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The Station Waiting Room

by Lawrence Howard

It's February and although it's just stopped raining, the breeze has a cutting chill to it. Having rushed up the steps and onto the platform with seemingly moments to spare I find that there's no train waiting and the sign on the platform says "Train Cancelled". Seeing that the next one isn't due for nearly an hour and with the platform at Haywards Heath channelling the wind into something likely to cause hypothermia, I decide to go into the waiting room.

Miraculously there's one seat left, clearly next to the person no one wants to sit next to. He's in his early 20's, probably a student, short hair, earphones plugged in, slouched backwards with his legs splayed wide open wearing baggy jeans with his right leg bouncing up and down nervously. He moves along slightly as I sit down next to him. I can hear the sound from his headphones but not quite well enough to work out what he's listening to.

I automatically reach into my pocket for my smart phone except that today it isn't so smart. The battery's dead because I've not charged it. It's funny how awkward it is nowadays to sit somewhere with other people and not have something to look at. Instead I end up by people watching, while trying to avoid eye contact.

There's quite a range of people in here. It's a weekday so there aren't any school children. Just a range of adults from the music loving student on my left to a business woman on my right wearing a formal raincoat but with gold sequined high heeled shoes which seem totally out of character with the rest of her attire. Opposite me is a man in his 40's wearing a donkey jacket and muddy heavily scuffed steel toecap boots.

A few seats along from him is a very tall man, probably 6ft 5, slim with dark hair wearing a charcoal coloured suit, white shirt and dark pink tie. He's typing furiously onto his Blackberry and looks very much like a lawyer. However, as I look closer I notice something strange with these four people. I'm puzzling over what it is when I feel an almighty jolt go right through me.

Immediately I realise that I've been asleep on the train and it's just come into my station. I jump up, dash off the train and onto the platform. As I walk along I notice a guard signalling to the driver that all the doors are now shut. Although he's wearing a guard's uniform it's the man I just dreamt of in the donkey jacket. As I walk towards the exit I notice a young man collecting tickets.

Different clothes but it's the student who was wearing the headphones. I'm thinking about this as a man pushes past me on the platform causing me to drop my ticket. I'm about to shout at him but freeze when I realise it's the lawyer with the Blackberry.

As I bend down to pick up my ticket someone steps on my hand keeping their foot on it so I can't stand up. It's a gold sequined shoe...