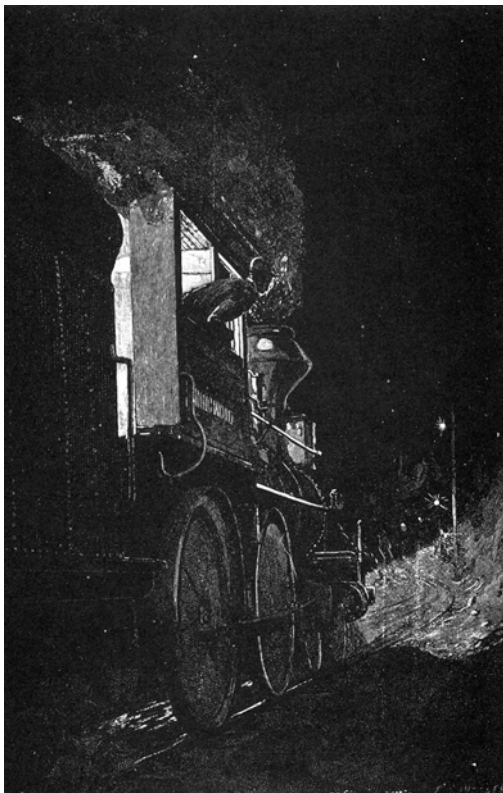


The Locomotive That Lost Herself

By Cy Warman (1897)

Engine 13 had been designed by a genius who was called a crank. He was the inventor of some of the most useful tools and appliances in use in the shops. He was an enthusiast. If he had not been, his design would never have been accepted by the superintendent of motive power and machinery. He claimed that his



new locomotive would steam better, pull harder, and run faster than any engine on the K.P. She was so constructed that she could run farther on a tank of water, the enthusiast said, than an ordinary locomotive would run on two; and that was good, for water was scarce on the plains. She had patent lubricators and balanced valves -- new inventions at that time -- and being fresh-painted and handsome, she was regarded as a good "catch" by the engineers of the Smoky Hill Division. The genius who designed her had been sent out East to the locomotive works, to superintend her construction; and long before the engine was completed, the mechanics employed upon her had arrived at the conclusion that the Western engineer was as crazy as a jacksnipe.

As the locomotive neared completion the enthusiasm of her designer increased. A quiet, undemonstrative enthusiasm it was, that seemed to possess the soul of the inventor and to fill his life with all that he needed. Upon her growing skeleton he worked himself weary, and then rested himself in quiet contemplation of his ideal engine; and finally, when the wheels were placed beneath her frame, he began to see her as she should appear when completed. One morning when the workmen came, they found Hansen's bed in the engine tank. From that day forward he worked about her by day, and slept, if he slept at all, upon her at night.

Oscar Hansen, a Dane, had yellow hair and a very poor stand of clay-colored whiskers. Like writing and painting geniuses, he allowed his hair and beard to grow and blow as they would, and the result was that he was about as unhandsome a man as one would meet in a lifetime. All this was nothing to Hansen. He lived in his work, and believed that in time he would run away from Stephenson, Franklin, and all the rest.

When the 13 arrived at Kansas City, Hansen was with her, and he remained with her day and night until she was taken out to be limbered up for her trial trip. He insisted upon handling her himself, and would not allow the locomotive engineer to touch the throttle until the master mechanic came to him personally and remonstrated. It was evident from the very first that the engine was not right, and the engineer told Hansen so at the close of the first day with her. Hansen became so angry that he threatened to kill the engineer if he ever dared to repeat what he had said. Every day for nearly a week the new engine was raced around the yards, and never for a moment did Hansen leave her. His wild hair became wilder, his deep eyes sank deeper into his head, and his thin white face became almost horrible to see. At the end of a week it was decided to put the 13 on the Denver Express for her trial trip, and Hansen surprised the master mechanic by asking to be allowed to run her.

"But you are not a locomotive engineer," urged the official, "and I couldn't think of allowing you to handle the engine. You may go with her, if you wish; but the engineer must have full control of the locomotive."

Hansen went sullenly out, and climbed up into the cab.

When the conductor came with the orders, he glanced up, and asked: "Who's His Whiskers?"

