

Dead Ted's

Summer 1974
Arcola, Saskatchewan

WARNING:

The story you are about to read is laced with profanity. It contains rude ethnic jokes, features alcohol abuse, smoking, illegal activity, and other reprehensible behavior. It was written a long time ago.

The story is almost 100% fiction, *almost*. I am not going to tell you which parts happened, and which did not.



There are a few other things you need to know before you read it:

- In 1974, the population of Arcola was about 500 – everybody knew everybody.
- None of the characters (other than Ted) are real, especially the “me” mentioned, and
- The bar in Arcola was once owned by a fellow named Ted Muldoon. Ted died, and the establishment is now known locally as

.... *Dead Ted's*.

The Trans-Ukrainian Railroad

July 1974

Arcola, Saskatchewan

“Wanna Bet?”

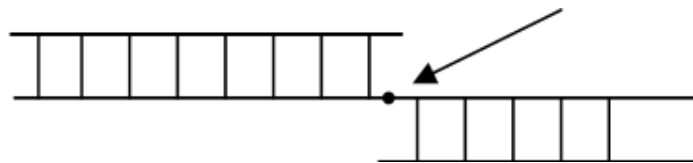
If I had a nickel for every catastrophe that started with those two words, I could pay off the national debt.

We were sitting at *Dead Ted's* overindulging on draft beer and pickled eggs. It was late, the tavern was empty, other than our table and Dusty the barmaid. “We” consisted of me, Spud Cooper, Tanner Moore, and Nester (Kubasa) Hrytziuk, Arcola’s token Ukrainian.



Tanner scratched something on a napkin with a pencil

“Hey Kubasa, guess what this is.”



“Busted ladder?”

“Nope, It’s the last spike on the Trans-Ukrainian Railroad!”

Three of the four of us found this funny. Kubasa took a lot of heat from the rest of us. Ukrainian jokes were in vogue in the ‘70’s and Kubasa was the only one we knew.

“I bet none of you jerks could drive a train”.

“And I s’pose you could”, Tanner slurred.

“Damn right I could!”

“You can hardly navigate that crap Ford parked out there. No way you could drive a train.”

Wanna Bet?

And there it was..... A challenge was on the table and it was up to the rest of us to pony up or let Kubasa win the contest. We looked at each other and gave non-verbal assent.

“We’ve each got ten bucks that says you can’t”, Spud accepted the bet on our collective behalf.

Dusty was about to turn the lights off anyway, as we got up and made our way to the door.



I stopped and bought a case of Labatt's Blue at the off-sale counter. I thought we might need refreshments if Kubasa was going to put on a show.

“You Boys watch out for the cops.” Dusty said, as she handed me my change.

“Thanks, Dusty, we’re gonna take the train home.” I responded, only half joking.

We didn't have far to go to find a train. *Dead Ted's* is on North Railway Avenue and the *Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* elevator is kitty-corner. There was a CPR locomotive beside the elevator pointed west, with two boxcars attached. Kubasa was already across the street looking up at the locomotive.

“Do you suppose that idiot is actually going to try to start that thing?” I asked Tanner as I caught up to him.

“He couldn't get it going even if he was sober, and he's been pounding back draft like a dog eats leftovers.”

There was an empty dray wagon parked by the train station. We dragged it closer, hopped on and watched Kubasa climb up the ladder on the side of the engine.

“They probably keep it locked” Spud said, but Kubasa's silhouette appeared in the window of the engineer's cab as the words left his mouth.



Kubasa tugged on the sliding window, popped his flush face out and gave us a wide grin, which exposed a gap where a tooth had been up until last hockey season.

“Any of you dim bulbs got a match? It's dark in here.”

I tossed him up a pack, but only after lighting a cigarette for myself. *“You better not set that thing on fire; it probably costs more than you make.”*

Tanner and Spud had cracked the *Blue* box open. Spud handed me a stubby bottle as I hopped back on the wagon.

“Hey Kubasa, you want one for the road?” Spud yelled, but Kubasa’s face had disappeared. Only a dim glow from the lit matches appeared in the window.

