

The Tracks of Petals and Steel

Hydrangeas. My mother's favourite flowers were hydrangeas. They have this unique ability to change colours depending on the PH of the soil. *"When the soil is sad and low the hydrangeas go blue to portray it, But when the soil is high and happy the hydrangeas grow pink or even red."* I can't even begin to guess how many times mum must've said this in her lifetime. *"When the soil is happy the future will hold plenty of bright things."* she'd preach trying to persuade some deep meaning that I was too disinterested in to comprehend.

I had just gotten off the phone with the florist, I'd had to organise her favourite flowers to be there. Of course the only time I could get through to them was on the miserable and foggy walk to the station, Ironic isn't it?

I slow to a halt on the lazily done brickwork. After a moment my feet stand idle, unable to move me away from the wind biting at my face. As my nose tingles and my hands and feet grow numb I couldn't help but wonder how on earth my mum ever liked this weather. I have never enjoyed the cold, I'd always complain like a limb was falling off. However my mum would always breathe in the bitter wind with a smile. I wish I was more like her, maybe then I'd know what to write, what to say.

I shift my weight back and forth in hopes of igniting some sort of warmth within me. My gaze starts to drop down, ensuring my fingers and toes are all still there, but instead my eyes land on the yellow line. The one that sits methodically in front of the platform's edge, serving as a reminder to keep a safe distance away from the oncoming traffic. I've heard all the horror stories of people getting caught between the tracks, only to be left in a half-dead agony unable to be saved. This should be enough of a deterrent, but as my mind wanders my feet feel less numb and seem to itch to get closer to the edge, the shifting of my weight begging to lean forward. The cobalt converse on my left foot slowly starts to rise. As if ready to score the goal that'd shift the tides of a sports match, the yellow line edging it on. It'd be quick, a terrible accident.

I'm suddenly broken free from my trance, a deafening metallic crash fills the air. As my head whips around to try and find where it came from, I realise that the bomb-like noise came from me. My heart starts to ache as I look to my feet and see my mother's drink bottle staring back up at me. It must've fallen out of my fraying bag. The water starts to bleed out from the cracks, seeping in between the poorly laid bricks. I borrowed this drink bottle the last time I made the trip to see my mum, the whole time she'd been pleading with me to visit more, but I callously ignored her. I slowly pick up the damaged bottle, trying to assess if it is salvageable but as I stand back up, my gaze meets the woman sitting across from me. Her wispy brown hair flowing effortlessly around her face, complimenting the cerulean blue dress that sits snugly over her swollen belly. A lover stands tirelessly beside her, fussing over every small thing to ensure her happiness and safety.

The metal clanging signals the oncoming train, along with the whooshing air that powerfully hugs my body. My feet are planted safely away from the yellow warning line. The steady and predictable machine clangs undeniably closer, its rusted metal leaving no reminders of its once shiny exterior. Mum used to tell me all about the names it used to get, about how it was covered in bright and obnoxious colours. If it weren't for the few struggling bits of paint, you'd

have no idea. I hold my breath just in case one of the peeling colours blows off in the wind. Fortunately the monotonous noise ends signalling the train's arrival. My eager feet board the fogging train, swarming with warm bodies, packed as tightly as an old overly full library waiting to be kindling. The first seat I go to seems as welcoming as a heated hostel to a long time backpacker, where all meals are pre-prepared. A baby's cry breaks that illusion. It throws its lilac dummy across the floor, its exhausted mother tries pleadingly to settle him. Her ragged hair and bloodshot eyes make it impossible to hide her lack of sleep. I can picture my own mother in this woman, how she once would've picked me up for my comfort and stayed up for my sleepless nights. Back then my biggest fear was the lack of her love. I can't bring myself to sit next to this woman who's all too similar to my own mother. Maybe I could write about a mothers love and how hers felt?

My tired legs keep me moving down the aisle. They carry me past a pair of young kids playing games, whose energy is wild and untampered. Their pitched voices squeal with laughter & accusations, trying their hardest to beat one another. Just behind them sit a group of teenagers. A set of young guys attempting to impress the girls by making a complete fool of themselves. Their noise and chaos is not unlike that of chimpanzees in a zoo. "Caelum, you need to quiet down, there's people around" the girl exclaims in a hushed voice, her flushed face revealing her embarrassment, her bright violet hair contrasting with the pink in her cheeks. My mum loved when I coloured my hair. As much as she thought my natural hair was lovely, when it was dyed to unnatural colours, she'd always compliment it. The colour in my hair meant she could live out her childhood dreams through me. I find an empty seat, its fabric starting to unravel, being covered in a thick layer of dust, turned grey by its years of use and sunbleach. The cushioning left in it is sparse and falling out from the sides. I sit down, trying to get as comfortable as possible before pulling out my laptop to try and start writing, but it's harder than I thought. How are people supposed to do this stuff?

"Truthfully I was scared to leave you in charge of the honeymoon, I thought you might forget something" Newlyweds. Great. I sat behind the newlyweds.

