Over the Tracks
By Danielle Jochums

The train bolted in front of me. I knew the day. August nineteenth. Clouds lurked overhead. Every shattered piece of me reflected the greyness, the gloom.

You were sand underfoot at the beach. You were a stray beam of light shimmering through the trees. You were the quiet rise of the first spring flower. You were gone. It began to sprinkle. It was just enough to empty me. I sat by the tracks, watching that prevailing thud of the train. My sweater became colored by the rain. I stood up and put one foot in front of the other. My feet were concrete. I could only imagine stepping stones. I was stepping stone. I was stuck in stone.

I was watching the flash of the railcars erode into a dusty village. I was stepping over tracks. I was not looking back. I was wandering into a trap. I was pacing through brittle grass. I was standing in front of glass. Inside, I could see aqua-colored booths lining the walls, black-and-white squares underneath them. The jukebox was unplugged. A paper was taped to the door. I never knew how much it hurt to be broken. Just then, I couldn’t fathom the magnitude of what I had done, the open grave I had fallen into. I willingly resigned myself to this world of escape plans, emptiness, rows of dead bodies, dead boys, boys I might have loved. You stole my vision from me. This seemed like a nice place to rot.

Help wanted.

I went inside. I wanted to forget time. I wanted to forget all the times we had spent together. I wanted it deleted, cleared. I wanted a blank slate. A clean world. One without You. What scum. What filth. Do You remember that time we went to the farm? We went to get pumpkins. It was so muddy and we slid and we slopped.

I want that erased.
And You remember when we watched all of the James Bond movies in a row? I was so tired and I was melting into You and the couch and didn’t think I could stay awake for one more dramatic stunt. I was so happy that we were together and I was thinking about how I didn’t deserve You. You were so warm. You hadn’t spoken in twenty-three hours. It was a privilege to be next to You.

I want that eliminated.

Do You remember the time we drove to New Mexico? Someone died, I think. Your aunt, maybe Your great aunt. Someone named Ethel. We listened to The Everly Brothers all the way there. My face hurt from smiling. Your ebony hair was blowing in the wind, everywhere. You were the demigod of desert. You were barely human to me. It was an honor to be worshipping You.

I want that obliterated.

I tried to forget You and everything that went along with You.

I forgot wonder. I forgot pain. I forgot feeling.

August nineteenth was the last day on earth.

You were the last real thing.

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I just know it was a Monday. Meatloaf was the special. I was trying to move on without You. It was me minus You. A punk strode to a stool to settle in and sit. He must have been new to the town. No one around here keeps that confidence in their stance and dream on their shoulders for long. He flipped through the menu without really seeing any of the words and then ordered a root beer and a chicken pot pie.

I sighed and smiled and said, “I’m sorry. We’re out.” It was a busy day. The diner had been packed with people seeking smoothies and shakes to shelter them from the sinister sun of the summer day.
He glanced back at the first page of the menu. “I suppose I'll have meatloaf then.” He looked me right in the eye. He looked at me like I really existed. How merciless. I felt like floating away into the prickly air, like ice cream into root beer. He wanted root beer and a chicken pot pie. No. Meatloaf. Today is Monday and meatloaf is our special. The meatloaf will sit on the counter next to him and he will look at it and see it is floating in a pool of bubbling orange grease. And I will serve shakes and sundaes and soda pops to the sufferers of the swelter, surprised that I am floating. I hadn’t felt anything but lost since You left. I spent so much time wrapping myself around forgetting You. What did he do? He said what he wanted to eat? I hated him. I kept staring at him from across the counter, across the room. Blue jeans, black shirt, brown eyes, blonde hair. He smiled at something, smirking to himself silently. I hated him. The railcars shuddered by. It shook the service counter. They all shunned the shouts of the engine, but in their skins they were shaking. They recalled September. Screams are still everywhere. Where are You? How did I get stuck here like an insect on sticky strips? Sticky strips. Sticky service counters. Shakes and sundaes and soda pops. The man was unphased. He finished and I gave him his check. He said his name was Marcus. Monday. Meatloaf. Merciless. Marcus. How did he look at me like I was the epicenter of the universe? How did he corner me, mathematically encircle me, a train on a track that revolved around me? How could he orbit me when it was so clear? He was the sun, smiling silently, sickening me on simple sweet nothings yet to be spoken. He was the sun and I was sweltering. I was floating. I was glowing, orbiting him. And he reciprocated to little, undeserving me. And we fell like binary stars, sinking through space.

