



## A Woman Makes a Cardboard Train

by Jay McKenzie

A woman has collected a cast of boxes that once housed saucepan sets or plungers or brushes to reach the deepest nibs of mouldy bottles or bulk shower gel or a Dutch oven in which to slowly suffocate meat. She surveys them with a dispassionate blink, arranges them in a line. She crouches beside one which housed a washing machine, measuring herself against it.

She grips a pair of scissors, rusted now but functional. She splits the legs with her finger and thumb and a confetti of ochre dust peppers her jeans. She is methodical, slicing with precision into lines demarcated only in her head. She punches out rectangular spaces to create the windows. Panoramic views from the driver's cab. She attaches a chimney to cough toxic fumes up into the air. A hungry boiler to swallow fuel. She fits the carriages together, attaches them to the cab. *Here is the buffet car. Here is the dancing lounge. Here a jasmine-scented sleeper car.*

When finished, she decorates. She chooses colours unsettling and confronting in their boldness. Gold, a thrumming violet, a cerise oozing suggestion, a dripping spleen-red. *These are not train colours, say watchers, how confident! how trashy!* The woman paints on, a slash here, a flick there.

While it is drying she surveys her work. A ghost of a smile suggests that she is satisfied and she climbs into the driver's cab and dons a cap, angling an elbow out of the window. *Where do you think you're going?* shriek the watchers, all shaved-marble eyed and steaming fury. *You've got no tracks!* The woman throws back her head, laughs, and steam rises from the funnel. She sounds the whistle and doesn't look back as she chugs away in her cardboard train.