"Math"
by Dynn Javier

is dead for better or for worse. For example, answer the following word problem. Show your work.

Two trains are traveling toward each other at evil, unstoppable speeds (these are given elsewhere). Sparks lunge from the tracks as the twin engines barrel down the line nearly setting the dead grass ablaze. How soon until they collide spectacularly, miserably, presuming that they're on the same track for some reason? Show your work. Alternatively, what if the trains aren't on the same track after all and what if they're—by chance—moving slow enough for it to hurt? How much longer do we have then? And exactly how badly will it sting (rounded to the nearest decimal point)?

Two lines touch at a point and make an angle and one is obtusely aware of the beads of sweat running down my face. At least they aren't tears. Downward rays, vectors, and negative slopes. What's the angle here? Solve for the missing piece in my chest cavity. Show your work. Consider all possible perspectives and equivalents. The answers are in the back of the book but the pages are stained with coffee and blood. Some stick together, some are just burnt.

Show your work—Train A is traveling down the line at one page per minute. Given that, on average, one page can hold as many as ten thousand poems, when does the line get crossed? And who crosses it out? You carry the zero and pretend to be just friends because of all the triangulation and speculation. Show your work.

Two points rest in gridlock on a single plane, parallel and improbable. Despite only a handful of possible outcomes she pulls away from my grip and begins drifting away and one point is left with the responsibility of recalculating the distance from the other. Recalculating, repositioning. rerouting. All that's left is a chalky sense of dread, for better or for worse.

Clearly somewhere down the line, a point gets lost. And each word problem, in the end, lacks both a hero or a bad guy. Because math can't explain if either of you had any probable chance at all. Or why she doesn't even bat an eyelash when you show your work.