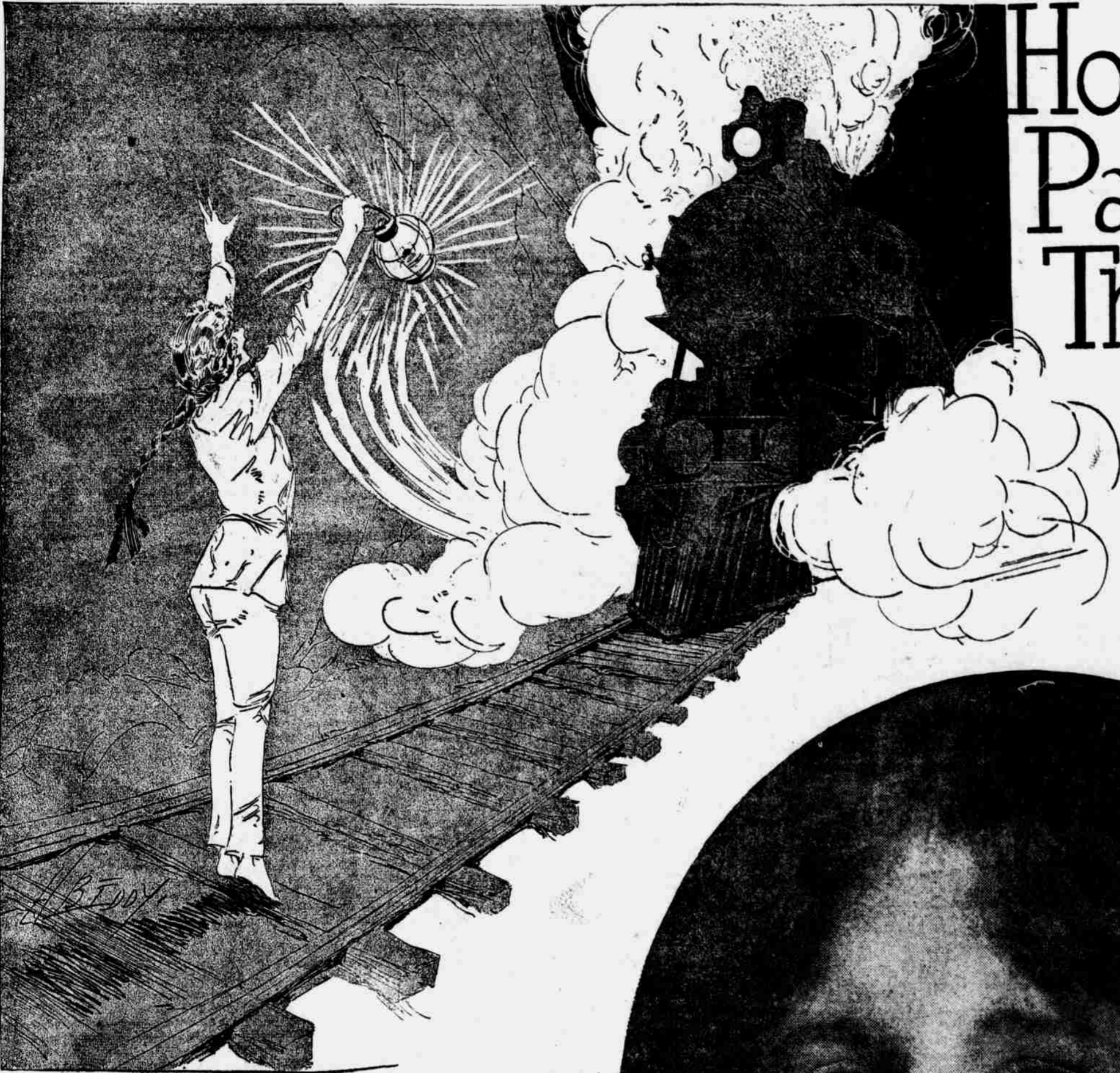


THE OMAHA SUNDAY BEE MAGAZINE PAGE

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How Pretty Blue Pajamas Saved The Fast Express!

