

Rusty stared up at the clear blue sky as *many* thoughts swirled in his head, wondering about what he had just seen and trying to distract his mind from overthinking.

His knee had gotten better from the accident he was in with the trucks after being in check-up with Victor, and no one suspected it was C.B's fault in the incident, but it was the tracks that were slightly buckled instead.

But he had just seen a *human*.

Admittedly, Rusty was afraid of encountering that human again for fear of being harmed, but, at the same time, he wanted to see her again.

While she had the chance, she did not attack him, and, well, she was unexpectedly strong for even being a woman.

Then... *who* or what is she?

Rusty groaned in annoyance at all the thoughts piling up in his head as he facepalmed.

He wanted to relax after having a hard day working in the shunting yard, but his mind was still overthinking about the strangeness he had seen.

Half of him just wants to yank his brain out of his skull and tell it to stop overthinking to let him relax, but that would be a one-way ticket to death.

A *stupid* one-way ticket to death.

Rusty sat up from where he was slumped and rubbed his face, not even bothered by him rubbing more dirt on his face with his hands.

What should he do?

He could not tell any of his friends or Poppa, or they would think he had gone crazy or gotten himself into trouble again.

On the other hand, they would panic and think he had brought a vermin into their land from the humans' side, deciding to blame him for kidnapping it from its land.

A shudder went down Rusty's spine at the memory, back when he was only a steam locomotive in Germany and going through a *horrible* transformation.

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*Back then, Rusty was a simple LMS Stanier Class 4P 3-Cylinder 2-6-4T who worked in Germany as a coal mine shunter to rearrange the trucks to be delivered to other locomotives to have coal in their tenders.*

*However, Rusty's conductor switched him from working at a coal mine in Germany to moving to a different country because of trade.*

*He worked hard in the U.S., where everything was going smoothly, despite a few bumps here and there with slow work and hints of diesels coming to age.*

*Until that Golden Crystal Infection exploded from that crystal mine in a far-off city and infected Rusty with no notice.*

*At first, he stopped working in the morning with the extra driver and fireman after his original driver and fireman called in sick because of the looming infection.*

*They pulled Rusty out of service after discovering what had happened to him and labeled him 'infected,' which caused him to be left alone to deal with it himself.*

*It consumed his entire body as a week went by with no one by his side during the transformation, and soon, Rusty woke up as a being instead of the himself that he used to remember.*

*Rusty panicked after realizing what had happened to his body and wanted everything to change back to what he used to be, but was taken in by Poppa when he had no one else to turn to, who used to be a Union Pacific 844.*

*With the looming threat of humans hunting down transformed steam, diesel, or any vehicle, Poppa and the others who were mutated by the Golden Crystal Infection escaped from the place to head somewhere where there were no humans around.*

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That memory still haunts Rusty as he shudders again, remembering how terrified he was at the thought of him and Poppa being found and hunted down by humans for being an infected steam locomotive.

As Rusty thought to himself about everything that was now piling up in his head, a hand suddenly placed on his shoulder as a voice spoke, "There you are, Rusty!"

Rusty almost jumped out of his seat when he felt the hand and heard someone speak, whirling around to see who it was.

But he soon relaxed after seeing that it was from a friend of his, who was coming over to see him.

“Thomas!” Rusty sighed in relief as he placed a hand against his chest. “You should stop that, or you’ll give someone a firebox attack!”

Standing behind him was a young man with fair skin and short, semi-messy, jet-black hair with light blue eyes.

He wears a light blue cap with a light blue jacket with yellow lining, and underneath is a white, short-sleeved v-collar shirt.

On the collar of his jacket, he has the number one pin on it.

He also wore a pair of blue pants with a single red line down the sides and black shoes.

“Sorry, Rusty,” Thomas sheepishly smiled. “I came over here to talk to you about something.”

“About what?” Rusty asked, covering the suspicious tone of his voice as he looked confused.

“It’s from Jerome,” Thomas began, sitting next to Rusty. “He said that he saw something blue and small running into the forest from your crash site. Do you know what it is?”

Rusty felt surprised that *Jerome* had seen that tiny human but was half relieved that he had not had a closer look at her.

Half of himself wanted to demand Thomas to give more answers about where the human went, but the other half repressed his expression so as not to cause any harm to the being.

“No, not really,” Rusty lied, not wanting to scare the poor human further. “I was busy with my hurting knee rather than noticing what it was.”

“Ah,” Thomas said with a nod after Rusty lied. “That’s a shame. I hoped it was an animal.”

“Why?” Rusty curiously asked, glancing over at Thomas.

“Because animals are cute!” Thomas remarked as he had stars in his eyes.

“Ferdinand kept telling me he, Bash, and Dash kept encountering bears in the forest where they work! I wonder if they are really *that* soft like teddy bears?”

‘Don’t even think about that, Thomas,’ Rusty thought after Thomas explained, not telling him it is *dangerous* to get close to a bear.

He remembered Poppa always telling him and the Freight about not getting too close to animals or else they would attack.

At first, Rusty was skeptical about listening to Poppa’s words about avoiding animals... until Henry exclaimed that he nearly lost his goods train of food to a bear and was almost attacked.

So... now Rusty understands why bears and other animals would be dangerous to them.

Rusty seemed to daze Thomas out as he continued to talk about meeting other animals, still thinking about that human he had encountered.

Is she like an animal compared to him?

But she did scramble away when C.B. appeared with the cranes to help him and his crashed trucks.

Thomas stopped talking after noticing that Rusty was not listening to him, seeing that he looked distracted by something.

“Are you okay, Rusty?” Thomas politely asked, snapping Rusty out of his thoughts. “Is there something wrong?”

“No, I have a lot in my mind,” Rusty shook his head, still lying to Thomas about the human being, before standing up. “I need to push some trucks, and you need to pull some carriages too.”

Thomas instantly perked after hearing Rusty respond before scrambling onto his feet, exclaiming, “Oh, the express! I forgot about that!”

He quickly ran off as Rusty chuckled, amused at how unique Thomas’ personality was compared to anyone else’s.

But that thought of the human still lurked in Rusty’s mind, annoying him about why that thought was still around.

After thinking to himself, Rusty nodded after making a decision in his mind as he went back to work.

To find that human when he has time off.

But while Thomas was talking to Rusty, C.B. was hiding behind a water tower near where they were and overheard their conversation thanks to his headphone set that could pick up sounds.

C.B. had a curious expression on his face after listening to the entire conversation between Thomas and Rusty.

He removed his hand from his headset as he thought to himself, slightly smirking as he placed a finger on his chin.

‘A small blue thing running in the forest where Rusty had crashed?’ C.B. curiously thought.

That was where C.B. and Rusty were when he helped Rusty pull the goods train to be delivered to Fairytale Station, even crashing when one of the trucks’ brakes gave out.

‘This is all gettin’ interestin’!’ C.B. thought to himself with a smirk as he pretended to walk past the water tower. ‘I wonder what it could be!’