



"I PULLED HER WIDE OPEN, AND SHE TOOK IT LIKE A HUNTED DEER."

#### There was a Gap in the Trestle— But She Got Over It Without Much Trouble

**H**ALF an hour before train time, I passed through the gate and sat on a baggage-truck near the iron fence in the Ninth and Broadway Streets station, Louisville. The train nearest me—

eight electric-lighted palaces, besides mail and baggage-cars, drawn by a 100-ton L. and N. racer—was the one by which I should depart.

I became aware of a small, gray man sauntering along by the big engine—a

grizzled, stocky figure of a man with a slight roll in his stride, seemingly engrossed in his own thoughts, he passed along, stopped, examined her outlines with an admiring eye, patted her ponderous cylinder as one might pet a child, and stood listening to the purr of her steam. Presently he noticed me, and strolled over to the truck.

"Ain't she a beauty?" he queried, jerking his thumb in the direction of the engine. I assented, and after a pause, to keep up conversation, mentioned that the weather was warm.

"Quite so," he said. "Quite so, but it would be cool on a moving train. Mighty fine to lean out of a cab and watch her throw the right of way behind her on a night like this; mighty fine!"

I remarked that he must have leaned from a cab in his time, and he nodded with some pride.

"Yes," he said, "I wrestled the reverse-lever and eased the steam into the cylinders on one of them for sixteen years. Not a big girl like that one, though; there wasn't any like her in my day—I quit in '86. I come down here once in a while to hear the sputter of an engine and to pat one on the side sort of familiar, but I haven't been in a cab or even aboard a train for twenty years. I run a grocery-store," he added with an apologetic air, as if it was an occupation of small renown and to be mentioned without enthusiasm.

He relapsed into silence, and I waited.

"Excuse me," I said finally. "but I am waiting for you to tell me about it."

"About what?" he asked.

"Well, about—your most thrilling experience!" I said.

"Never had many thrills," he said. "Used to have lots of hard work and plenty of wrecks and very little pay; but thrills, as you call them, we didn't pay much attention to. I worked on the old C. O. and S. W., a rickety

old road in those days, but some better, I understand, since the I. C. got it.

"It was fierce then, though; track so loose that after a rain we could squirt water from under the ties into a dog's eyes twenty feet away. The coach windows used to rattle and clatter, and the bell on the engine never stopped.

"Johnny Westover, who used to run the accommodation from Cecilia to Louisville and back, went down to Charleston about the time they had the earthquake, and they said he woke up when things began to dance and rattle, and said, 'Muldraugh's Hill, by Gadfrey!' He thought he was on his old run.

"We used to get hot boxes regular right by a big watermelon patch; and while we'd stop to cool, Pete and Sam, our two darky brakemen, would go over and get some big ripe ones.

"We rarely ever got from one end of the division to another without going in the ditch; and for a gondola to jump off, run a hundred yards or so on the ties, and then jump back on again at the first curve, was so common that half the time we never knew it unless a truck happened to turn sideways and tear up the track; then we'd find it out for about twelve hours.

"In the winter we'd buck snow, and in the spring the Ohio would get on a rampage, and we'd get laid out by floods.

One time we got into West Point about midnight, and the river was out on the bottoms. There used to be an old wooden drawbridge across the Salt there that was built like a culvert—nothing above the stringers but ties and rails, not even a hand-rail.

"The Ohio was backed up in the Salt, chock-full, and there wasn't any bridge in sight—just black, lapping water. Old man Morrison and me went down and set sticks to see how fast she was rising, and she was crawling pretty fast.

“ ‘Whai’11 we do? I said the old man—we hadn’t been home for forty-eight hours, and if we got hung up there we might be out for two weeks more.

“ ‘Cross her. If the bridge is there,’ I said; and we all climbed on, and I let 637 walk out on that bridge mighty slow and careful, with the crew ready to pile off if she dropped. The bridge was there, all right, four inches under water, and we got across.

“Old 637! There was a good old engine! She knew me just as well as a horse or dog knows their masters, and she never went back on me, not even the last trip when I quit the road. She killed two engineers after I left her, and she’s gone to the scrap-pile long ago, but she never did me a mean trick in all those years.

“How did I happen to quit? Yes, I know old-timers are not supposed to ever quit, but sometimes they do. See these gray hairs? I reckon I got most of them one night on that same old Muldraugh’s Hill.

“You know how the old line winds in and around that old knob and all those old wooden trestles. There used to be nine of them trestles—some away up in the air, too—built on short curves; one had a reverse curve in the trestle itself.

“I was pulling a local freight that year, and we had quite a bit of business along the old Chesapeake, hauling dried apples, tobacco, sorghum, and such like, and we never had any schedule except to start out on—we got back when we could. Ben Austin was running the way car, and the two darkies, Pete and Sam, were braking.

“I had a fireman named Brady, who was young and enthusiastic when he wasn’t drunk, and a hoodoo to the train when he was, according to the darkies. Whenever Brady came out loaded, Pete would roll his eyes and say. ‘ ’Nother wreck this trip,’ and shake his head.

“That last trip was sure unlucky. Brady was drunk, two cars went into the ditch down by Big Clifty, we killed a cow at East View, and a gangplank broke at Bethlehem and let a barrel or something fall on Austin’s leg, mashing him up considerable. We were anywhere from eight to ten hours late when we hit the hilt, and I shut old 637 off when we started down and sat back, contented like to let her roll easy.

“It was about seven o’clock of a summer evening, quiet and peaceful, the fireman standing in the gangway enjoying the breeze; everybody feeling comfortable except Bob Austin, who was nursing his smashed leg back in the caboose. We had a pretty fair train, twelve or fifteen cars, mostly loaded, and we pushed along about thirty-five miles an hour, snug and cozy.

“Down around the hill we bowled, over the trestles, and around the rocky points. I was thinking about supper and a smoke on my back porch at home when we came out of a short curve in a shallow cut and out onto one of those hundred-foot high bridges, and my breath stopped.

“About the middle, the bridge was burned in two.

“It took me about a second to pull a screech for brakes, yell for Brady to jump, throw the engine into the back motion, and give her steam, but in that second we were out on the trestle, and the valley looked a long ways below. The fireman jumped before we had hardly left the embankment, and wasn’t hurt. The rest of the crew got off, Austin with them, some way, before the caboose got out of the cut.

“As for me and 637, we were out in the air; behind us, a loaded train shoving too hard to be stopped; before us, a gap in the trestle, where for three or four feet everything was gone but the rails. When I saw how it stood, I got up and threw her into the forward like a

maniac—I guess I was crazy.

“Then I gave her steam, and we jerked away from the train like a horse when you cut it with the whip. Then, when we reached the gap, I pulled her wide open, and she took it like a hunted deer. She shivered one instant, settled, and sunk—then she rose and leaped, sir, she leaped across, and we went out on the firm track beyond.

“The rest of the train went through, the box cars dropping and crashing, end over end,

to the valley below, and the farmers used them for kindling wood afterward.

“I took my engine in and resigned. I haven't been in a cab since. I read about these young lads with their Twentieth Century Limiteds, and their racing for the mail contracts, and all that, but it's too hard on the nerves.

“I like to come down occasionally and kind of snuggle up to an engine and hear her breathe, but that's all.”