

## Rusty Fears 5 - Derailing

### Content Warnings:

- Being Haunted
- Paranoia
- Anxiety & compulsive behaviour
- Body horror
- Discussions of: auditory hallucinations
- SFX: low continuous drones, high pitched tones

### [Show Theme – Intro]

Derailing by Josefin Berntsson, read by Jonathan Sims

There was an old railway near my house. Not that I actually knew how old it was, but I had thought of it as old ever since I moved in. Back then, I thought the expression had a kind of charm to it.

The first summer I didn't really pay it any mind. I had plenty of work to do to get the house in order, as it was a bit of a renovation project, and the garden even more so. But I still heard it, ever so often; placed beyond the trees at the edge of my garden, the railway would always be well out of sight, but the metallic rushing sound of a train passing by was hard to miss.

It wasn't until late autumn that I fully realised that I had never actually seen any of the trains that passed. Now, with the trees stripped of their leaves, I had a direct line of sight to the railway from my bedroom window, but not once did I manage to be looking in the right direction when the train came. I did try, mind you, once I noticed. Several times I'd be on the other side of the house when I heard the telltale sound, and rush over to see if I could catch a glimpse of the train itself, but it was always gone before I could see it. Eventually I stopped bothering, and once winter fully hit, the trains stopped coming at all.

I started hearing the sound of it again come spring, but by then the trees were lush and green again, and once more obscured my view. I could have gone across to the other side of them, but I wasn't so invested in this trainspotting

that I could be bothered to, especially not with how irregular the trains tended to be. Sure, they would run mostly in the evenings, but I had better things to do than to just sit for hours and wait for a train that might not even show up.

They became just background noise for me after that, and remained so until summer rolled around. A railway is always louder in the summer, somehow, to the point where it forces you to pause any conversation you might have until the train has passed by. The day my friend Sarah was visiting me was no exception, though she did say something that no-one had said before:

“I didn’t know any trains ran by here.”

“Well, they do,” I replied with a shrug. “Almost every day.”

“But where do they go?” she asked. “There’s no station in town.”

I...had no answer to this. In fact, I was a bit thrown by the fact that I had never even considered it myself.

I managed to mostly put it out of my mind for the duration of Sarah’s visit, but I couldn’t let it go. The train only passed once more while she was there, and I didn’t miss the way Sarah frowned at the sound. It *was* a train, wasn’t it? The way the sound built and built until it became almost deafening, only to then fade away into the distance again couldn’t be anything else, could it?

When Sarah left I almost immediately went to look for my house on a map. I found it easily. There was my property, with the buildings marked just as well as the small road winding its way up from the main thoroughfare. But no railroad. I could see the stretch of land where it should have been drawn, but there was nothing. I had to look miles away to find where the nearest railway was marked, but that didn’t make any sense.

And yet, as I stood there with the map right in front of my eyes, I heard the sound of the train again.

Frustrated and itching for some answers, I then did something I had never actually done before. I went outside, and I crossed my yard. When I reached the trees at the edge of it, I didn’t stop, but instead brushed my way through their thick leaves. There were more of them than I had initially thought, but eventually I made it through to the other side, and onto the railway.

Quite literally – my foot stepped onto the rails as soon as I emerged from the trees.

The first thought I had then was that it was dangerous, that I didn't know when the next train might arrive and that I wouldn't want to be on the rails when it did. But as soon as I could think past that, I began to realise that there was no way a train had actually passed through there recently. The rails were well overgrown, you see, with grass and vines reaching up and around them. In some places, even roots had begun to overtake them, which would have led to a certain derailment of any train that attempted to pass. Overhead, the tree branches were thick and gnarled and reached almost all the way across the rails, effectively blocking the path of any vehicle save maybe a bike.

As I looked up, I could see that there were no wires either. Even if a train had been able to pass by here, it couldn't have been an electric one, and yet what I had heard had definitely not been the steady chugging of a steam engine.

All my concerns of danger had passed by then, and I was just confused and annoyed. None of this made any sense, but I desperately wanted it to. So I did the one thing I could think of, and began to follow the rails.

It wasn't an easy walk, given nature's attempts at reclaiming the old structure, and it felt like I walked for hours. At no point did the railway turn into something that might even resemble something functional, and eventually it just stopped. The trees gave way to a field, full of crops almost ready for harvest, and the rails stopped with the treeline. As I stood there, gazing out at the golden wheat, I thought that maybe I had just imagined the train all this time. I didn't know why I would imagine such a thing, but what other explanation could there be?

And then I heard it again. Faint, and far away in the distance, was the familiar sound of a train approaching.

