moon scudding past some clouds high overhead and a breeze moaning sadly through a clump of pines by the right-of-way. I'm moseying along the roadbed and thinking romantic thoughts of Peggy, when all of a sudden I hear cautious footsteps in the cinders on the other side of the train.

I'm about twenty-five cars back from the engine, and all alone, so these footsteps sound mighty suspicious to me. I douse my lantern and squirrel up the grab-irons on the nearest boxcar. Lying flat on the roof, I listen intently. Sure enough, I hear the soft crunch of someone pussyfooting along the cinders. I then

realize that maybe we didn't get *all* the robbers. Just as I come to this conclusion, the footsteps pause below—and I hear someone climbing the ladder!

Leaning over and looking cautiously down, I see his dark bulk coming right up at me.

Well, I'm a man who acts fast in a crisis, and I reach over and clout him with my lantern.

There is a "*Klonk!*", a startled bellow of anguish and fear, and a thud, as Graveyard Gorman tumbles down to the roadbed. Cripes! I've clubbed my own conductor!

Before I can collect my thoughts, Graveyard staggers to his feet and runs off into the darkness as if the devil was after him with a pitchfork. I sit there on top of that boxcar and consider my predicament. It ain't good.

Of course, what has happened is easy to figure. Graveyard heard me, and being a nervous type, decides to climb a car to reconnoitre, just as I did. Right now he thinks it is train-robbers who hit him, but it won't take him long to figure out there's no robbers around loose, and that it must have been me.

Which means that if I go back to the caboose he'll beat my brains out.

And if I don't get Crazy McIntosh his carpentry tools, *he* will beat my brains out.

I am in a mess.

I sigh heavily and look around. Right then I get an inspiration. About a hundred yards off the right-of-way is the dark shape of a farm-house and a barn. Maybe I can borrow a saw and some boards from the farmer without disturbing Graveyard, who probably has a headache anyway.

I swing down to the roadbed and cross the ditch to a cornfield. My lantern won't light so I have to fumble through the darkness to the farmyard, and believe me I am careful. I once had a nasty experience

with a farmer's dog which I don't wish to repeat. However, I reach the farmyard without rousing the mutt and am about to knock on the door when in the moonlight I see a bucksaw leaning against a woodpile. There don't seem to be no point in waking the household and getting involved in a lot of explanations, so I pick up the saw and carefully retrace my path to the right-of-way. There aren't any boards lying handy and it's a cinch the farmer won't let me pull some off his barn.

However, when I return to the engine, Crazy has collected a lot of boards and stuff from the wreckage of the truck and he seems satisfied with the bucksaw. He calls Dolan down and we go to work building a sort of jerry-door in the smoke-box opening. I am just coming to the conclusion that this ain't going to do much good because the boards, being scrap lumber, don't fit together very well, when Crazy hollers at me, "Bub, we got to have a blanket! Go back to the Hearse and git a blanket!"

I open my mouth to ask him what for, but he glares at me and kinda fingers the lump on the side of his face—and it ain't McAndrew's plug. So I restrain my curiosity and hurry off on my errand. It seems to me I am becoming a regular Marathon walker.

ALL at once I stop and remember that my lantern's broken. Now, it is against the rules for a brakeman to go anywhere at night without a lamp, and with Graveyard in a bad mood anyway. I don't want to give him no chance to throw the Company Bible in my face and get me suspended. So I climb into the cab after a couple of fusees, figuring I can ignite one of them when I get near the caboose and so have an appearance of obeying the book. I am surprised to see no sign of the robbers in the cab, and naturally I call

down to Crazy and mention the fact.

Crazy comes dancing up alongside the cab a-waving his torch and screeching at me most horribly. "Ya cussword dude-wrangler! Didn't I tell ya to git me a cussword blanket? Why are ya loafing around up there, ya cussword stargazer?"

Me, I am indignant. I tells him I had to have a fusee and that furthermore the crooks has escaped.

Crazy glares up at me, and in the torchlight he sure is an awful sight with his ugly goatish face all grimed with coal and soot. He draws a deep breath and says pleadingly. "Lissen, Bub, we packed them yuks in the big tool-box on the water tank. They's locked in nice and safe. Now lissen, Bub, if I was to beg you on me bended knees, would you kindly git me a blanket from the crummy?"

"Oh, well," I says magnanimously, "if you put it that way, I'll do the best I can." Crazy swallows kinda hard, so just to play safe I descend on the other side and hotfoot back along the train.

About forty cars from the engine I suddenly notice a shadow skulking a dozen yards or so beyond me. Then the shadow disappears—up into a boxcar!

I pause to figure this out. Then I see it all. Graveyard has realized it is me who crowned him and he is laying in wait. He is going to jump me as I trudge unsuspectingly past that there boxcar.

Well, Graveyard may think he's pretty smart, but I'm not so dumb, either. Quick as a flash, I run up alongside the car and heave the door shut. It is the work of an instant for me to throw the hasp over the staple and ram in the spike of a fusee to hold it. Now, ten men couldn't break out of that car—unless the door on the other side is open, too. I hold my breath, but from the muffled roar and pounding I conclude that the far door is closed tight, so I proceed on my way with light heart.

When I arrive at the caboose I can see the flicker of a red fusee away down the line where Jonesy is out protecting the train. I appropriate a couple of blankets and a fresh lantern and hurry toward the front end.

As I pass the boxcar which I have turned into my own private prison, I feel a pang of remorse. I really shouldn't treat my conductor like this, but, however, if I let him out now Graveyard is going to be pretty nasty about everything and will maybe want to argue, and we can't afford any more delays.