“He’ll never get it started.”

“I think Kubasa’s Dad worked for the CPR once; maybe he knows more than we think.”

“Even if he could,” Spud said, *“he’s not crazy, or drunk enough to actually do it.”*

A light came on in the cab and a gentle whirring sound with it. *“That is the glow plugs you are hearing Boys”,* Kubasa hollered from deep inside the cab, *“Get your money ready.”*



The confidence in Kubasa’s tone gave me an uneasy feeling that we might have pressed him too far. I was about to suggest that he come down and have a beer, but my voice and most of my other senses, were drowned out by the sound of 10,000 horse-power bursting to life.

Kubasa’s face was at the window again, grinning and yelling ***“All Aboard the Ukrainian Fuckin’ Railroad!”***

“Christ Kubasa! Shut that thing down before somebody catches us.” Spud yelled up at the cab, *“Let’s get out of here.”*

I’d have gladly given Kubasa my ten bucks, and kissed his ass to boot, if he would have turned the engine off and come down at that point, but he was having way too much fun. Kubasa had found a greasy striped engineer’s cap. He was standing at the window wearing it and pumping his fist in the air, yelling imperceptible babble over the ever-increasing whine of the generator.



“Get out of there!” Tanner yelled. *“You are going to get us all thrown in jail.”* Those of us on the ground started edging away from the locomotive.

“OK”, Kubasa said, *“I’ll shut it down – wait for me.”*

“Hurry up damn it. What if the cops show up?” I paused on the road to wait for him.

"I can't turn it off!" Kubasa's confident tone had changed to something just south of terror, *"Maybe this one....."*

"This one" turned out to be the mechanism that connected the 10,000 horses to the wheels. As Kubasa pulled whatever *"this one"* was, the engine grunted under load and the wheels of the train started to creep.

"Jesus Christ! Somebody give me a hand here".

"You're the fucking Engineer, you stop it!"

The train had only moved about ten feet, but it was clear that it was going much farther if our engineer didn't find the "stop" button soon. That thought was no sooner out of my head than Kubasa, still wearing the striped cap, came bailing off the engine like his tail was on fire.

"What are you doing? Get back up there and stop that thing!"

"No way Man, I can't see, it's dark in there."

The train was still just creeping, but it was now at the road crossing, two box cars dutifully following it to *God Knows Where*.

"Let's get out of here." I don't know who said it, any one or all of us might have.



We looked in all directions as we headed for Kubasa's Ford. The streets were empty. We sat in the car for a silent moment and watched as the locomotive and two box cars disappeared in the darkness to the west. Kubasa drove us home in silence; sober as church mice by the time we arrived.

ARCOLA STAR STANDARD

The *Arcola Star Standard* headline the following week didn't surprise a few of us:

"UNMANNED CPR ENGINE GOES TO STOUGHTON, BY ITSELF"

Part II: Silence is Golden

July 1974

Arcola, Saskatchewan

"I haven't seen you boys for a few days" Dusty commented as she took our order. *"I thought maybe you had taken a train trip to the mountains or something"*.

"No idea what you're talking about." Tanner mumbled, without making eye contact.

"Right! And Pigs can Fly." Dusty gave us a knowing frown before she headed to the bar to get our beer.

"You think she knows?"

"Of course she does, but Dusty's alright, she won't squeal on us."

"Maybe we should tip her more than the usual two bits."

"You Think?"

We had laid low for the past few days and Kubasa was still holed up at home, waiting for the storm to pass.

According to *The Star Standard*, a CPR engine crept through Kisbey about 3:00am last Saturday. A railroad employee was awake at that hour and noticed the unscheduled train roll through the level crossing without a signal. He knew something was wrong and chased the creeping train to the next crossing. He managed to get it stopped before the engine ran into the back of another train parked at Stoughton.

There was no damage, and nobody got hurt, but the CPR and the RCMP were both mad as hell. They quizzed Dusty about who had been at the bar that night, but she could only remember some oil riggers from out of town.

Dusty noticed a significant increase in her tip income in the summer of 1974....

...Her Silence was Golden.