"That fellow with the tired look and troubled tresses," answered the engineer, "is the idiot who designed this machine."

Hansen had, by insisting upon running the new locomotive himself, incurred the displeasure of every engineer on the road, and as this remark was meant for him to hear, he heard it. When the conductor left the engine, Hansen crossed over to the driver's side and said: "If you don't make time today, I'll run her myself, and I'll send you where you won't want a fireman."

The driver only laughed, for the sanity of the inventor had been a debatable question ever since his return with the new engine.

The train to which the 13 was coupled was a heavy one, for Colorado was at that time just beginning to "boom." In the first run, of seven miles, they lost five minutes, but Hansen was too much taken up with watching his machine to take note of the time. Her boiler was foaming as new boilers usually do; her main pins were hot, and so was her engineer. The first stop was at a small town, and when the conductor gave the signal to go, the engineer was still on the ground pouring tallow on the pins. Hansen became frantic at what, to him, seemed unnecessary delay and, springing to the driver's side, he pulled the throttle wide open without releasing the air-brakes. The engine lurched forward, and when the slack was gone, her wheels began to revolve at a frightful rate. The engineer sprang into the cab and found Hansen working frantically in a vain effort to shut off steam, and concluded at a glance that the throttle had been left partly open, and that the high pressure of steam had forced it out.

Now, when the engineer, fireman, and Hansen all seized the lever to force the throttle in, they sprang the stem, and the thing could not be closed. The engineer released the air with the hope that the train might be started, and in that way the engine could be cooled down without doing any great damage. But the wheels were now revolving at such a rate that the engine had no adhesive power, and the train stood still. Five, ten, fifteen seconds went by, and still the three men worked, each in another's way, trying to shut off steam. A solid stream of fire was rolling out of the stack, and such sprays of sparks came from the drivers that they looked like living flames.

Pushing Hansen and the fireman out of his way, the engineer opened both injectors; what with the cold water going in and the fire going out, the mad machine cooled rapidly, and in a few moments, grouped harshly and came to a stop. It was found, upon examination, that the drivers had dug great holes in the steel rails, and that the tires on the back pair of driving-wheels, already well heated by the furnace, had loosened by expansion and slipped nearly off the wheels. In a little while the throttle was cooled and closed, and a fresh fire was made; but when they gave the engine steam, she refused to move. She was uncoupled, and still refused to go; and then they saw that her tires had cooled and clasped the firebox, and the firebox, expanding, held them there and locked the wheels.

When they had put out her fire, the wheels let loose, so that a yard engine could drag her back to the roundhouse. All the way her scarred wheels ground and ground against her frame, while Hansen sat in the tank with his thin yellow whiskers full of coal dust, and nobody but he knew that he had opened the throttle.

During the weeks that followed, while the 13 was being repaired, having her tires turned down to remove the slivers of steel, and getting reset and repainted, Hansen never left her for a single hour. His condition became so pitiable that the engineers, who had at first looked upon him with contempt, now spoke kindly to him or gave him no attention at all. He rarely washed now; his yellow beard was dark with coal dust, and his death-hued face was splotched with soot and black oil. By the time the 13 was ready for the road, Hansen was almost ready for an undertaker; and when the master mechanic saw him, he gave orders that the inventor must not be allowed to go out on the engine, which was to take out the fast freight, a night run of some importance.

Hansen had hoped, even boasted, that the 13 should never be coupled into anything plainer than a mail car, and now when he learned that she was going out on a freight run he was frantic. Formerly he had insisted upon running the engine only; now he wanted to run the road. When the foreman told him, as kindly as he could, that no one would be allowed in the cab of the 13 except the engineer and the fireman, the inventor glared fiercely for a moment, then turned and entered the office of the master mechanic. He did not wait to be ushered in, but strode to the chief's desk, and informed the head of the motive power department that Engine 13 would not go out on freight; that when she did go out, she would pull a passenger train, and that he, Hansen, would be the engineer.

The master mechanic was forced to be firm with the man whom, up to now, he had avoided or humored; and he told him plainly that the orders given concerning the new engine would certainly be carried out, and that if he became too troublesome he would be locked up. Hansen raved like a madman, and all the clerks in the office were unable to seize and hold him. "She is my life!" he shrieked. "I have put my soul into her, and I will never allow her to go out of my sight -- you will be guilty of murder if you separate us."

