TRANSCONTINENTAL

Written by

Christia Crocker

Idea Unit, Inc.

14347 Albers Street #307
Sherman Oaks, CA 91401
(310) 989-4661
WGA Registration No. 2187922

TEASER

EXT. GREENFIELD, MA 1850 - FIELD - DAY

ANNA (19, bright, adventurous), stands in a field with CHARLIE (22, Anna's supportive brother) looking through a theodolite at a RAILROAD TRACK.

The cross-hairs of the viewer indicate the track is sloping down below the level.

ANNA
Charlie, look at this.

Anna comes away from the theodolite, as Charlie looks. Anna runs slope and pressure calculations in her notebook.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(alarmed)
It's sinking.

CHARLIE
It doesn't appear to be sinking. The rails are in tact.

Anna hikes her skirts up and attempts to walks through the marshy reeds.

ANNA
That's because the engine isn't rolling on them yet.

Anna boots sink into the mud as she continues towards the CREW (15-40s) hustling to lay ballast on top of the track.

CHARLIE
(trying to stop her)
Anna, they are professional rail men. I'm sure that they would know.

EXT. RAIL LINE - OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

ABNER (late 40s, formidable owner of the rail line) stands with LUTHER (early 30s, Abner's yes-man). Abner impatiently calls out to THEODORE (21, charismatic lead crewman).

ABNER
Prepare to run it! We're loosing light!

Idea Unit, Inc.

Theodore nods up to Abner and walks up the rail line towards the engine house where the trial engine is being fueled.

EXT. RAIL LINE - DAY

A LINEMAN (early 20s, observant) notices water oozing through the soil. He flags Theodore from the distance. They shout to one another.

THEODORE
Check?

LINEMAN
It's not good.

Theodore walks down to the Lineman. They put their hands into the earth, assessing the land. Its consistency FLOWS THROUGH THEIR FINGERS like chunky, sandy, cake batter.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Anna struggles through the marshy field. The harder she tries, the more she is caught. Charlie has given up on trying to stop her.

EXT. RAILROAD LINE - DAY

Theodore is alarmed and frustrated. The silty soil is not safe. Abner SHOUTS. Theodore watches the Crew guide the engine onto the track straightaway at the top of the line.

The Crewman starts to add ballast to additional soil, packing it as tightly as possible.

EXT. RAIL LINE - OBSERVATION DECK - DAY

ABNER
Luther, what do you think this line is worth if we make it all the way to Union Station?

LUTHER
More than all the others combined.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Anna sees Theodore and stops short, nearly loosing her breath. She stares, then collects herself and tries to flag him down as she makes her way across the muddy field.

Idea Unit, Inc.

ANNA
Wait! Sir! Don’t run the engine!

EXT. RAIL LINE - DAY

Theodore, Abner and Luther, oblivious to Anna, walk together from the middle of the line towards the end of the line.

Theodore stops them near the SOFT SOIL near the Lineman, who has been adding more ballast to the saturated land in an attempt to absorb the moisture.

ABNER
Is the rest of the line firm?

THEODORE
(hesitant but truthful)
Yes, sir.

ABNER
Then shore it up with more ballast and run the test.

THEODORE
Sir, I still wouldn’t recommend -

ABNER
I said shore it up and run it!

The men shovel ballast and earth onto the bank of the track.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Anna sees Theodore walking towards the engine. Charlie has finally caught up to her.

ANNA
(waving furiously)
WAIT!!

CHARLIE
Anna! This is too much; let them work!

Anna continues forward towards the line as fast as she can.

ANNA
The rail line angle is dangerously off. The ground won’t support it... they will crash!

Idea Unit, Inc.

EXT. RAIL LINE - START POINT - DAY

Theodore's face sweats as he walks back to the engine. The exhausted upper-crew cheers him on, in need of a victory and unaware of the danger. The ENGINEER (30, cocky) tips his hat.

ENGINEER
(to Theodore)
Be my Fireman?

INT. ENGINE CAB - CONTINUOUS

Theodore climbs aboard but shakes his head with concern.

THEODORE
I would take her really slow. The ground isn't ready, but Abner insisted.

The Engineer nods. Theodore grabs a shovel behind the furnace, seals the boiler door and SIGNALS a THUMBS UP.

ENGINEER
Stay alert! Keep back and be ready!

The whistle BLOWS, pushing the engine forward to the CHEERS of the whole crew.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Anna and Charlie stop in their tracks. Charlie puts his hand sympathetically on Anna's shoulder.

EXT. MIDDLE OF THE RAIL LINE, OBSERVATION DECK - CONTINUOUS

The engine moves slowly. The railroad ties and ballast hold.

ABNER
Yes indeed! The key to success, is not letting doubt get a toehold. We must stand firm.