Since I had gone back on the opposite side of the train, I didn't see the farmhouse, but now I notice the house is all lit up and there seems to be a bit of excitement around. Me, I don't tarry. I don't want no angry farmer questioning me about his stolen bucksaw.

Crazy is yammering with impatience. He snatches the blankets from me without even a "thank you" and in about ten shakes the engine is repaired. He nails one blanket over the wooden jerry-door, then slams the smoke-door shut on it and hammers home the dogs. This makes an almost air-tight front end. But to be certain he jams the second blanket into the broken section until everything is snug.

Screeching at me to collect the tools and at Dolan to stir up the fire, he clambers into the cab and whistles in the rear flag. Then he cautiously starts the hog and sure enough it steams and after a few minutes of bucking slack into the train and a couple of false starts we get under way. I look back and catch a highball from the rear end denoting it Jonesy is aboard, and collapse on my seat.

By the time we rattle through Nixon and hit the long grade down into Simcoe, things have settled almost to normal. The hog doesn't steam with her old vim and vigor, but she hauls the train and we can

congratulate ourselves on having done a darn good job of repairing a breakdown.

Me, I am worried about Graveyard. I am in a quandary. Naturally, Jonesy don't miss our conductor because he figures Graveyard has gone up to the head end to investigate the breakdown and is riding with us—which he ain't. But we'll stop at Simcoe to turn our prisoners over to the police and report to the dispatcher. And there's going to be some eyebrows raised when our conductor turns up missing.

So what am I going to do? Am I going to just leave him in that boxcar and let the poor old droop starve to death? Or am I going to release Graveyard and probably get myself fired for assaulting my conductor? Besides which Graveyard will undoubtedly assault me personally.

I AM brooding about this when Crazy McIntosh calls me over to his side of the cab. He smiles kindly and says, "Bub, you sure kin act fast in an emergency, hey?" Realizing that he is referring to my heroic aid in capturing the crooks, I say modestly, "Oh, it weren't nothing."

"Bub," grins Crazy, "you was on the baseball team, wasn't you? You was their star pitcher, wasn't you?"

I nods proudly.

"Then," snarls Crazy, feeling the lump on his cheek tenderly, "you deliberately bashed me with that hunk of coal! Don't try to deny it!" His voice rises shrilly. "Damy, Bub, if I ever ketch ya messing around my daughter again I'm gonna slaughter ya with me bare hands!"

Sometimes life just don't seem worth living.

What with one thing and another you can understand how I am in a very upset condition when we drift down into Simcoe and Crazy spots the engine to a stop in front of the depot. And there I get the

worst shock of my life. I think I see a ghost!

Standing under the lights on the depot platform is a bunch of people including half a dozen cops. But—and my eyes nearly fall out of my head—hopping around in front of this group and watching us pull in is none other than Graveyard Gorman! He looks a bit battered and bruised and his noggin is covered with a bandage as big as a turban. He is holding a shotgun.

I am done for! Somehow, Graveyard has escaped from the boxcar and gone across country to the highway and called the cops. My goose is cooked to a turn.

Me, I dive for the opposite side of the cab to make a desperate break for freedom, but that side is also being covered by some armed citizens and a couple of cops. I am trapped.

Well, the cops pile up into the cab and I decide to surrender meekly, but to my surprise they don't pay no attention to me. There is a lot of hollering back and forth between them and Crazy McIntosh and he leads them onto the tender to haul the crooks out of the big tool-box. They are a sorry sight and there is no fight left in them. Crazy digs their guns out of the locker under his seat and hands the weapons to the cops and we all descend to the platform, yours truly somewhat dazed by the turn of events, but realizing that through some miracle Graveyard hasn't got around to suspecting me yet.

In the general whoa-de-do Crazy manages to tell his tale with great emphasis on his own heroism, the faker. He don't mention how it is strictly due to my bravery that we captured them monkeys, or how it was with my help he repaired the engine. Then Crazy peers at Graveyard and says kinda surprised, "Hey, you old bonebag, what are *you* doing here?"

And what happened to that there dome of yours?”

Graveyard is so excited and bustling with importance he can hardly gabble his story. It seems that when he was conked on the head by persons unknown, he hustles back towards his caboose. Suddenly he hears sounds of people breaking into a boxcar. With great presence of mind he deduces the train is being robbed, so kites across some fields to a farmhouse, wakes up the occupants and phones for the police. By the time the cops have arrived, our train is gone. *But* they find a big ten-ton truck parked in some bushes near the right-of-way and it is half loaded with stolen merchandise from our train!

A big policeman interrupts him at this point. “What we can’t understand,” says the cop in a puzzled manner, “is where the rest of the gang disappeared, and why they abandoned their loot. Also, you’d think when you started to move off they would cut the s air hose and delay the train until they’d finished loading.”

My knees are knocking strangely, but I take a deep breath. “They couldn’t do

that,” I says, “because I locked them in a boxcar.”

“You *what?*” yelps Crazy, incredulous.

“Shucks,” I say matter-of-factly, “they was robbing the train so I had to do something. See as how you wanted that blanket in a hurry, I locked them in a boxcar for the time being. It’s about forty cars back, with a fusee sticking in the lock.”

The police and the citizens all rush off to take this matter in hand, while Graveyard trots into the operator’s office to call the dispatcher, leaving Crazy McIntosh and Dirty Dolan staring at me.

Crazy is feeling the lump on his cheek gingerly and I can see he is struggling with his worst nature. Finally he shakes his head grudgingly.

“Bub,” he says with a sour grin, “Peggy and my missus are gonna be mighty proud of us, ain’t they? They ought to cook us a big chicken dinner for this, eh, Bub?”

Oh, well, maybe he ain’t such a bad guy after all.