Worn for the First Time by a Southern Society Beauty, They Splash Through the Mud for Half a Mile at Midnight, and Flag a Train in Time to Prevent a Collision

"The engineer caught sight of that bedraggled, pathetic little figure, standing, tottering between the rails, feebly swinging a lantern."

OF blue pajamas and the girl it is to sing—to paraphrase the opening line of Virgil's undying epic of heroism. "Arms and the man"—blue pajamas and the girl. Henceforth let everybody grant to the gentler sex all the rights there are.

Clad only in those blue pajamas, her little bare white feet splashing through the mud of a black and rainy midnight, she sprinted half a mile to the railway tracks barely in time to flag the fast express and save its sleeping passengers from destruction by a train of runaway freight cars.

Her name is Hester Ross—Hester Ross, of Ross Springs, Mississippi.

It would be impossible for even the gravest and most dignified historian to eliminate those blue pajamas. As well might Virgil have pictured his man without arms. If little Miss Ross had not, that very night, for the first time, discarded her creamy white, lace-trimmed nightie in favor of her first suit of pajamas, she would have slept soundly, as usual. The jingle of the telephone bell would not have awakened her. The fast express and its human freight would have whirled on to their doom.

Ross Springs is a pretty little town named for the prominent Ross family—of which Miss Hester is the bright, particular attraction. She is just twenty, beautiful, accomplished, acknowledged belle not only of her own town but of all that section of Mississippi. Her father's spacious mansion, set back half a mile from the railway tracks, is the principal social rendezvous between Laurel, five miles away, and Noxapater, ten miles distant in the other direction—all on the main line of the railroad. At Ross Springs a short spur branches off from the main line. The junction is called Ross Spur. Owing to light traffic on the branch, the telegraph operator at Ross Spur goes off duty before midnight. Thus the right of way for fifteen miles is controlled by the dispatchers at Laurel and Noxapater.

Keeping the topography and this traffic arrangement in your mind, let us return to pretty Hester Ross and her brand new blue pajamas.

They were her first introduction to pajamas of any color, and Miss Hester was the first girl in her Mississippi social set to make up her mind to follow the pajama example of society girls in the big Eastern cities. Women of the aristocratic old South are conservative in such matters. Most of them still favor those charmingly feminine robes of sheerest linen, lace-trimmed, dainty, which their mothers and grandmothers wore, and which are popularly referred to as nighties.

It is whispered about down in that section of Mississippi that the wardrobe of no Southern society girl contained prettier, daintier, more charmingly belaced and be-ribboned "nighties" than that of beautiful Hester Ross. Such whispers, entirely feminine at the start, more widely circulated through the medium of sisterly confidences to brothers too young to be quite discreet, ultimately can be heard over quite a lot of territory.

So it must have been one of those rare benevolent interventions of Fate that caused

little Miss Ross to fold up and put away her whole supply of these charming textile confections, and, at the psychological moment, to substitute pajamas. She had plenty of nighties. She did not really need pajamas at all. But imagine a pretty, delicately-nurtured girl of twenty sprinting for half a mile through the rain in a lace-bedecked nightie, be-ribboned, voluminous, and of gossamer thinness! You see there was a definite, great and humane purpose in those blue pajamas, though when Miss Ross prepared to don them for the first time she was wholly ignorant of the fact.

All the same, it was a great occasion. Pajamas, masculine or feminine, are much less intimate and retiring than nighties. Perfectly nice and respectable young actresses wear pajamas right out in public on the stage. A society girl in pajamas is fairly well costumed for general circulation in strictly domestic premises; whereas, in either case, the nightie and its wearer, and the spectators, would be scandalized.

It is on record that Miss Ross's new pajamas were blue. It goes without saying that they were of the finest material and fitted her to perfection—wisely, and not too well. The coat had a military collar, and owned sleeves that reached nearly to her dimpled knuckles. The trousers were of generous breadth, and the bottom hems caressed her slender ankles. Now, if you have seen Pauline Chase on the stage in her famous pink pajamas, you can conjure up a tolerably accurate vision of Miss Hester Ross, ready for bed on that eventful night, attired in her brand new ones.

