

THE IRON HORSE OF LUCY STEELE

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EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Steel rails bisect a vast expanse of lush greenery.

SUPER: The Western Frontier. 1874.

Gunshots explode, followed by the rapid-fire CHUGGA-CHUGGA-CHUGGA of an approaching train.

ENGINE NUMBER 88, an intimidating, hard-rolling vessel of cold black iron, roars through, two boxcars in tow.

Four BANDITS on horseback thunder in pursuit, pistols drawn.

A barrage of lead hits the engine.

Return fire rips into the FRONT BANDIT. His corpse tumbles clear. The others charge ahead.

INT. NO. 88 CAB - DAY

LUCY STEELE, 28, a firebrand of a filly who refuses to be tamed, shakes empty casings from a smoking revolver.

She runs a kerchief across her face, which removes some of the soot and grease.

She shakes a small paper box. It yields all of six bullets.

LUCY

The hell? Moses! Why didn't you get more cartridges?

MOSES WASHINGTON, 42, African-American, brawny, kicks opens the glowing-orange firebox door, shovels in coal.

MOSES

You said fixing the valve gear took top priority!

LUCY

Damn.

She reloads.

Steam spits from a convoluted jumble of pipes and valves. Lucy twists dials and adjusts levers. The steam subsides.

LUCY

Hang on, girl! I ain't being deprived of that money!

EXT. REAR BOXCAR - DAY

TURNER, 35, the bandit leader, gallops alongside. He grabs the ladder, hoists himself up.

TURNER

Get up front and draw their fire!

The two Bandits (#1 and #2) pull ahead.

INT./EXT. NO. 88 CAB - DAY

Lucy draws a bead on #1, pulls the trigger. The shot slams him clean off his saddle. #2's horse struggles to keep pace.

Lucy shoots. #2 returns fire. He spurs his steed.

He shoots again, then...CLICK! Empty.

He veers his horse hard off to the side.

Lucy fires. Red mist explodes from his neck. He falls backward, limp.

Turner hops the gap to the lead boxcar.

Lucy examines both sides of the train.

LUCY

Could've swore there was another one. Must've turned tail.

Moses dumps another shovelful of coal into the firebox.

MOSES

Some of those shots came a little too close.

Lucy holsters her gun, pats the controls.

LUCY

We been through worse. Ain't nothing can stop ol' Eighty-eight!

She tugs the whistle cord. WHOOT! WHOOT!

Turner peeks over the front of the lead boxcar roof, pistol in position.

Lucy works the controls. Moses stands up straight, stretches.

Light glints off Turner's pistol. It catches Moses' eye.

MOSES

Miz Lucy. Boxcar roof.

LUCY

Drop!

He ducks as she whips around, shoots.

The shot forces Turner back.

LUCY

Gimme some cover.

They switch places. She crouches at the base of the tender as Moses throws a lever, spins two cranks.

The engine's blastpipe belches thick black smoke, which soon envelops Turner.

TURNER

What the Sam Hill?

The smoke becomes thicker and blacker.

He coughs, shoots. The shot goes wide.

MOSES

Go!

Lucy scrambles up the tender, just underneath the flat column of smoke, then leaps onto the boxcar's ladder.

Turner hacks and wheezes, shoots.

The shot nicks the cab's frame, just above Moses. He recoils.

Lucy regards him, wide-eyed. He gestures her to keep going.

Lucy reaches the second-from-the-top rung, grabs her pistol. She and Moses exchange nods.

Moses adjusts the controls, dives to the base of the tender.

Turner sprawls out flat at the edge, desperate for air.

The smoke thins out.

Turner wipes his red and teary eyes. Struggling to see, he aims - his gunhand right above Lucy.

She shoots point blank. Turner screams as his pistol drops past her. She holsters her sidearm, scurries up.

Turner howls, cradling his blood-gushing injury. Lucy rushes him, slams him down. She grabs him, pummels his face.