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Marcus sat on the roof of the diner with me, spectating the ascension of the moon over the train. We were drinking root beer and avoiding life. It tasted like soap. It didn’t make me feel clean. I
was a heathen betraying my idol. No bubbly soda or smile could eliminate that. We were watching and washing and wishing when he wondered aloud, “Would you run away with me?”


I had never thought of running. I had never wanted to go back. Maybe it’s just because I don’t want to live. Not without You. Not at all.

“Where would we run?”

“Across the track,” He beamed. “To the moon.”


“So?” He asked. The summer day glimmered in his eye. I thought only You could give me that, but I was finding pieces.

“Let’s go.”

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The diner is a Band-Aid to cover the weeping puss of open sores. I’m in the black night, only lit by the neon signs out the window. I’m on the chess floor. My first pawn is taken. My breaths lash out, burning my throat. I cannot summon tears.


Boy is still bleeding on the tracks. Boy is a broken body. Boy is in two. Boy could never reach the moon. Boy could never be my savior. Boy is dying.


The boy didn’t know. This was just the beginning. The train stops for no one.

*Rest in peace, Marcus.*

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Flash forward to Graham. I think he deserves that. His name is always on the tip of my tongue, a story to exhale. I know You know. One can forget their martyrs so quickly. Before him, there was Marcus and Rafael and Noah and Rod and Sergio and Dinesh and John and other victims I remember to not remember. Graham established prominence in my memory graveyard. Something about how awful I felt for days and weeks and months afterward. Something about how I can still hear his bones crunch. Something about how he didn’t die on impact.

The day was enveloped in fog, with off-and-on showers. He had a bright yellow polka-dot umbrella and dewy eyes. All of his words took two tries before making their grand entrance into the world. He was six foot four. You could see his ear-to-ear smile above all of the people in the town. He would leave flowers on my doorstep and attach poems he composed. The words swooped me along with his cursive curls. I never knew there were so many ways to say I love you. I wish he didn’t try out the last one.

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Luke stood in the doorway to the diner. The burning bush. He sent me reeling. All butterflies were gasped out long ago. Love at first sight is such an easy idea to melt into. I’ve fallen in love so many times that I have no more bones to break. The cracks in my heart heal with such efficiency. Marcus, Rafael, Dinesh, John. Those memories are now faded. I wonder if any of it was ever love at all. Luke grinned and sat across the counter from me. We looked at each other’s eyes for a long time, too proud to look away. I’m too glued to get unhinged in the fervor of romance. I was sick of all these clichés. It always returns to this. A string between two people connects them from across the room. I wish I could destroy it with a machete, but I’m so tired. I’m so tired.

The train chugged by. I wished I could jump out the window, run, throw myself on the track. I try not to lie to myself. I knew exactly where the whirlwind was going to drop me.
“What do you want?” He asks my eyes. They’re tired of lugging the bags underneath them. I should be asking him that. Not you, I want to say. Please leave. Please get out of my miserable way. But the way he speaks, it’s not harsh. The orange embers in his dark eye do not scorch. He has a warmth in his words. The diner is so cold.

“I want to get out of here.”

The flame brightens and smile sharpens. He licks his chapped lips. “Run away with me.”

If I could count the number of times I heard that line.

“Okay.”

I vow to myself that I will not be burned by this creature. I only fall on behalf of the gods.

He would not be the beginning of my end.

The end cut me down long ago.

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The fire in his eyes is extinguished. The wispy smoke words escape from his mouth. “I’ve failed.”

“Luke, no, you haven’t. Please, Luke. Listen to me. You haven’t failed. Luke, you haven’t.” I babbled and babbled, even when the words devolved into biting shrapnel sound, a row of firecrackers dancing the street. I babbled as if my shrieks were the sparks that would reignite him, as if my tongue was the match that would transform him into a forest fire. I babbled as if I were a fool, because I couldn’t comprehend that each syllable was a bucket of water drenching his soul.