The engine continues to move slowly, but the PRESSURE begins to make the ballast ABSORB INTO THE GROUND ever so slightly. Abner does not notice this. As the engine passes, he SIGNALS to the Engineer to GO FASTER.

Idea Unit, Inc.

ABNER (CONT'D)
No one's buying a railway ticket to go at the speed of a horse and carriage!

INT. ENGINE CAB - CONTINUOUS

The Engineer looks back at Theodore, who has stopped adding coal.

ENGINEER
Keep it coming, it looks like we're lettin' her fly.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Anna BREAKS FREE, running as fast as she can to the rail line.

CHARLIE
Anna!

EXT. RAIL LINE - DAY

As the engine accelerates, the ground GIVES WAY, the railroad ties SINK, the ballast is SUBMERGED and the track BENDS, TOUCHING GROUND! The WHEELS sink causing an ABRUPT HALT.

The coal car SMASHES INTO THE ENGINE as Theodore is momentarily PUSHED AGAINST THE FURNACE and BURNED but still thinks quickly enough to SEAL THE FURNACE.

As the ENGINE RIPS through the earth, the Engineer is THROWN FROM THE CAB. Wheels caught, the engine teeters on one edge and SMASHES DOWN on its side with THEODORE INSIDE.

Everyone scatters in fear and surprise except for Anna, who runs straight up to the engine and LOCKS EYES with Theodore.

INT. ENGINE CAB - CONTINUOUS

ANNA
We'll get you out!

Anna quickly looks around, and notices a PRESSURE GAUGE continuing to RISE.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Is this one for the boiler? It's rising fast.

Idea Unit, Inc.

Theodore is burned and pinned, but captivated by this young woman.

THEODORE
Yes.

ANNA
There's someone in here! Help!

The Lineman, with a few other Crew arrive. Anna heads the triage.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Check the boiler doors! Make sure they are sealed and the rivets are still in place. We need to get him out before there's a fire!

More Crew return as they work to save Theodore. Others carry the Engineer's COVERED BODY to a wagon in the background.

Anna's presence attracts attention. She crawls into the sweltering engine cab.

INT. ENGINE CAB - CONTINUOUS

Anna covers her hands with her dress to avoid being burned and works to free Theodore's leg as the Crew begins dousing the engine with water, and lowering a rope to get Theodore out.

Charlie peers into the engine cab, breathless.

CHARLIE
Father is on his way with some of the men from Greenfield. You'd better get out of here and get cleaned up.

Anna looks at Theodore and SQUEEZES HIS HAND as he is lifted out.

END TEASER

Idea Unit, Inc.

ACT ONE

INT. NIAGARA GORGE 1855 - ANNA AND THEODORE'S SHACK - DAY

The ENTWINED, WEDDING BANDED HANDS of Anna (now 24) and Theodore (now 26), rest together as they sleep deeply. A slow water drip from the tin roof taps Anna, waking her.

Arranging a small pan to catch the drip with practiced ease, Anna looks at Theodore sleeping peacefully in bed. The BURN SCAR on his chest from the Greenfield accident, slightly visible.

Anna kisses Theodore's head gently, exiting the camp shack onto their small porch.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - ANNA AND THEODORE'S SHACK - CONTINUOUS

Anna looks through the lens of her theodolite, as the rising sun illuminates the mists of NIAGARA FALLS. She sketches out a potential engineering solution to the sinking earth from the day she met Theodore.

Anna takes notes and calculations on slope, pressure and displacement in a SKETCHBOOK she shares with Theodore. She looks at the strong, impenetrable walls of the Niagara Gorge, gets an idea, and writes it in the SKETCHBOOK.

Relaxing a little. Anna finishes reading a booklet by Asa Whitney entitled *A Project for a Railroad to the Pacific*.

Theodore comes out onto the porch wearing a blanket, and bringing coffee. He carefully envelops Anna in a bear-hug, kissing her on the top of her head.

THEODORE
My morning beauty.

Anna makes room for him and leans in to kiss him, smiling and taking her coffee cup. Theodore notes the Asa Whitney booklet.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
What do you think? Is it too farfetched? Congress keeps dismissing him.

ANNA
It's a beautifully laid out plan. But with tensions so high in the South, Washington is preoccupied.

Idea Unit, Inc.

On a clean sheet in their SKETCHBOOK, Theodore draws a rough map of the “new” United States including California and Texas, sketching a railway path from New York to California.

THEODORE
They can’t ignore the need for a transcontinental railroad forever. The future is West.

Theodore flips through the Sketchbook as a whole. A pattern emerges: Theodore’s broader sketches of ideas for the railroad are followed by Anna’s calculations and surveys.

Theodore notes Anna’s most recent calculations.

THEODORE (CONT’D)
This looks new. You’ve been busy this morning.