"I organised our flight to be tomorrow morning at eight. We'll spend tonight at a motel just outside of the city, it's kinda old but the reviews said it'll be good." The first night of a honeymoon at a beaten up motel? Yuck.

"I'm sure it'll be great, but even if it isn't I didn't marry you for a honeymoon, I married you because I love you, and I'm sure that even if we were in the worst motel imaginable I'd have a great time, because I'd be with you." Double yuck. Of course they'd have to be lovey dovey too. I can't focus on writing with these two having their hands all over each other.

"We're going to Greece?! As in the Greece?!"

"Of course we are, I know how much you wanted to. And do you really think I'd miss an opportunity to see you out in that peachy dress?"

If I ever got married I always thought I'd honeymoon in Greece, my mum told me all about her travels there, they were my favourite of her stories. Maybe I could speak about them? Another loud noise interrupts my thoughts, I hear a loud popping noise and an eruption of laughter as the teens scatter. What is with today? I'm constantly being interrupted. Then it hits me, the stench emanating from a row up ahead. I can feel my breakfast trying to make its way up my throat. My face feels hot & my nose burns from the horror breaching it. The

chimpanzees are laughing astronomically at the disgusting prank they pulled. A fart bomb, in a crowded enclosed space, who does that!?

As much as I want to scream and shout, if I sit here for a second longer the contents of my stomach will resurface and worsen the smell. In a hurried rush I leave the aisle trying desperately to find an uncontaminated place to breathe. I gasp a breath of the fresh dewy train air and flop onto a free seat. My stomach starts to settle & my face makes no attempt to hide my relief.

“Excuse me, love?”

My head whips around to meet the gaze of a middle aged woman, with two kids and a partner sitting beside her. “I’m so sorry to bother you, but it’s our first real family trip away and I was wondering if you could take a photo of us for me?”

My mouth voluntarily smiles as I delicately take the phone from the mothers hands, scared that its worn rosy pink case might crumple apart in my hands.

“I’d love to” my voice sounds foreign and tired though a tinge of warmth breaks through, finally finding its footing again. “Say cheese” seriously? Out of everything I could have said, I use the embarrassing classic?

Fortunately the family seems unphased as they shuffle closer together with matching smiles, blending together in a joyful manner. How could I not smile at them?

I take the photo before carefully handing the phone back, being awarded with praise and thanks from the mother. One day those kids will be grateful too, they’d have something to write about. My Speech!!! I’d forgotten about my Speech!!! How could I forget, what sort of daughter forgets something so important?!

I open my laptop to start writing, yet I can’t even bear to look at the screen, let alone write in it. Instead my eyes rest on the window. I used to ride this train to visit my mum, the whole way there I’d be bouncing with ideas and conversations to share. The two of us would talk about anything under the sun, about ghosts & the paranormal, about the planets and stars, movies and shows, practically everything.

“You’d never even know you missed it” a friendly yet crackled voice speaks, my eyebrows furrow as my head darts around to find out who spoke. It was the woman beside me. I hadn’t even registered that she was there. Her affectionate face smiles, further displaying her features, each one telling a unique story. Her nose crooks upward and out, on an unnatural angle, clearly once broken, her eyes sit heavy and tired on her face, showing her years, and are they surrounded by freckles, perfectly placed imperfections, her silky grey hair meticulously wraps around her expression, like a ribbon on a birthday gift. My confusion forces me to speak.

“I’m sorry?” I say to try to understand.

“The view” she must see from my face that I’m still confused, until I am not. A small amount of guilt flickers across my mind, I wasn’t even processing what was out the window, though she doesn’t know that. “It’s a stunning view, if you don’t stop every once in a while and notice the world around you, you wouldn’t even know what you missed.” her calm and admirable voice spoke. “I’ve lived a long life, and whilst it can be trying I can’t help but think about all the moments I would’ve missed, should I not have taken a second to breath and look around, to appreciate all the little things in life” she starts to stand her bright red coat draping

around her ankles, it takes me a moment to realise the train had stopped. "I wish you luck & comfort for wherever your life is taking you" my eyes start to well up and burn, my voice catches in my throat unable to speak. Her words of assurance mean more to me than she knows. Once I finally find the strength to speak again, she's already stepping off the train, lost in the crowd.

No, I'm not standing on those tracks but something crashes into me. Realisation. The realisation that I could miss so much, that one period of distress and hardship could make me miss so much more. I could miss travelling, loving, honeymooning, and my future, my life, the plans that the world has for me. Yes my mother is not here breathing, but part of her still resides on this earth, it's here in me. Sure it's not her personality or her spirit, but it's the memory of it, of her stories. Maybe I have another day in me, another week, or month to carry her around. I have another moment coming, and maybe it's worth waiting for. The loud monotonous noise resumes as the train starts to pass fields of pink and red flowers, already forgetting about the passengers it let off, but more than ready to welcome the new ones.