As the mad inventor fought, he frothed at the mouth, and the perspiration that almost streamed from his forehead washed white furrows down his face. It was not until the special officer came with

handcuffs that Hansen could be controlled; and as the 13 rolled slowly across the turntable he was led away to the lockup. He became perfectly quiet now, and when they reached "the Cooler," as it was called, the officer removed the handcuffs and turned to unlock the door. Hansen, taking advantage of this opportunity, turned quickly and bolted, and was many yards away before the officer, rattling away at the padlock, knew that his prisoner had escaped.

The officer very naturally supposed that Hansen would return to the shops, but he did not. He made straight for the freight yards, where the 13 stood steaming, all coupled up and ready to pull out on her night run over the plains. The engineer had finished oiling, and had gone into the little telegraph office where the conductor was getting orders. The fireman, who was in the cab looking after the engine, saw Hansen come leaping over the strings of flat and coal cars, with his beard sweeping round his neck and his yellow hair blown back from his bare head. As the inventor sprang upon the engine the fireman seized him, only to be hurled out over the coal tank by the desperate Dane.

Having freed himself from the fireman, Hansen gave two sharp blasts - - "Off brakes" -- and opened the throttle. The sudden jerk broke the train in two, four cars from the engine; and before the astonished engineer could reach the head end, the engine was in motion. The mad driver knew enough to open the sand lever, and with a few exhausts the short train was moving so fast that the trainmen were unable to reach it. Out over the switches, already set for the fast freight, and down the main line dashed the wild driver, while a flood of fire came from the stack and rained upon the roofs of cars and switch shanties along the line. Flagmen, coming out at crossings to cheer the fast freight with a white signal of "All right," saw the grim face of Hansen leaning from the cab; saw his white teeth shining, and his yellow hair streaming back over his shoulders, as the engine dashed by. Farmers along the line saw a great shower of sparks falling in their fields, and in her wake the wild engine left a sea of burning stubble where red flames leaped from shock to rick.

When the fireman, dazed and stunned, had been picked up and revived, he told them what had happened, and a dispatch was sent to the first station out to "ditch" the 13, which had broken loose from her train and was running wild. This station was the meeting point for the fast freight and the incoming express, and if the wild engine was allowed to pass, she must surely collide with the passenger train. The operator, who was on duty looking out for these two important trains,

realized the situation at a glance, and opened the switch at the farther end of the siding to allow the 13 to go into the ditch beyond the depot.

Because it was a junction point, the station was located at the foot of a long slope, down which Hansen drove at a frightful rate. Whatever speed he had lost by losing fire and wasting steam, he now regained on the downward grade. So great was the speed of the train that when the engine struck the first switch she left the track and plunged into the depot, carrying the four loaded cars with her. The fourth car contained giant powder for the miners in the mountains, and this now exploded with terrific force. The agent and his assistant had stationed themselves near the other switch to witness the performance of the wild engine when she should leave the rail, and so escaped death. Hansen's escape was almost miraculous. The engine, in turning over, threw him upon the roof of the low station, the roof was blown away by the explosion, and Hansen was carried out into the prairie. The special engine and crew that followed upon her blazing trail found the 13 buried in the burning station, and Hansen lying unconscious upon the starlit plain.

The blackened fields had been plowed and prepared for another crop, the station was being rebuilt, and the company's claim agent was busy settling with the farmers along the line, before Hansen was able to walk out in the garden in back of the company's hospital. It seemed to him, he said, that he had been ill all his life, and that all he knew was the short life he had lived in the hospital. Back of that, all was a blank, save that he had a faint notion that he had lived before, and that the world out of which he had come was made up of one great sorrow from which he had narrowly escaped.

"Is that my name?" he asked of the attendant one day when his reason had returned.

"Sure," said the nurse; "your name was Oscar -- don't you know your own name?"

"Oh yes!" said the patient wearily. "I had forgotten. What's my other name, Oscar what?"