ANNA
I woke up thinking about the Greenfield accident. But then stumbled upon an idea for the next stage here in the gorge.

Theodore looks at her calculations. They are complex and he cannot readily identify the problem they are meant to solve. He feels frustrated with himself.

ANNA (CONT’D)
(moving to the theodolite)
Look here. It might help displace the water using the solidness of the rockface.

Theodore looks through the theodolite and can see what she is describing.

THEODORE
Then we could tack out the route at right angles! Anna this is good.

Anns smiles warmly and begins to write down the coordinates and launch into the calculations.

ANNA
You never know when you’ll be called up for engineer.

Theodore gently stops her by holding her hand. Anna becomes concerned.

Idea Unit, Inc.

THEODORE
I love your faith in me - and your help. But at some point I need to rely on my own surveying and calculations.

Anna, relieved that Theodore's concern stems from Theodore's reliance on her skills rather then something more ominous, gives him a flirty wink and completes the calculations.

ANNA
(playfully)
But that's no fun. If you did your own calculations, why would you need me?

THEODORE
(relaxing, teasing)
Hmmm - that's an excellent question!

Theodore scoops Anna up in his arms.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
But I can think of a few reasons!

ANNA
(giggling)
Is that so, Mr. Judah?

THEODORE
It is indeed, Mrs. Judah. At least 100!

They kiss, entering their camp shack.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - DAY

Multiple crew members swing spike mauls and lay rail ties in a hurry against a vast and powerful waterfalled vista.

THEODORE
Well done men - right on schedule! We've never missed a weekly date, and we won't start now.

Further down the line, WILL, (14-year-old Irish-German-Jewish orphan immigrant) is having a hard time keeping up - taking two swings for every one of his older, seasoned crew-mates.

SIMON (early 30s grizzled and obstinate) comes precariously close to Will with each of his swift swings. Simon is irritated by Will's inexperience.

Idea Unit, Inc.

SIMON
We're just as happy to leave you behind - best keep up.

Theodore strides briskly and purposefully down the line of workers coming toward Simon and Will.

Will is still struggling with his swing. Theodore takes Will's mallet, realizing it is much heavier and an incorrect tool, altogether. Who gave this to Will?

Theodore looks at Simon incredulously, giving Will's incorrect mallet to Simon while taking Simon's spike maul. Theodore demonstrates the "windmill" technique of swinging.

Will swings and, while not perfect, it's smoother. Theodore nods in approval. Will feels a sense of relief and a spark of hope - maybe he'll be able to make it out here after all.

THEODORE
That's it Will. Ok.
(returning the spike maul to Simon)
Take this mallet back to the shed, get yourself a proper spike maul.

Will nods with appreciation as Theodore departs.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
(to Simon)
He's just a kid - don't make it harder on him. We have deadlines to meet.

SIMON
It's not my job to babysit an immigrant stray who's getting paid the same amount as I am.

THEODORE
It *is* your job to get these rails done on time. The more Will can do, the easier for you. Help him out.

Will returns with a spike maul and joins Simon. They both continue the work as Theodore continues down the rail line.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - BAKER'S OFFICE - DAY

BAKER (early 50s, chief engineer) looks through his own theodolite MATCHING ANNA'S PORCH VIEW of the gorge. He make a few notes and calculations in his notebook and SIGHS.

Idea Unit, Inc.

Baker moves the theodolite to a new position and then, stymied, sees Theodore laughing with the men and walking into view from the rail line. Baker WAVES THEODORE OVER.

As Theodore advances, Baker's face seizes with a fit of violent coughing. He spits out blood, kicking dirt over in a flash of shame. Theodore notices, but pretends not to.

BAKER
(to the theodolite)
Take a look. I'd like your ideas on the next stage of the railway.

Theodore looks through the theodolite, recalling his earlier conversation with Anna.

THEODORE
The rockface might help displace the water. Then we could tack out the route at right angles.

Baker considers this and then crunches some numbers in his notebook.

BAKER
An interesting solution, Theodore!

THEODORE
Actually, sir, it was -

BAKER
We'll talk more about this approach. The men need you on the rails, but good work!

Theodore nods and rubs his face as he heads back to the rail line.

THEODORE
(guilty, to himself)
Actually, sir, it was Anna's idea.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - ROCK FACE - ACROSS FROM RAIL LINE - DAY

Anna sees a spectacular view of the falls and climbs towards it while stopping to collect two rare plants.

Reaching the ledge, Anna settles into a nook with spectacular views of the water and the rail line across the gorge.

Anna takes out the SKETCHBOOK and begins to transform Theodore's survey into a lively future depiction of the railroad.

Idea Unit, Inc.

Anna can see the rail ties being laid across the gorge and Theodore's movement along the line.

