

They Wanted Songs about Love but Got Idle Chatter.

by Brett Fogarty

Granddad listened to Elvis and then he would talk more or less the entire night. “Mystery Train” was Sam Phillips’ song. Then Presley recorded it, but did it up different, sounded much faster so you could feel your hair blow back a bit.

My grandfather’s uncle was from Chicago and would ride a train seven hours every month into the city. He would walk out of the station different, put on a new face like a seasoned impressionist, bought groceries and walked to a house to lie in a larger bed next to a woman who cooed at him and also called him “daddy.”

He laughed and said, “Imagine that, two different daddies in two different places, can you imagine that?”

Different sight memory on a moving train- Buildings, ordered rows of suburban houses thinning to a flat line; it all passes by easy so please please let it be gone for good. Granddad switches, starts talking about processing plants, the depression and a decent crossword dictionary.

“Depression?” I ask

“Yeah, The Depression, dummy”, he says as he changes the record side.

All those limbs hanging out of crowded windows like laundry in the breeze, watching a city blur and slip away. I sit, stationary, feeling lean times in a different century but thankfully, the music comes back on. I dream, hanging out a moving window, grabbing at the bare trees and half-built buildings and pencil thin land. My grandfather remembers an eight letter word for “brawler”, then thousands of frayed, loose ends in every city tying themselves up into impossible knots.

