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Request Stop

by Nick Barrett

Soft summer rain dusted the tall pine trees and leafy ferns grew thick around the lochside on a sleepy Sunday morning as a couple, in their early thirties, dragged wheeled suitcases into the old railway station shelter.

Two teenagers, a boy and a girl, tutted at the interruption, unwrapped themselves from one another and walked out another door.

“Pardon our intrusion, bloody ingrates. Bloody Highland weather, bloody midges everywhere and nowhere open in this godforsaken dump, can’t even get a seat on a bench because of a crazy man sitting there with a goose! Crazy bloody country,” the woman spat, looking out of the window and sharing her passion with the loch and the heather covered hills and the overhead telephone lines that paralleled the twin railway tracks as much as with her companion.

“This isn’t exactly the Highlands, we’re no more than about 50 miles from Glasgow,” he tried to explain, with a smile.

“I don’t know what you’re smiling about, bloody useless car, trust you to hire from some back street shyster.”

“They’ll collect it, it should be safe in that pub car park.”

“Bloody Highland pub opening hours, they’re open half the night but you can’t even get a cup of coffee off them till about lunchtime. What a country.”

“The train should be about half an hour, I think,” he managed to squeeze in, reading off a peeling timetable on the wall, surrounded by faded prints advertising Maid of the Loch trips and the claim that there was a Scottish Riviera and that Oban was on it. “Only one to Glasgow on a Sunday. It’s a request stop.”

“What the hell’s a request stop? You have to put your hand out or something for a train to stop up here? There must be an app, or a website. Oh I forgot, no bloody reception round here.”

“I’ll deal with it, it must be simple enough, nothing here telling you what to do though.”

“You’d better deal with it, I need to reach Glasgow to catch that London flight. I can’t call up to postpone an interview with some lame excuse about a train that didn’t stop in the middle of the bloody Highlands. I need that job or we can’t go to New York.”

“Don’t worry about it, it’ll be fine.”

“Where’d those two youngsters vanish to? Could have asked them. Better go back to the pub and ask that kilted idiot with the giant goose on the bench if the trains are running all right. I didn’t like the look of him, what’s he doing with a goose sitting beside him anyway, I can’t stand poultry.”

“Yeah, you certainly get some strange people round here. Look, the pub’s a ten minute walk in the rain, and ten minutes back, I might miss the train.”

“You’re not even sure there will be a train and you don’t know how this request stop malarkey works, so hadn’t you better go find out?”

The teenagers had returned to the shelter, watching the man walk slowly back leading a goose on a leash. The girl seemed to enjoy telling him the woman had got on the train. He picked up his weekend bag that held their tickets for the flight. “All’s well then,” he said, smiling his thanks.