LUCY
What the hell are you doin', tryin'
to rob my train?

She shoves him down. His face a mangled mess, Turner whimpers as he struggles to crawl away. He spits blood.

TURNER
I tell you that, I'm as good as dead!

She aims, cocks her pistol.

LUCY
Talk, or you will be.

He reaches the edge. With his good hand, he launches himself over the side. He vanishes into the blurring-past scenery.

Lucy stares, dumbfounded.

INT. NO. 88 CAB - DAY

Moses works the controls as Lucy climbs down off the tender.

She consults a beat-up pocketwatch.

LUCY
Damned fool threw himself clean off.
Better not have put us behind
schedule. You alright?

Moses nods, runs a finger over where the bullet hit the frame.

MOSES
Lucky it wasn't worse.

LUCY
Luck, nothin'. We know how to survive.

She flicks the pistol's chamber open. One bullet left.

MOSES
(to himself)
Rather live than worry about
surviving.

EXT. JACKSON CORNERS - TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

A small town out on the Prairie.

WHOOT! WHOOT! No. 88's whistle announces the train's arrival.

The engine slows. Lucy hops off.

She rushes to the depot window. The clock inside reads 11:33.

LUCY
That the right time?

The CLERK eyes the clock, then his pocketwatch.

CLERK
Yep.

Lucy races off.

EXT. JACKSON CORNERS - MAIN STREET - DAY

A MALE SETTLER works the reins on the pair of oxen pulling his covered wagon.

A PAIR OF WELL-WISHERS waves from behind.

WELL-WISHER #1
Good luck!

WELL-WISHER #2
Send word when you get to Oregon!

Lucy runs.

The wagon rolls by, blocks her path.

She pivots and dashes behind it.

Inside the back of the wagon, a YOUNG MOTHER in a gingham dress struggles to comfort her howling BABY.

Lucy regards them with a huff and an eyeroll, continues on.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A BUSINESSMAN hands Lucy an envelope.

BUSINESSMAN
There you are, Miss Steele. A pleasure
doing business with you and your
"Fastest Train in the West."

She opens the envelope, flips through a wad of bills.

LUCY
Ain't none faster. You got the time?

He produces a fancy gold pocketwatch. She snatches it, holds hers next to it.

Both show the current time: 11:44.

LUCY
I recall mention of a bonus for
delivery ahead of schedule?

He shifts in his chair.

BUSINESSMAN
Just under twenty minutes isn't
exactly "ahead of schedule".

She leans in, eyes ablaze.

LUCY
I arrived before I said I would.
Hence, ahead of schedule.

He emits a nervous chuckle, gulps.

EXT. JACKSON CORNERS - TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

Moses oils the wheel bearings. He sets the oil can down,
pulls out a beat-up dime novel. He sits and reads it.

Lucy approaches.

LUCY
You and your books. If Pa could see
you now.

Moses licks his thumb, turns the page.

MOSES
Mister Zeb always marveled at a
runaway slave taking to reading more
than his own child.

LUCY
Pshaw. I read just fine. Just choose
other ways to pass the time is all.

MOSES
Right. Downing whiskey and brawling.
You get the bonus?

She pats her pocket.

LUCY
Enough for a new pressure valve, and
then some.

The Clerk limps to them.

CLERK
You Lucy Steele?

LUCY
That's right.

He shoves a telegram at her.

CLERK
Wire for you from Fort Spencer.

She takes it. He pivots and limps away.

She reads the telegram. Moses stashes the book, stands.

LUCY
"Report immediately. Highly
confidential. Major J. Fillmore."

MOSES
Fillmore? Wonder what happened to
Major Curtis.

LUCY
Guess we'll find out soon enough.
Let's get her ready.

INT. NO. 88 CAB - DAY

Lucy works the controls. The train rolls.

LUCY
Get a move on, Moses!

Moses jumps aboard. He wipes black grease off his hands.