Determined, I remained where I was. I had no intention of leaving these rails until I could actually see the train approaching. Except it never came. The sound rose, only to fade before it could really reach its peak. Was there a second railroad, perhaps? Further away?

No. It had to be my imagination, it had to be. Besides, dusk was setting in, and I hadn't thought to bring a torch with me. Resigned, I began to walk back towards my house. I decided I would follow the railway in the other direction the following day, and maybe once I had found out that that was another dead end, my mind would stop playing these tricks on me.

The terrain didn't offer much in the way of landmarks, but I think I was well over halfway back home when the train sounded again. It was definitely closer now, sounding much more like I knew it to, though still not quite right. Not loud enough.

My heart was beating hard and fast by this point, partially from the long walk and partially from nerves. Still, I pressed on. I just wanted to get home and get this over with.

It was dark by the time I returned, and I had only the moonlight to go by. I couldn't see my house from this side of the trees, but there was a small clearing on the opposite side of the tracks that I recognised from earlier. I was about to push through the trees when I heard it again: Metal against metal. That long, drawn out, discordant note that started faintly but then began to grow, and grow, and grow.

The train was here.

Out of instinct and self-preservation, I threw myself into the branches and off of the tracks, holding my breath as I waited for the train to pass.

Of course, there was no train. But the noise didn't come from inside my mind either.

As the sound crept towards its crescendo, I could see something step out into the clearing. It was large, easily taller than me even as it walked on all fours. Its limbs were taugth and stretched, and large, thick spikes protruded along its spine. It didn't have a face, only a mouth which opened wider and wider as it screamed out the anguished cry of a train rushing over rails.

Slowly – on hands or paws, I couldn't tell – it crossed the clearing. In the glint of the moonlight, I could see that the spikes on its back looked like rails, but jagged and bent. The creature didn't pause, didn't seem to listen or look or

sniff the air, if it could even do either of those things. It just kept on walking, as its roar gradually faded into the distant singing of rails, before going silent altogether.

Only well after it had disappeared on the other side of the clearing did I dare to move, and ran through the trees and across my yard and into my house as fast as I could. I didn't manage to sleep that night, no matter how badly I told myself that it wasn't real, that what I had seen was just some bizarre trick of the light.

Three nights later, I spotted the creature walking through my garden, making its way over my lawn with heavy, lumbering steps. The morning after, there was a single railroad spike lying in the grass. I was too scared to touch it, at first. But after a few hours of it doing absolutely nothing, I finally caved in and grabbed it, and threw it into the trees.

Only a few days after that, I saw the first bit of railway beginning to reach its way into my garden. It was partially hidden by the vegetation at the edges, and I probably would have missed it if I hadn't been paying such close attention to the treeline, but there it was. Rusty, but solid bits of rail, stretching towards me. I tried to get rid of them, tried to dig and chop and hack through them, but the iron was firm and sturdy. I finally gave up when my shovel cracked, and instead I began to cover the rails with a thick layer of soil. I doubted that it would solve anything, but I just couldn't stand to look at them. After a few more days I found another pair of railroad spikes, this time sticking up from the earth like sprouting plants.

I knew I couldn't stay, and I certainly didn't want to. I put my house up for sale, and hoped with all that I had that the creature wouldn't find me before I could leave. I was lucky, and managed to be indoors every time it showed up. In fact, I barely went outside at all, and certainly not after dusk. I saw it though, through the windows. It would stalk through my garden, searching, waiting. Sometimes it dug up the rails I had painstakingly buried, and sometimes more were left there in the morning.

I did my best to cover the rails when I showed the house, and I must have succeeded well enough, but by the time I managed to sell it they were almost reaching the front door.

It didn't feel good to leave the house to new owners, who had no idea what was slowly crawling its way towards their home, but I told myself I didn't have any choice. As soon as I got the house sold I moved as far away as I could, to a place where I knew for sure there would be no railroads.

I couldn't avoid them entirely, of course, not if I wanted to be able to ever visit any larger cities. But for the next couple of years I at least only ever heard trains that I could see, or that I knew were supposed to run. That fact calmed me somewhat, if not entirely.

Still, a part of me always knew that I wouldn't be able to avoid it forever. A few weeks ago, I found the tracks in a park a few blocks away from my current home. They were already overgrown, but I'm certain the rails weren't there when I first moved here. And then yesterday I finally heard it again – a train passing in the distance, no matter how impossible.

I've thought of moving again, but how far can I run? I don't even know what it wants, just that it can't possibly be anything pleasant. I suppose at least this way I'll finally get some sort of answer to the mystery.

All there is left for me to do now, is to stay and wait for its arrival.

### **[Show Theme – Outro]**

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