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## I Got a Line on You

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## I GOT A LINE ON YOU

Not one of the inhabitants of the town heard the train the girl named Hope touched in the night. They had grown used to the fury of its passage, had long since ceased to shift in sleep as it rattled window glass and, even at four in the morning, when only tumbleweed and tarantula risked the crossings, warned them with its whistle to stay clear. During the day the trains passed frequently, some of them double-stacked with shipping containers, their wild urban graffiti vibrant and somewhat shocking against the tawny hue of desert. The train Hope touched, if viewed from above, was longer than the town itself.

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HOPE HAD BEEN drinking at Trudy's with a group of kids who worked the summer resorts—dude ranches and health spas—in the mountains northwest of town. They had been dancing to the golden oldies of a local outfit that called themselves Captain Hook and his Left Hand Band. They'd stayed on the dance floor until Captain Hook (Kyle Klunich, branch manager by day at Far West Pipefitters) closed out their set with a ragged if energetic version of Spirit's "I Got A Line On You." Trudy flicked the lights as soon as the applause died down and the crowd spilled into the parking lot, but Hope strolled over to a picnic bench beside the

train track and sat. A boy, a coworker named Luke, followed her over. He was curly-haired and rough-skinned, in love with Hope in a moony way that made her pity him and love him back, but not in the way he wanted. Far down the valley came the bleat of train. I am going to touch that train, said Hope. Me too, then, said Luke. The train entered town from the east. As the engine drew alongside the bench, Hope got up and walked toward it. Luke did not think she would keep walking. Later he would claim he called out to her just before--not with a finger but with her entire hand, palm flattened as if to protect rather than to risk--Hope touched the train.

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WHEN THE TRAIN—indifferent to the touch of anyone, even comely Hope—spun her toward and then away from its tracks, into the bed of recently laid gravel, Hope became a schoolgirl walking through an airport during the holiday crush, hugging a pillow to her chest. This is the way she used to imagine herself in an airport before, once in her sophomore year in college, she flew to New York to visit a boy. On that first flight and every other one, the plane had smelled of its bathrooms and everyone who spoke over the intercom had done so with the same intonation, right down to the slight lilt in the penultimate word of every sentence. Flying, which should have been so wondrous--lifted above the earth and settled in some force that swept you in only minutes from the still-frozen prairieland

of Minnesota to the early spring of Central Park--was so disappointing it was almost funny. Maybe this is what Hope was thinking as she was once again lifted above the earth. And maybe when she landed, it was not gravel she felt, but a fed-by-snowmelt lake across which she swam naked with a boy so skittish in his disrobing and so awkward in his breaststroke that he would be, forever in her mind, chaste. Though she slept with him. He was her first. He loved her in the sloppy unrestrained way that Luke did, and like Luke, she could not love him back, but for a different reason: because she was just a teenager. Imagining Hope swimming in a fluid crawl across the frigid lake, pursued by the gangly ungraceful boy who loved her, don't you remember how things were back then? Don't you remember how we did things just to get them out of the way? Don't you remember how it did not even bother us for more than a few weeks when we left each other behind like outgrown band posters still hanging on the walls of the bedrooms we had inhabited since birth?