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I look at my feet the whole funeral. The eulogy is about hellfire, not his fire. They don’t understand the trials and the train track death and the terror tied on Luke’s face. They couldn’t. It’s open casket. Luke isn’t as busted up as most of them were. I keep hoping he’ll sit up and run out of
the church. Climb the steeple. Light us all on fire. We’ll get a sneak peak of the afterlife. Luke doesn’t sit up. I wish they would have cremated him. I wish they would cremate me alive. I just want to watch everything burn. That’s what I want. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. That’s what I should have said. When Luke saw me. When our string attached. I should have hacked at it with a machete. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. It’s just that I’m so tired. It takes so much to rebuild myself time after time. To keep myself warm when the sun and the fire go out. I’m selfish. I know. That’s why I should have said it. That’s why I should have ended it before it began. I shouldn’t hope anymore. Marcus, look what be started. A trail of loverboy filets: Marcus, Rafael, Noah, Rod, Sergio, Dinesh, John, Graham. Now you, Luke. It’s obsession. I should have said: leave me alone. I should have said: I don’t want anything. I should have said: I want to burn alive. I want to scream so loud that everything I’ve ever said will unwind. I want to cry so hard I bring back the dead. They will haunt me. They will all haunt me and taunt me and I will deserve every word of it. Because I wanted them to worship me. Because I wanted revenge. Because I wanted out. I’m sorry, I am. Please sit up in your coffin. Please burn me.

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Is any of this real? Can anything be real, after You? How did this web become neatly knitted in the abscesses of reality?

The pies wait in their case.

The booths and stools whisper to each other.

With every passing moment, the scene freezes.

The turquoise leather and checkerboard floors frost.

I long to become an ice sculpture.

I yearn for the roof to cave in and crush me.

I don’t want anyone to enter the diner.

No one does.
At the end of the day, instead of thanking God, I unplug the neon Open sign, grab my coat, and leave.

Do You understand failure? Has it ever dared to touch You? Could You understand the agony that laced those two words? *I’ve failed.* Blood was running away from him like he was the plague.

Where did You run to? Where did You go when You didn’t even say goodbye? I ended up here. I was mourning You. You’re out there, somewhere, on the other side of the tracks, where the world still endeavors to turn. I’ve tried and tried to believe that there’s a way out. Hope is for hypocrites like me. But Luke is the end, the last victim. I cannot stand for more blood to be shed. Each love is just a tangent from the mundane. The ticking, dripping depression. Each one is just a reason for me to hate myself a little bit more. I want to fling myself into the path of the train. I want to apologize. I want to become an ice sculpture. There’s nothing to melt me anymore, no heavenly You, no sunshine Marcus, no flaming Luke. Maybe I’ll fall to the ground. I’ll shatter again. Everything is again. I’m methodically massacring in my circle.

That was life.

But it doesn’t have to be life anymore.

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To Marcus, the rays of bronze light:

You deserved to be a supernova, not a splatter. I was screaming but I could sense the soul-splitting shake as the wheels churned your guts into a pulp.

I’m sorry I condemned you for creating the obsession of my escape. I could never escape myself. I could never face myself. I could never do anything but what I did that night.

I stood ten feet away. I giggled when you saluted, standing next to the track. You shouted at the moon reflecting your glory. I can’t remember your words exactly anymore. Something like, “I’m
coming for you” or “I’m leaving this godforsaken town.” One skip forward. I screamed. I fell to the ground. Covered my eyes, ears, face. Five minutes later I looked up. Blood was everywhere. You were in halves. Through the gut. Sliced through the intestines. I looked at you like you were the epicenter of the universe. Giggled. Glory. Gut. My sun. I ran away into the night. Toward the diner’s glowing sign. Under the moon. Another Monday. It was all madness. There was just the two of us. Two of you. The legs. The torso. I tried to forget you too. Two. Torso. Try. Try to forgive me. I love you.

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To Rafael, a fresh coat of winter snow:

I’m sorry I agreed to run away with you.

I can’t avoid the general store. I walk past it twice a day. I taste the bitterness of regret. The memory stings. Your magnetic radiance pulls me back through the years. All at once I see you stocking the shelves with canned green beans. You turn around in slow motion. Your movements drift on air. Before I can even see your face, I see our future together. I see you asking me if there was anything you could help me with. I see our cinema popcorn dripping with grease. I see you slip. I see your thigh dangling over the track. I see the train rushing toward you. I see the blood rushing out of you. I see me rushing away from you.

I love you.

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To Noah, lava stretching up to the sky:

I’m sorry I hoped that this time in wouldn’t end in gore plastered on the tracks and in my mind.
You were in the south part of town in the saloon downing shots and we thought you were
the strongest, smartest man alive. Made of steel.

Evidently not.

The steel squished you into nothingness. You’ll always be something to me. Even when I left
you on the track like a plastic superman toy, melted onto the rails.

I love you.

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To Rod, a stoic redwood on the horizon:

I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you that, by design, we’re stuck here forever, no matter how hard
we try or what we do. I would notice you strolling around the blocks from a distance, from the
doctor’s office to the rose garden to the barber shop to your classroom at the school house. You
were serene. I stole that from you. The train squashed you. I didn’t stay long enough to see the
details.