In spite of the unfamiliar garment, it is probable that Miss Ross said her prayers with her customary reverent concentration upon the subject; but once her head was on the pillow and the lights

were out—well, any truthful girl, remembering her own parallel experience, will tell you that wearing pajamas for the first time is not conducive to sound slumber. They have not that grateful, soft, voluminousness of the nightie. The lower portion of the garment—"complete in two numbers," like an advertised short serial in a magazine—conveys a sensation of not being properly undressed for bed. Most distracting of all is the pressure of the bow-knotted draw-string at the waist of the—er—trousers.

All of which retarded Miss Hester's customary prompt passage into the Land of Nod. She heard the hall clock strike the hour of eleven. For another half hour she heard the rain drops splashing against her window panes. She heard the half-hour strike—and then she probably dozed, for she thought she dreamed that the telephone bell down in the hall was ringing.

The scene changes to the train dispatcher's room in the station at Laurel, Time, midnight. No. 72, the New Orleans, Mobile and Chicago through express, has just passed, and is puffing off through the rain and fog up the heavy grade toward Noxapater, with Ross Spur only five miles away.

Suddenly Dispatcher Stepp's telegraph sander begins rattling away at a frenzied rate, ticking off his signature—"C. O. C. O. C. O." Stepp responds in a hurry. It is the operator at Noxapater who is calling. His instrument fairly stutters with anxiety as it clicks into Stepp's ears the warning:

"Hold No. 72. Cut off freight cars running loose on down grade!"

All the startled Laurel dispatcher can do is to get the lamentable truth on record. He replies:

"Too late. Seventy-two has pulled out!"

There is no possible chance of flagging the express short of Ross Spur, five miles away, and no operator there! Dispatcher Stepp thinks hard, while jumping across to the round house, where there's a telephone. It's the only chance. And at mid-



Miss Hester Ross, the Pretty Mississippi Society Girl and "Blue Pajama" Heroine.



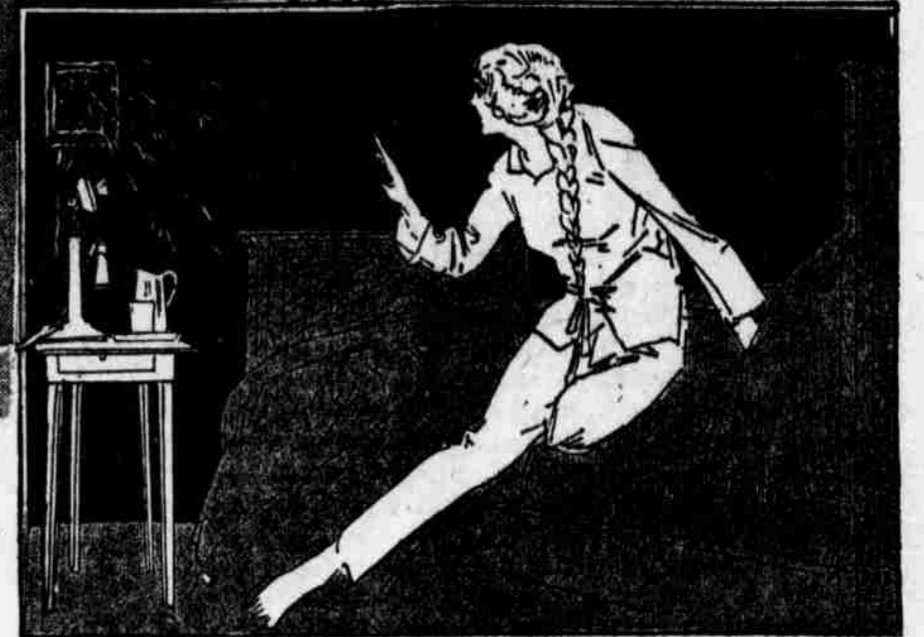
"Swinging her lantern, she ran like a 'blue streak.'"

pajamas was in the Ross kitchen, lighting a lantern. In another instant she was out through the back way, her white feet flashing in the lantern's light as she sprinted through the mud for the railway tracks, half a mile away.