The attendant was about to reply when the surgeon, entering, gave sign for the man to be quiet. "Restless," said the doctor, taking the patient's hand; and the sick man caught at the word, the meaning of

which his wreck of a mind scarcely comprehended, and repeated: "Reslis -- Oscar Reslis -- that's a nice-sounding name."

"Yes," said the surgeon, deciding to let it go at that; "Oscar Reslis is a very pretty name."

The physical condition of the patient improved rapidly enough now, but his mental condition continued to puzzle the chief surgeon and his staff. He was quiet enough, and seemed anxious to be alone -- away from the other patients and the attendants. He would sit for hours thinking, thinking, hard and long, upon the great problem of Life, and trying to make out how he came to be. The attendants had been instructed to keep a close watch upon the sick man, and this, as his reasoning powers returned, Hansen detected. "Why do you follow me all the while?" he asked of his German keeper one day, when the latter had trailed him down in the garden.

"To see so dot you don' skedattle -- flew der coop -- see? Dat vos it."

"Tell me, Fritz," Hansen pleaded, "where did I live before I came here?"

"Oh ho!" exclaimed the German. "You dink I vos one fool? Der doc tell me I shall not speak mit you about your past life. He say I must-use say, nix, une blay as I don't listen, see?"

"Then tell me why they brought me here."

"Oh! I mus'nit, I mus'nit speak mit you about your sickness, der doc says; because, he say, it will make you nut fly off. You see it is nit goot for you to know so much, because you ben kronk in der cope -- see? Dot vos it. Doc says you must not told a man vat is crazy dot he been crazy, for dot makes him sometimes still more crazy yet again already. Dot is it. So I vill not say anodder vord from you."

Oscar thought a great deal over his conversation with Fritz, and as the days went by he began to realize that he was a prisoner; that he had been a prisoner once before, either in this world or the other; that he had escaped, and he must escape again. All his time was now occupied in forming plans by which he might free himself from his captors, who had no right, according to his way of reasoning, to hold him.

One night when Fritz was asleep, Oscar dressed himself, slid down the rainspout, and reached the garden. By the help of some grapevines

that grew there, he was able to scale the wall; and, once free, he ran away with all his might, not caring where his legs carried him so long as they bore him away from his prison. It happened that, as he reached the yard, a freight train was pulling out, and seeing that it was leaving the town, he boarded it and rode away. Upon some flat cars in this train there were a number of narrow-gauge locomotives going out to a mountain road then being built in the new West, and in the firebox of one of these engines Hansen hid. The train had been out three days, and was almost in sight of the Rocky Mountains, when Hansen was forced by hunger from his hiding place.

He was put off at an eating station, and the boarding boss took care of him. He said his name was Oscar Reslis; and when he was strong enough to work he was put into the kitchen as dishwasher. But being sober and industrious, he was soon promoted to be second cook. At the end of the year, when the cook got drunk and lost his place, Oscar was made chief cook at one of the best-known eating houses on the K.P. He was a little queer in his actions, but they all attributed his eccentricities to his long fast in the firebox of the dead engine, and treated him with greater consideration than he would otherwise have received.

When they had hammered the kinks out of her warped and twisted frame, and smoothed the dents out of her boiler, the luckless locomotive was rebuilt, painted, and rolled out over the turntable with the same unlucky number on her headlight. Nobody wanted her now. New and beautiful as she was, not an engineer asked to be allowed to run her. After she had been broken in again, and the traveling engineer had passed on her fitness for the road, she was ordered out on local freight.

She had no serious trouble for some months, but any number of minor accidents were charged up to her in the conductor's delay reports, and the workbook in the roundhouse was written full of her troubles. At the end of the year it was found that she had burned more coal, used more oil, had more repairs, cost more money, made less mileage, and injured more people, than any engine on the Smoky Hill Division. She was placed in the hands of one of the most experienced engineers, but she made the same bad record, if not a worse one; and neither engineer nor master mechanic was able to put a hand upon her and say: "Here she is wrong." Her trouble could not be located, and most of the men gave it up, declaring that Hansen had "hoodooed" her. One

day her throttle flew open and stuck as it had upon her first trip, causing her to run away, kill her engineer, and injure a number of trainmen. After that she was put on a construction train, and made to drag outfit cars from station to station along the line. But even here she had to be followed up by a machine shop to keep her on her wheels.

