

The Train

You show me your child. You're standing so close to me, whispering. I can feel the hard material of your harsh black suit and your bony elbows underneath it. You are controlled. You look controlled. You're about to tell me the tragedy. We look at the child with dark eyes and dark hair. I look at your wife standing behind you. She's blind. This must be the tragedy. I grab your elbow out of pity. The wife and now the child. But you smile and say, No, the child can see – isn't she beautiful. The child isn't tragic, you and I are tragic.

You keep talking. You can't run away from the past. You carry your memories with you always. This is something you say when you expect remorse and penitence from me. You want to see me as the escapee with the head wounds. Scarred by love and still limping. Childless and alone.

The sun streams into the room through the doors onto the balcony. I sleep for days and days to forget. I dream about the train where we all lived together. You said the train always stands for the past. Our homes were the carriages joined together. The train stopped outside the town in the countryside. We jumped off and ran around in the long grass shouting and laughing. One man set a fire through the train and burnt all the unnecessary things. A purification. You can't run away from the past, you said. I tried to light the fire but I didn't have the knack. I burnt the blue chest of drawers and scorched the timber paneling. Only one person could light the fire correctly. He was the escapee who never felt remorseful or penitent. He was always forgiven and never carried the past with him.

But if the train was all our houses joined together from the past and through the present into the future, the train is not the past but our lives as they run together. And the man who changed our lives without destroying us has gone away and taken his secret with him. You stand beside me now, more gentle than you've ever been because you're relieved that the kid didn't have to carry our own afflictions.