

All Aboard

I remember looking at my parents' wedding photo. They were so happy and unaware of what life had in store for them. I remember looking at my mother's dress, trying to catch every detail of her veil and how it flowed down her back and laid out in front of her. How my dad's mustache sat perfectly on top of his lip, where you could see a small smile.

I remember being jerked, like someone had hit the brakes, hearing my father.

"I'm sorry, mija. You know I wish I could take it from you."

I had blacked out and hadn't heard a word from the phone. The worst promise in the world: "I'll call you back." Waiting to see if he really would and what news he would bring.

It was 8pm when he called. I don't actually remember hearing him tell me, so maybe it didn't happen and I'm still asleep staring at my parents' wedding photo.

I jerk again and wake up in a hospital bed, crying, holding a stranger's hand while a nurse sticks a needle in my arm. "See, all done."

All done? When did we start?

I slam my head on a desk as I'm asked how I had spent my summer.

"Great," I tell them. "I traveled. Traveled from doctor's office to doctor's office, and I got this cool souvenir from the hospital."

I lift my neck and present my Harry Winston of a scar, still purple and swollen. I laugh through the pain, which helps hold my smile, but every night I can feel it. That fear of it opening and spilling everywhere, that fear of laying on that table alone while blue masks breath down my neck, trying to scrape every piece of gooey green slime out.

That's how I imagine it, how I imagine cancer to look like. Gooey neon-green slime that hides and teases its patients.

I hit my head on the seat in front of me. This time I'm in a nightmare. I remember these beige walls and squeaky chairs, but the nurse is someone different. I don't know her, but she smiles and says my name as if she's my friend. I can't leave just yet. They need to give me my drugs, the drugs I will take every day for the rest of my life.

I'm on a train and I will never get off. It's filled with reminders of that summer and of whom I used to be. The train can run at a hundred miles per hour and, in one second, stop, jerking my body from cart to cart. I will never get off this train; there is no stop other than death. Every cart takes me closer, and all I can do is stare out the window, watching the other kids play.

I fly through the air, bracing for impact, and instead land on my bed crying and scared that someday it'll come back. What if I'm not strong enough, what if I die, what if I didn't do enough in life, what if this is all I will be remembered by. The girl who had cancer.

No.

In the next cart I jump to I will sing and dance as loud as I can, and the next will be filled with food from every corner of the world, and the next will be showered with love and laughter, and the next filled with heartbreak, and the next filled with waters to jump in, and the next covered in glitter.

I will make this train my bitch and force it to move where I want it to, and the day that it stops, I will greet death with a high five and say, "Look at that. Look at my life and see what I did. Even after you tried to stop me, I kept going. Go, look. I dare you to find the darkest cart and to follow each one after to find the light. I dare you to board my train and see how long you last."

Death will smile, take my hand, and walk me to the ends of the earth.