As Anna looks more closely at the rail line embankment across the gorge, she can see some of the rocks shifting and starting to give way. CRACK and CRASH!

Rocks and a few supplies tumble down the opposite side of the gorge splashing into the whirlpool of the river. Anna sees that Simon has slipped and is hanging by a tree branch about to fall in.

ANNA
No!

Anna scans for Theodore, quickly climbing back down her side of the gorge and making her way back to the rail line side.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - RIVERBED - DAY

Will runs to the riverbed to help Simon. Theodore follows, grabbing a rope and running to catch Will while tying it around his waist.

THEODORE
(throwing him the rope)
Will! Tie this around your waist!

Simon is struggling to hold onto the branch in the heavy current. He hits his head on a rock from the force of the current, goes under in a swirl of blood as the water pummels over him.

WILL
He's drowning! We need to pull him in.

Theodore sees the bloody water rushing and swirling and is nauseous. He refocuses himself by tying the rope connecting he and Will to a tree.

BAKER
He's cut - be ready to pull him in!

Theodore and Will GRAB SIMON just as several barrels of supplies begin to roll down the embankment.

Crew members throw down rope as Theodore and Will try to dodge the massive, rolling barrels.

BAKER (CONT'D)
Grab the supplies! Get them back off the ledge.

Idea Unit, Inc.

Crew pull the men onto land as Simon leaves a bloody trail. The group pants in an exhausted pile on the ground as Anna appears.

ANNA
(to Theodore)
Thanks goodness you're ok!

Anna notes Simon's gash.

ANNA (CONT'D)
His head! Let's get him to a safe, dry place.

Theodore, Will, the Crew, and Anna move Simon up the embankment to stable land.

Anna tears her underskirt into severals strips and begins to apply pressure to Simon's head. She pulls out needle, thread and the plants she recently picked.

Anna stitches Simon up, applies a plant balm and covers his head with the cloth strips. The men are taken aback at Anna's quick work (and the use of her undergarment).

Theodore notices this and feels both proud and protective. Anna looks at them sternly, redirecting the attention to Simon's unconscious state.

INT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - BAKER'S OFFICE - DAY

The following day, Baker watches Theodore rallying the crew into a speed contest of hamming rail ties from his office window.

Baker begins coughing uncontrollably into a handkerchief. There is blood on the handkerchief. Baker reads his ...

TELEGRAPH

Western Union

Charleston Baker July 11 1855

SVRR needs new chief engineer and 1 top crew ASAP. 2 tickets paid at NYC harbor.

STOP

Baker contemplates this offer as a dream come true, but looks at his bloody handkerchief. Outside his window, Theodore, young and strong, leads the crew.

Idea Unit, Inc.

EXT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - DAY

Will is windmilling with a blaze, leading the pack as Theodore passes. Will smiles and Theodore nods with pride.

THEODORE
(teasing, coaching the crew)
Now somebody beat this upstart! He just leaned to swing properly this week. Catch him!

The hammers swing faster and faster.

INT. NIAGARA GORGE - RAIL LINE - BAKER'S OFFICE - DAY

Baker welcomes Theodore into his office / home after the day's shift. A few survey sketches, small family pictures and memorabilia decorate the wall.

BAKER
Theodore. That took some serious guts yesterday. Skill, too.

THEODORE
Thank you, sir.

BAKER
I don't know if I would have advised that.

THEODORE
My better sense nearly stopped me. But I mean to keep the crew on schedule.

Baker nods.

BAKER
And you have. Along with some innovative ideas on the second stage of pass.

THEODORE
Thank you, sir. About that -

Baker gets hit with another coughing fit, Theodore and Baker exchange a meaningful glance.

BAKER
I'll finish this line in Niagara before it gets me. As for you -

Idea Unit, Inc.

Baker hands the telegram to Theodore coughing sharply to stop his eyes from moistening. Once upon a time, Baker would have given anything for this opportunity.

Theodore reads it, searching Baker.

THEODORE
California?

BAKER
Chief engineer.

THEODORE
Chief engineer! And 2 tickets so Anna can -

BAKER
Not Anna. Sorry, son. I understand she's precious to you. But it's for your crew - your right hand man.

THEODORE
That's exactly what she --

BAKER
You'll need to pick from the crew. The steamers are booked full with starry-eyed prospectors and even if we could get another ticket, Cornelius would look very unfavorably on a woman coming out before you were established.

THEODORE
She found a place here. Anna was the one who worked out the right angles at the rockface.

BAKER
(surprised not dissuaded)
I *allowed* her find a place here, but don't fight me on this. She can't go with you. Not yet.

Theodore is unhappy with this, but wants his dream job.

BAKER (CONT'D)
My faith is in *you*, Theodore. Go build that railroad, son. East to West or West to East. Go build it.

Idea Unit, Inc.