

Letter Found on the Body

*A railroad accident took place a short time since near London, by which a Mr. Railing was killed, who it seems was an eccentric character.... The idea had taken firm possession of his mind that he was destined to die a violent death, and the most desirable one, in his view, was that caused by the explosion of a locomotive. He traveled, therefore, constantly, on the railroads.... There was not a station where he was not known. —“An Eccentric Will,” *Scientific American* (November 4, 1854)*

Dear train wreck, dear premonition, dear throat
of flames, I ride three different lines each day
and wait. I linger at every crossing I can
find. Dear head-on collision, dear white bomb
growing in the engine, what's a train but
the hot wind of catastrophe flying by? I need
the freight of me spilled. Dear warning flag
unraised, dear axle break, dear mutilate,
dear steep gradient in rain, dear tunnel
hiding a stalled train, which of you will it be? I'm not
scared, dear old nightmare. Once my car slipped
into dark folds of water. Once the sleeper
next to mine snapped in half like a twig. Dear
red eye burning in the night. Dear, dear surprise,
I bid you: come. The brake came off in my hand
long ago. I am the runaway train, the signalman
gone, buckled track, my head a thick, thick fog.
Show me my equal and opposite force. Barrel
towards me, dear monster, dear mangle, dear God.

Note: This poem takes its first three words and its epistolary structure from Kerrin McCadden's poem "Epistle: Leaving."