In time she came to be the talk of the whole system. If a man had a special or a fast freight behind him, he would invariably ask the dispatcher where the 13 was, and he looked for her at every curve until he had found and passed her. She was always "due" to jump the track or lie down between stations in the face of the fast express. She became so notoriously unlucky that men were hardly held responsible for her capers. Wrecks that would have cost the driver of another engine ten days were not reported; and even serious accidents her engineer was not called upon to explain. So long as she remained at the other end of the line, the master mechanic was satisfied. She was a "hoodoo."

Meanwhile Oscar Reslis had become an expert cook, and had many friends at the little Western town that had been a flag station when he stopped there to break his long fast. His mind seemed clearer, but he was less cheerful. A settled melancholy seemed fixed upon him, which none of his associates was able to understand. He believed in the transmigration of souls. Where he had lived, he said, he had been deeply wronged and persecuted. He had passed through a great sorrow, and to his acquaintances it seemed that he had been purified by pain.

He lived such a simple, sinless life that those about him believed in him and in the faith he held, and in time he had a number of converts to what they called "the Reslis religion." He was constantly preaching. "Strive hard, strive hard," he would say to those about him. "Remember that all the good you do in this life will count for you in the life to come. The more you suffer here the more you will enjoy there -- be patient."

One sultry summer day, when all the help were complaining of the heat in the kitchen, the patient cook surprised them by beginning to sing as he went about his work, a thing he had never done before.

"I think I shall go away soon," he said, when the second cook asked the cause of his apparent happiness.

"Where? Oh! That I do not know; but to a better place than this, I hope. Not that this is a bad world; but we must advance -- go on and up, up and on, until we reach the perfect life."

Suddenly there came through the open windows two shrill blasts of a locomotive whistle, and instantly Hansen's face grew joyously bright.

"There she is! There she is!" he cried, bounding out of the kitchen, and clearing the back fence at a single leap. And now he beheld the old 13 just pulling out with three or four outfit cars and an old, rickety caboose behind her. She was so covered with alkali, dust, and grease, that her number could not be seen; but he had heard her voice and knew her.

The fireman was busy at the furnace, the engineer was looking back to see that the yardmen closed the switch behind him; and so the cook climbed into the cab unobserved. When the fireman came out of the coal tank and found the man there, he concluded that the engineer had given him permission to ride; and when the engineer looked over and saw the fireman fixing a seat for the "deadhead," he thought the two men must be friends and, as few people ever came into the cab, he was rather pleased to find a man reckless enough to ride the 13.

The Dane's face told plainly how glad he was to find the lost idol of his heart. Dirty, disgraced -- almost despised -- drudging along in front of her wretched train of rickety, dust-covered cars, she was still beautiful to him.

The engineer was doing the best he could with the old scrap-heap, for there was a passenger train coming from the west, and the first siding was nearly ten miles away. It had been raining down the line the night before, and the parched plain was fresh and cool. Both the engineer and the fireman were much interested in the bare-headed passenger, who seemed about as happy as a man can get and live. He took note of every move made by the engineer, smiling when the engine blew off steam, and frowning when the driver handled the throttle or lever in a rough or careless manner.

"Guess this is your first ride on a locomotive, eh?" asked the driver.

"My first ride?" cried Hansen. "Don't you know me? I made this engine, and they took her from me, and locked me up in a prison; but I shall never leave her again. I shall scour her jacket, polish her bell, repaint her, and she shall pull the Denver Express."

"If I don't b'lieve, it's the crazy Dane," said the engineer. "Where'd you git 'im?"

"I didn't git 'im at all," said the fireman. "Where'd you git 'im?"

"Is that what they call me over there -- back there where we used to live?" asked Hansen, almost pathetically.

The engineer made no reply; the fireman shook the grates and looked out over the plain, where the scant grass, taking courage from the recent rain, made a feeble effort to look green and cheerful.

"Open her up," shouted Hansen. "Don't be afraid of her. We shall push right on to the end of the run -- until we find a roundhouse, and some tools -- and then we will rebuild her. How handsome she will look when she comes out. We will paint her black this time -- all black -- all but her bell; and that shall shine like burnished gold. Black will become us now, for we have passed through great trials since our separation. How they have abused you, my noble steed," continued the man, glancing along the boiler and up at the stack.

