

Tracks

by Katrina Denza

The winter following their son's death, Mr. Kelly's wife became absorbed by the tracks that ran in back of their house. At any given hour in the night, he'd hear her in the next room, their son's old room where she now slept, shuffling through dresser drawers. He could picture her picking out worn jeans, her pink sweater with knobby wool beaded around the hem, see her sifting through dainty socks for a thick orange pair. She'd try to walk downstairs unnoticed, but he was already awake and the third stair from the bottom always gave her away. He knew where she was headed because the tracks poked their way into the few conversations they shared during the day. She'd tell him of an unusual pebble she found, or she'd show him a grayed sneaker someone had thrown by the side.

One night he followed her. A slice of moon illumined the ground; he stepped into her smaller prints left behind in the snow. There was no wind, just the kind of cold that snaked in between layers of clothing.

She sat in the middle of the railroad tracks, her knees pulled to her chin. She didn't look at him as he approached, just kept gazing toward the south.

"Aggie," he said. "What are you doing?"

She saw him then, smiled.

"I'm memorizing," she said. She got up and waved for him to stand next to her. "See?" She wrapped her arm around his waist and pointed in the direction she'd been staring.

Some of the trees bent over the rail line, their branches heavy with snow. One tall pine to their left appeared to hold the sliver of moon in its tip. The tracks, dark slashes in the snow, went on as far as he could see and pierced through the brawn of a mountain to the south. The view clawed its way into his conscience, and for a moment he *was* his son: a good enough football player to plan a future, an average student, a number of possible girlfriends, and the

compelling belief he was irredeemable. His midsection felt wrung. He sank to the snow-covered gravel in between iron tracks and glanced up at his wife.

She'd covered her head in a wool hat; a section of her hair drifted free against her cheek. "Beautiful, isn't it?" Her breath bloomed in front of her as she spoke.