A long whistle from down the grade told her she was scheduled for the race of her life. Swinging her lantern, she ran like a deer. In her blue pajamas she ran literally like "a blue streak." Mud splashed to her knees, the rain soaking her through and through, she ran without a thought that was not centred on beating the through express to the Ross Spur junction.

Her long hair came down and streamed out behind her as she ran—she had forgotten that she had any hair. Splashes of mud from her flying bare feet socked her cheeks, her chin, her nose. Hester Ross, the daintiest girl creature in the State of Mississippi, didn't care a particle. She climbed a rail fence in two bold leaps and came down in a mud-puddle that drenched her to the waist, and never gave the matter a thought.

Only another fifty yards—but her bosom was bursting with breathlessness. Another long whistle from the express, not an eighth of a mile away! She pulled herself together for the final spurt, and made



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night, in that sleepy little place, how much of a chance? The runaway freight cars are slipping down a sharp grade while the express is pulling up hill. To Ross Spur, ten down-grade miles for the runaway, only five miles for the express—though the latter has to climb. Which will reach Ross Spur first? Anyway, it is a matter of precious minutes!

Stepp jerks down the telephone transmitter and yells for the solitary night central operator at Laurel—Miss Mary Monday. Thank Heaven, Mary's on the job! Stepp wastes no words:

"Quick, Mary! Get somebody at Ross Spur—anybody—and tell 'em to flag Seventy-two! Life and death! Hurry!"

Mary Monday, too, is of the stuff that makes heroines. In a flash she saw the one chance—the Ross mansion. Nobody in the Ross family would stop to ask questions. She "plugged" the Ross line and set the bell a-jingling—and kept it jingling with those short, sharp pauses that seem to mean more than the sound of the bell.

Suddenly little Miss Ross, blue-pajamaed, sat up in bed and listened.

"Why, I'm not dreaming," she told herself. "It is the telephone!"

Out of bed, with the light switched on, she looked sleepily for her bathrobe. Then, noting her forgotten blue pajamas, so much more "dressy" than her accustomed nightie, she laughed lightly, and slipped down the stairs in her bare feet to answer the 'phone.

Dispatcher Stepp's message, concisely repeated by Mary Monday, drove all the sleep from little Miss Hester's brain.

"The through express?" she said into the 'phone. "Flag it to prevent a collision? Of course—instantly!"

Mary Monday, at Laurel, heard no more. A pretty girl in bare feet and blue

it—barely in time.

The puffing locomotive was not a hundred yards away when the engineer caught sight of that bedraggled, pathetic little figure standing, tottering, between the rails, feebly swinging a lantern. One sharp toot on the whistle satisfied the panting girl that he understood—that she had saved the express. Then she dropped like a dead girl, with the arm that held the lantern lying limp on one of the rails.

The train stopped with the locomotive's nose almost in her face. Grizzled Engineer Adams picked up the lifeless figure in his arms and carried it back towards the cab of his engine. The girl opened her eyes and mumbled something about a "runaway freight." At that very minute, looking up the grade, Engineer Adams could see through the mist a dark mass approaching. A few seconds later his locomotive had a broken nose and one of the runaway freight cars lay on its side in the ditch.

If both trains had been in motion there would have been a wreck with terrible loss of life. As it was, the impact was hardly sufficient to awaken the express passengers.

Little Miss Ross quickly revived. Her pajamas were no longer blue—they were black with mud. Assured that no lives were lost, she looked at herself and laughed heartily. But there were tears in the eyes and lumps in the throats of the escort of train men who accompanied her back to the Ross mansion.

The general superintendent of the road has written little Miss Ross a letter of congratulation. Residents of Ross Springs are petitioning the Carnegie Commission to give her a medal. As for Miss Hester Ross, herself, she just laughs merrily, and remarks that no girl has a better excuse to stick to blue pajamas for the rest of her life!