

Viola and the Passing of the Ghost Train
Jonathan Bellot

I still can't hear any damn train Violet Closebloom whose real name was Viola Cosbum said to Émile Erhard with a flail of her arms and reddening eyes under the blue swath of moon for they had gone to the beach to make love and hear the famous ghostly train that had become famous when the prime minister suddenly became able to hear it and soon everyone in the world or at least everyone on the island could hear it everyone but Violet Closebloom and it made her want to run across the wave crests tugging at her hair like a trichotillomaniac gorgon because Émile the asshole could see it and he was pointing with the still eyes of someone witnessing the impossible or as he'd said *There it is look I can see it on the water Vy-vy can you see it I dunno if I'm going mad hey are you okay* well obviously she wasn't because they hadn't been able to make love much less both see phantasmal locomotives because the goddamn crabs had come up from their holes in the sand and from under the sea-grape trees first one crab then two crabs then seven had come and it shouldn't have been much more than annoyance because they were soldier crabs in teeny wizard hats of shells but Violet had screamed when she saw them and tried to move but Émile must have thought he was simply doing the job better than usual because he pulled her back to him and kissed her nape right where she'd tied her hair up like a geisha and by then the crabs were swarming over her legs and she was kicking and shrieking and Émile still had no idea what was going on but that snake oil he'd bought from his brother who had bought it from a Carib *obeah* man must have *really* had all the aphrodisiacal excellence it had promised in a post-it label on the bottle and the more she cried out the better he felt until she told him to stop but by then her cries had drawn the attention of the great crabs beneath the sand and they'd had to evacuate as an exodus of red crustaceans with claws the size of coconuts had scuttled toward them like primeval spiders and after running down the beach with Violet wrapped in their towel and Émile clutching his genitals they sat breathless on a dune under the moon and it was then Émile saw the train oh that damn train well you see there had only been one railway on the island of Asphodel and it was now a rusty guano-slicked stop on pamphleted island tours after all it had only operated from 1910 to 1913 by the Rum & Cane Corporation Ltd so when people began going on about hearing the horns and *chug-hissss-chug-chug-hissss* of a great locomotive going by no one knew if those hearing the train were mad or if there were something demonic going on of course the priests of the island were called in but they dismissed it as superstition of all things and it became another island legend like the legends all places even space stations and MMO communities have *man* you should have seen the prime minister he would put a hand to his ear at the end of some of his speeches to pretend he heard it and people would laugh which was good because everything he said was unfunny but nonetheless in recent months there had been a resurgence of interest in the legend because Father Dolt who was at least a century old claimed he had heard it himself and that it was no mere locomotive but a heavenly train in every sense of the word but only the spiritually privileged the elite could hear it and suddenly of course the prime minister could describe clearly each sound it made while the rest of the crowd struggled to hear and Violet cringed whenever she saw her coworkers at the coconut products

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factory putting hands to their ears *So crude* she would mutter *So crude* because Violet my gentle flower wanted so much to get the hell out of Asphodel and go to America maybe even Europe and yet she was stuck in a factory making fucking coconut soap and coconut cream the latter of which was actually good for fucking but regardless it was so insulting to her to have to live where she did which was the second floor of a three-floor rectangle of a building as gray and tall as a forgotten man's epitaph it was all Violet and her mother a woman with a face wrinkled like a banyan and gentle eyes could afford and Violet could not hate her mother but she seemed to hate her anyway Violet hated such unpunctuated confinement hated living in a place where no one was open to anything from abroad unless it was from another Caribbean island though she had to admit the men were good at sex but she kept telling herself she would never go back to having sex with locals and then she'd found Émile who'd come from a French island but had been born in Treasure Island Florida and he was the smallest man she had ever been with and *boy* did he ever drone on and on in unending sentences but she simply retreated into herself as she had learnt to do being an only child a tactic that Émile could not argue about because she employed it even in arguments but he stayed with her he said she was the most beautiful woman in all the islands he'd lived in she was so light-skinned that she saw herself as a true foreigner in the mirror and that made her smile except her hair when unprocessed was a mass of dark springs and her lips and hips were so full and that drove Émile wild or so he claimed but she wanted to reduce both lips and hips also she'd made her hair straight as a Japanese woman's at almost all times she could not be alone with herself too long though but had to be a one-girl parade and anyway if she was alone too *too* much even with her mother Violet would start to hear the chilling flap of invisible wings so she would stick to others and Émile had said he would go back to Treasure Island one day when he got the money he was in Asphodel now because he had too much family here and while Violet thought that made no sense she waited and saved up none of her own money because it had to go towards keeping herself from looking like anything but *difference* in fact she even had to make extra money by giving her ex-boyfriends bedroom time when *clueless* Émile was off somewhere *Why can't you go somewhere with a name like that* she'd said *A name like what* he'd replied with his umber face crinkling and she'd rejoined *Forget it you're just as in love with here as everyone else* but all in all things had been going pretty well really supercalifragilisticexpialidociously I'd say or at least until everything had all gone downhill which was when Émile became able to sense the train like everyone else and soon Violet was the only one who could not hear or see it even little schoolchildren on the bus she took to work as they had no car were talking all about spectral *obeah* trains filled with Raphael cherubs with flapping wings and Violet had no one to hang around with except her boyfriend and ex-boyfriends oh how she hated herself for not being able to sense the train after that *piece of shit* Émile had been able to sense it for an entire week and I think she just wanted to prove to him and everyone that it was shit all a bunch of defecation they were getting excited about if the train even existed and you know what she thought it was probably just the typical mass hysteria of such people but anyway she had decided to combine a chance to see the train with sex on the beach and *oh romantic sweetie* Émile had brought a lovely French-looking blanket in the colors of the elusive Waldo and how wonderful the moonlight was it was like being on a distant island like Capri maybe oh *fuck* but then things had gone badly *litotes* and now the train was

going across the water but Violet could neither see nor hear anything and in that moment she felt absolutely insane so she decided to really run across the water and she ran out far *hahahaha* she was going like Jesus or maybe like Mary Magdalene and then the next thing she knew she was on her back on the beach with a great sea urchin sticking out of her left foot and Émile was cradling her head and yelling at her *Oh my God you stupid idiot why would you do that I'm sorry I love you I'm calling for help I think seawater helps let me put some on the cut* and maybe it was the thing sticking out of her *was it real* but Violet knew then it didn't matter if she ever saw the train through a tear in her chrysalis for she'd been running toward a ghost and what she *did* know was that, be it because of the thing in her or something else, she saw that there was nothing around her but dark, and she heard a faint sound, like harp strings on wind.

It was an empty sound, the sound of a great unfilled world.

Dry, cool, dustlike – like the voice not of elegant Death but of Her little brother, a thing with no shadow. A connection she simply saw in her mind.

It was pretty to Violet somehow.

She blinked, and it occurred to her suddenly that there had never been a train to anyone but herself, and that the one with that sad empty voice was its conductor. A key, it seemed somehow, to life, a little oddity that would allow her to stand and spread herself far, wherever she was, to never be confined again.

She realised after a moment she was stroking her chest like a stringed instrument.

Oh, she thought. *Um*.

And then she knew no more for a while, but it was just as well, for she wouldn't have wanted to know anything more than that, and I don't think she was ready for me to come myself just yet.