

Friend in the Dark

“I’m here. How much longer? Okay. Yeah. Uh-huh.”

Putting down the phone, Leo shook his head in exasperation. A strong gust blew by, nearly knocking him off balance. He put both hands on his flimsy umbrella and prayed that it would stay intact.

The flimsy string lights put up for the holiday season blinked helplessly toward Leo through the rain. All the other passengers of the train had been picked up, so the parking lot was completely empty save for him. Leo decided to take out his phone instead of gazing upon the sad scene, scrolling mindlessly through his Instagram feed to distract himself. He bit back the urge to sneeze.

As he scrolled, his shoulder itched, and he tried to ignore the feeling because he really did not have enough hands to scratch it. But when he glanced down at his shoulder, he saw that familiar creature struggling to climb onto his jacket, constantly slipping and yelping as its tiny claws refused to latch onto the denim.

Somehow, the little dark creature managed to hop onto Leo’s shoulder. It was about the weight of a stapler. “Whatcha waiting for?” it chirped.

Leo exhaled. “The train, duh,” he fibbed. “I’m at a train station, so I would be waiting for a train, right? It’s probably going to come soon.” He did not have the energy to deal with the creature right now. Better to lie to make it go away.

“Why are you waiting for it?”

“I’m going somewhere.”

“Where?”

“None of your business. Go away now, the train will come any minute.”

The creature giggled, each laugh like tiny bells clanging against each other. “No can do, I’m obligated to stay here with you until this train comes!”

Leo shook his head and kept scrolling, attempting to ignore the creature pawing at his shoulder. He saw vacation pics of golden beaches, ski resorts, and first-class flights. Meanwhile, the creature sounded like it was nibbling on something. Leo hoped his jacket was not being eaten.

As the minutes dragged on, his phone decided to stop registering his thumb. Probably due to all the rainwater on the screen, Leo thought. Giving up, Leo shoved his soaked phone into his pocket. He turned his attention to the little creature. He tried flicking the creature off his shoulder, but before he could make contact, it leaped into the air and hovered, like an annoying mosquito.

“Why are you always here to bother me?” Leo sighed. “I see you too much these days.”

The creature zipped around, its dark furry body shimmering through the rain. It looked like a tiny cat, with a set of triangular ears and a long tail, but it was too small for Leo to make out any facial features. “I’m just here to keep you company.”

Leo attempted to swat it away again. “Well, it’s not making me feel much better.”

“When’s that train coming?” the creature laughed as it dodged Leo's hand. “It doesn’t seem to be arriving!”

“Fine, I’m not waiting for the train! Do you just like torturing me? My friend is late. They overslept. They don’t give a crap that I’m waiting in this rain. Is that what you want to hear?” Leo realized he was shouting. He glanced around at the parking lot to make sure no one was around.

The creature giggled. “Don’t put the blame on me if you’re uncomfortable.” It tilted its head and burst into a series of maniacal meows.

Leo clicked his tongue. “You are nothing but a nuisance.”

“You know you’ll never get rid of me. The holiday season is rife with moments like these.”

“You’re surprisingly smart for your tiny head,” Leo said.

Finally, a pair of headlights broke through the rain, old tires splashing muddy water onto the sidewalk.

Leo gave the creature a triumphant look. “My ride is here, see? Goodbye!”

The creature landed on the ground, leaving tiny wet pawprints on the pavement. It looked up at Leo for a moment, before bursting into loud barks. “See you soon!” It scuttled away, tail in between its legs, laughing and giggling like always.

Leo rolled his eyes and got into the car he had doubted would arrive. Cars were uncertain, depending on their driver. Unlike a train, which might be late, but would always come.