The engine began to roll and plunge fearfully now, and the driver, looking out, saw that the rain had been very heavy, and that the track was almost unsafe. But he dared not slow down, because of his close meeting-point with the eastbound express. Instead of being frightened at the capers of the rolling, plunging engine, the Dane seemed delighted, and leaned far out on the fireman's side, and shouted and laughed as the world went by. Although the track was clear and straight, the driver kept a constant lookout, for he had no air, and the way the train was rolling, it would be difficult for the trainmen to get to the brakes, and when they did get to them they were apt to be out of repair.

Occasionally they crossed deep, narrow gullies on wooden bridges that shook as the engine struck them. These waterless streams in the West are treacherous. It is not enough to say that they are dry one hour and bank-full the next; for they will often fill to overflowing in a single minute. The water at times will roll down in a solid wall ten or twelve feet high. There had been a cloudburst here, and suddenly the driver

saw the sagging rails hanging over a deep ravine. The bridge was gone, and there was no possible show for them. "Jump!" he shouted, and the fireman leaped out into the prairie, and the engine plunged headfirst into the stream, now almost dry. The three or four outfit cars piled in on top of the engine and filled up the gap, while the caboose, breaking her coupling, leaped over the wreck and was thrown out on the plain beyond the washout.

When the fireman had pulled himself together, and the conductor and brakemen had crawled from the wrecked caboose, bruised and bleeding, they went in search of the engineer and the crazy Dane. What they found, and failed to find, is well known to thousands of railroad men. It has become a part of the history of the road and of the West.

There in the bed of the narrow stream, they found the outfit cars all in a heap. The stream -- only eight or ten inches of clear water -- was rippling through and around the wreck; but the locomotive was gone, and so was her driver, and so was the Dane. The men stared at one another, and when the fireman told them that the crazy inventor was on the engine, they were seized with a strange terror, and they all turned and scrambled up the bank. Far down the plain they saw the smoke of a locomotive, and they thought that the crazy Dane must have caused the 13 to leap over the washout. It must be so, for the engine had disappeared, and this discovery served only to increase their bewilderment.

Presently the conductor thought of his running orders and of the eastbound express, which they were running to meet at the siding only a mile beyond the washout; and, securing a soiled flag from the old caboose, he ran with all his might to meet and flag the approaching train. The arrival of the express explained away the smoke they had seen, and made it plain to the crew of the work train that their engine had not escaped, but that she was somewhere in the quicksand of the little stream. It was some time before the crew and the passengers of the express could bring themselves to believe the story told by the bewildered freight crew. They went down into the stream, waded into the water, and found the sand firm enough to hold a man up, and some of the passengers said the men were crazy, and would not believe the tale they told. What wonder, then -- if these men, who were there only a few minutes after the wreck, doubted this story -- that men laugh today when the enterprising newsboy points out the place where the engine went down and disappeared in the sand.

The railway officials, however, did not doubt the story, and they came and dug and drifted, prospected, and plowed around in the desert sands all night and all the next day. After the bridge had been rebuilt they went at it in earnest. For days and weeks and months they worked away, digging and sounding in the sand, and when thousands of dollars had been expended they gave it up. The lost locomotive has never been found.*

*The following letters, recently received by the author, will be of interest to the reader:

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT
UNION PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY
DENVER, COLORADO

March 1, 1896
Cy Warman, Esq., Washington, D.C.

The lost locomotive of which you inquire went down in Sand Creek, a few hours' run east of Denver; and although thousands of dollars have been expended by the company, the engine has never been found.

Respectfully yours,
W. A. Deuel, General Supt., U. P. Ry.

THE DENVER & RIO GRANDE RAILROAD COMPANY
TREASURY DEPARTMENT
DENVER, COLORADO

March 21, 1896
Mr. Cy Warman, Washington, D.C.

My Dear Cy,

I remember the story of the engine going down in Sand Creek; and, so far as I know, it has never been recovered.

With best wishes, I am, hastily, sincerely
yours,

J. W. Gilluly, Treasurer of the D. & R. G. RR.

- 1897