

The Vibration of Train Wheels

I was dreaming again.

The strap of my red tote bag slipped down my sleeve, brushed my hand and woke me up. Now I'm awake, but I hate it. I don't want to be here; I don't want to still be on this train.

This must be the longest ride of my life.

And the headache won't quit. Now I remember, I was meditating. I have that book that I wanted to read. But when I tried to find my page, the words just danced and taunted me, and I thought of last night, and I had to close the book and shut my eyes. The headache made me see those spots again, the little white flashes that look like bleach splashes on my favorite black jeans.

The train is crashing through the tunnel and I wonder if we're really going faster and faster, or if it's just me. I look around at the faces of the other passengers and I try to gauge their level of alarm. Some of them do look concerned. But most of them just look bored. Tired. Normal.

I wonder if any of them are thinking: Why is this train going faster? Why is it crashing through this tunnel? What if this train is like that train I read about in Switzerland that went faster and faster until it derailed? The last thought makes me panic. I wonder if people see me panicking and if they wonder, Hey, is that girl losing it? So I try to calm down, but the headache gets worse the faster the wheels below us go *Whir! Whir! Whir!*

With my eyes closed, I picture the sound coming from a circular funnel of cartoon smoke. It looks like a target—no, a tornado—and it's sucking me into the center.

The PA cracks on from a speaker right over my head. The sudden clatter sends a jolt through me and I am awake. Now I can't tell if the conductor is saying, "This train is going local," or, "This train is going *loco*."

The train cars are moving again.

I think, If only this damn train were still going Express my stop would be next. Only one more stop and a few blocks to go. I can walk home and lock myself in with the quiet and the calm. I can be safe.

The train crashes through another stop and I'm too nervous to sit anymore, so I stand by the doors and stare out the window. The black tunnel walls slide by my face. I've become something liquid. I am a slug and I excrete ooze. It melts into the black as I slide along the tunnel wall. I'm gliding along the tunnel wall, navigating by feel. It should all be smooth and fluid as water flowing, but the train wheels approach and now they overtake me, *Th-thud, th-thud, th-thud*. They chop me up. They slice through my liquid trail. They interrupt. I sense the lights mounted in the tunnel. The intervals are getting shorter as the whirring grows louder, faster now. Then the lights come too quick one after another and it makes me nauseous, so I pinch my eyes closed again.

I was dreaming again.

The train crashes to a stop—my stop. I try to act calm as I exit the car. The stairs at the station are dark. It's cold and I'm the only one who gets off here. And there's still that headache.

The last few blocks are dead silent as I speed-walk the four blocks til home. Sometimes it is so quiet, it's like no one lives here at all.