

“Train 728”

by Dynn Javier

Wayfarers and passengers alike
on a summer train, southbound, towards San Jose on Train 728,
please listen to the following messages:

I.

Our next stop
would have been Hayward.
On the map its only a few miles away.
The man who sat two rows ahead grumbles angrily
until retiring back into his seat with his arms crossed.
They tell him no one was allowed off even to just smoke.
Or maybe just to lean against the wall out there.
He complains, obviously.
His departure ticket is for Hayward
but they told him it just doesn't work that way.
Like the way he crosses his arms
and the way he looks
out the window as if he was counting bricks.

II.

The conductor is young but stressed.
I can hear him birth over the intercom.
I wonder what it's like to clock in and have your workday end like this.
He sounds tired but rehearsed:
“Police are on their way.”
“Coroners are on their way.”
I guess there really wasn't much else to say
but, isn't it so strange how I shrugged and groaned
along with everyone else in the tube
when he apologizes:
“They're running late.”
“They're still on their way.”
“An hour or two longer (this will all be over soon),
Amtrak is sorry for the delay.”

III.

I think the lights start to flicker
because they keep shutting off the power
to check the train's vitals
or to perform some other police procedure

that I don't understand.

After the police arrive it had already been two hours, maybe,
and each time the power goes down
the electric hum under the seats and in the window panes
dies without a gasp.

And the afternoon sky, which had now spawned dust and mold,
wafted in soft patches of dusk's light across our faces.

We were all counting bricks now
while we still could,
while we tried to guess exactly how long this train
still stood,
here of all places.

IV.

There were some business people across the car
sitting at their table seats with suits and long arms
and one of them says to another,
"It's one fucking hell of a way to go."
The suits nodded as the rest of us drop in,
"At the service all that's left of you just fills a shoe box,"
he says,
in a way that made my fingernails curl in their stocks.

V.

Okay, that *has* to be bull shit
I thought.
They wouldn't do that,
I knew at least that much,
even though it seems I was alone
in that this had never occurred to me before.
I quietly rest my temple against the glass.
My ear listens for the distant heartbeat of the train.

VI.

The sun passes down along the fences
and the graffiti on the brick walls outside grows boring,
even anxious
as it peels off and limply hangs like gray palm fronds.
The conductor explains, now, that since the coroner has finally arrived,
"A new engineer will also be replacing our current staffer."
Yes, that old engineer would be the first person to ask
about where to go to adequately fill up a shoe box.
The café car is running out of snacks.

VII.

We were stuck for about three hours in total
and after the smokers and the suits got off
at Hayward,
just within a few minutes of being
back on track,
I thought about what I learned.
They call them trespassers,
but didn't they have every right to inhabit the same space as the train,
or maybe they just led themselves to the wrong track
on purpose.
I wondered about that kind of panic.
I was wishing it would rain.
I was fishing in the blackness outside every window pane.

VIII.

I'm sorry we were in your way today.
I don't think they would show your parents a shoe box.
Maybe instead they could think of something else.
Maybe something better.
While we smoke up
or get down to business
and make our own way.
Wayfarers and passengers alike