

by Katey Schultz

SOMETHING COMING

with art by Lori Vrba

The train tracks ending in Lauren's backyard hadn't been sparked by a moving rail car in years. Even at twelve, Lauren knew she lived next to something failed, something meant to conjure possibility, travel. Instead, those tracks sank into the ground as if into a grave. What stayed close in Lauren's ears all these years – tracks sinking deeper, stubby grass sprouting through the cross-ties, her world getting messier as more of the get-out got in – what stayed close, was the tug-hum echo of a coal-fired

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engine moving heavy, headlong, hell-bent on her house. Nothing she could do. The repeated crash, the train like an ax busting her house into splinters. That echo was like a friend, ringing in her ear. Like a promise – chug chug, *some thing*. Like a – chug chug *come ing*. Like a prayer she didn't even have to say out loud – chug chug *to get you*. *Something coming. Something coming.*

In this way, an odd comfort formed the backdrop of Lauren's days, so that by the time she entered Toten Middle School she no longer felt alarmed by her vivid imagination. She accepted it as fate, whatever *it* might come to mean.

One Sunday afternoon, Cindy Washburn suggested they dig up a rail and use it as a balance beam to practice gymnastics. Lauren's attention caught. Their final for the gymnastics

KATEY SCHULTZ is the author of the short story collection *Flashes of War* (2013; reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2014) and the forthcoming novel *Still Come Home*, both published by Loyola University Maryland's Apprentice House Press. She earned her MFA in Writing from Pacific University and founded Maximum Impact, a mentorship service that provides transformative online curricula for serious writers. She received the 2019 Linda Flowers Literary Award from the North Carolina Humanities Council and has been awarded writing fellowships in eight different states. She lives in Celo, NC.

Final judge Ben Fountain explained his selection of this story for the Doris Betts Fiction Prize: "The experience depicted in 'Something Coming' – that of a young girl's coming of age – rings true at every level. The uncertainty, the excitement, the very real dangers, it's all here, rendered in vivid, nuanced prose that does justice to the complexity and wonder of these several days in twelve-year-old Lauren's life. The voice never falters, nor does the writer's sure handling of exposition and scene. The temporal shift at the story's conclusion is the kind of daring leap that's the mark of a first-rate writer, and serves to, if I might borrow a metaphor from one of this fine story's narrative lines, 'stick the landing.' 'Something Coming' pleased this reader very much."