I love you.

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To Dinesh, orange leaves cascading to the ground:

I’m sorry I followed insanity. I thought something would be different this time. When
Marcus jumped across the track, he had been too careless. When Rafael stepped across the track, he
had been clumsy. With Noah, it was poorly timed. With Rod, too slow.

I’m sorry I thought that maybe, maybe this time, something would change. Something did
change. You were in three pieces. Shins. Body. Arm. That was a first.

The train, without fail, will run over whoever crosses its track.

I’m stuck. You’re dead. I love you.
To Sergio, a sea breeze on a clear day:

I’m sorry that I didn’t map out our reality for you. Here it is, far too late: in the middle of the town, there’s the general store, the church, the schoolhouse, the doctor’s office, the barber shop, all of the quaint necessities that characterize an extra-ordinary life. To the east, there’s the diner. To the north, the theater. To the south, the saloon. To the west, the rose garden. All around, there’s the train. The blood of lambs past is dried up like chocolate sauce all around the track. Your blood oozed out the back of your skull on the southwest side. The track shelters us from the outside world. It shelters the outside world from us. It never stops. It just runs in circles into oblivion. It will be here when everything else is gone. You’re gone. I love you.

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To John, the sun setting on a still lake:

I’m sorry I didn’t tell you that it was impossible. We were sitting on a bench in the rose garden. I watched the world sideways, my head on your shoulder. The flowers shifted in the wind. You asked why only I had a calendar, with a chuckle to shroud your ignorance. I thought. I knew exactly why. And I held your hand with both of mine and said I never thought about it. You scanned my face, kissed my forehead, and dropped the topic. I locked the answer away, but I have resurrected it for you. They don’t have calendars because it helps them plunge into thick pools of monotony. Because the only people who are happy are the ones who don’t think about leaving. They couldn’t even imagine it. They’re the ones who live. That could have been you. It should have been you. Instead, you found eternal sleep, lying on the track, bruised all over, bleeding on the inside. I’m sorry I dragged you into my dreams, my goals, my mess. I love you.

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To Graham, a crisp spring morning:

I’m sorry I killed you. I was shattered, so I sentenced you to shatter your daffodil smile. Even when I could already hear the echo of your bones splitting. Even when I could envision you splintering under the tracks.

I timed everything, to the second. I waited until the train was as far as it could be from us. That wasn’t enough. Nothing is ever enough. You weren’t enough to fix me. Please paint the sunsets with your soft grace. I love you.

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To Luke, the burning bush:

I’m sorry I didn’t cut the string when it connected between us. I was standing at the diner counter, thinking only of how much blood I have on my head, my heart, my hands. You stepped in. I’m sorry I didn’t hack the thread. I’m sorry I didn’t stop you in your tracks. I’m sorry you bled out on the tracks. I’m sorry your own blood put out your fire. I think you know. As the embers in your eyes were sizzling out, I think you saw. You saw how wrong I was. You saw that it was better to die in my arms than live another moment in them. You didn’t fail. I failed you. I wish I never met you, for your sake. I love you.

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To You, my everything, the end of me:

I’m sorry that I didn’t see that You were flesh and bone and a cynical smirk that would make my head spin. You were all this and more. That’s all You had to be. You didn’t have to be a deity.

I’m sorry that I assumed You wanted to be adored. I didn’t know that each moment to You was an eternity. I didn’t know that You were just focusing, on breathing, on staying afloat, alive. I didn’t know that sometimes You felt You were drowning. You needed to be alone.
I’m sorry for blaming all this on You. I felt You betrayed me, that You were leaving me to decay into nothing. Really, You were just trying to become something. You had to find Yourself before You could believe in Yourself. The blood that was shed was not in Your name, just in vain.

This is the funny thing, the nuclear boom of the silver lining. I don’t know how to apologize to You. I never knew You.

You. I keep saying You. As if Your name is too sacred to be uttered. Anthony Kincaid. That’s your name. I’m not afraid to say it. I’m not afraid to recognize your humanity. It’s not a cracked foundation that will topple me.

I’m rocketing these paper airplanes toward the moon.

They won’t get to you.

I hope nothing gets to you.

I hope you have found what you were seeking.

I hope you’re where you want to be, who you want to be.

Today is the real last day.

Today is the day I meet my martyrs.

Today is the day I face the tracks.

End.