MOSES
Couldn't leave without putting up
our good luck charm.

EXT. JACKSON CORNERS - TRAIN DEPOT - DAY

No. 88 chugs down the track.

On the depot wall, a small "LS88", underlined with a pointing arrow, written in engine grease.

Around the corner, Clerk posts a wanted notice - "Prentiss Nash. Reward - \$25,000" along with a crude sketch.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

PRENTISS NASH, 40ish, impeccably dressed, leads five RIDERS on horseback to a stop alongside the tracks.

POP, late 50s, grizzled, and ZEKE, 19, baby-faced, dismount.

POP

There's the last of 'em. C'mon, Zeke.

They shuffle towards a bloody, mangled form.

BOSCH, late 20s, slick, ratlike, lights a cheroot. Next to him, AL, mid-20s, built like a redwood, pats his pockets.

AL

Hey, Bosch. You sure you don't got any more jerky?

BOSCH

Al. For the last time. No!

Turner, his face scarred and swollen, reaches for Zeke.

TURNER

Help me. Please.

Zeke jumps back.

ZEKE

Pop! He's alive!

Pop grabs Turner's face. The injured man yelps as Pop conducts an impromptu examination.

POP

I seen worse during the War. Nash?

Nash dismounts. He flicks dirt from his sleeve.

A train whistle sounds in the distance. SMYTHE, 30s, seedy Brit, looks towards it.

SMYTHE

Comin' in fast. Couple of minutes.

NASH

Thank you, Mr. Smythe.

Nash strides to Turner, crouches before him.

NASH

You failed, Turner.

Turner trembles upon hearing his voice.

TURNER

M-mister Nash?

NASH

You swore you and your men could take any train.

TURNER

No train's that fast. Horses could barely keep up. And that engineer! Meaner'n a wildcat.

NASH

Then you'll understand if I take a refund for services not rendered.

Nash extracts a small pouch from Turner's pocket, steps away.

Pop and Zeke drag Turner onto the tracks.

The train whistle sounds again, closer this time.

TURNER

Mister Nash, please!

NASH

A train will be here momentarily. Perhaps they'll give you a ride.

The gang return to their horses, ignoring Turner's pleas.

POP

We stickin' to the plan?

NASH

You heard the man. No train as fast.

BOSCH

And the engineer?

NASH

Once those plates are in our possession, she'll be dealt with accordingly.

They mount and ride off.

Turner attempts to crawl clear. A train rounds the bend. Its whistle drowns out his screams.

EXT. FORT SPENCER - DEPOT - DAY

Two MECHANICS, one BALD, the other sporting a WALRUS MUSTACHE, work on a sorry-looking train.

No. 88 rolls to a stop on the next track over.

A red-faced DEPOT MANAGER storms up to No. 88.

DEPOT MANAGER

What the hell're you doing? Only official trains allowed here!

Lucy jumps down. She shoves the telegram in his face.

LUCY
This is an official train, peckerwood.

Moses leans out from the cab.

MOSES
Maybe he can't read.

DEPOT MANAGER
You shut your mouths. I don't gotta
take no guff from the likes of you.

HUDSON (O.S.)
Is there a problem here?

LIEUTENANT HUDSON, mid 20s, looks barely old enough to shave,
strides up.

Lucy presents the telegram.

LUCY
Lucy Steele to see Major Fillmore.

Hudson's face lights up.

HUDSON
Excellent! I'm Lieutenant Hudson,
the Major's aide. This way, please.

Hudson glances at Depot Manager.

HUDSON
See they get whatever they need.

Depot Manager half-heartedly salutes.

DEPOT MANAGER
Yes sir.

Hudson leads Lucy away. Moses steps down. He stands next to
Depot Manager.

MOSES
I can write you a list, or read it
to you. Your choice, boss.

Depot Manager mutters under his breath, stomps off.

EXT. FORT SPENCER - PARADE GROUND - DAY

Hudson escorts Lucy.