The Audition Without a Song



Leo had borrowed his cousin's drumsticks and spent a week copying a song from an online video. The drummer made it look easy. Leo could play the beginning, but whenever the music became faster, his hands seemed to belong to two different people.

The school band was holding auditions on Wednesday. Singers, guitarists and anyone who played another instrument could try. Leo had already written his name on the list. Crossing it out would be simple. Explaining why to his younger brother, who had helped him practise on kitchen pans, would be harder.

On the bus that morning, he listened to the song one last time. Then his headphones stopped working. Without the music, he heard other sounds: the engine beneath his feet, the doors opening with a hiss, rain tapping against the glass. His fingers began repeating the pattern on his knees.

Outside the music room, Leo could hear a guitarist playing beautifully. His stomach tightened. Inside, a girl with a bass guitar was helping the music teacher. "What are you going to play?" the teacher asked when his turn came. Leo looked at the drumsticks. "I'm not sure anymore."

The teacher pointed to a practice drum, but Leo was looking at a wooden stool beside it. "Could I use that too? And the empty tin on your table?" She checked

that the objects were safe to use, then moved them closer. The girl with the bass raised an eyebrow. Leo nearly changed his mind.

He started with the low sound of the stool: the bus engine. The metal tin became the rain. A light tap along the table's edge marked the doors closing. At first, he played too quickly. He stopped, breathed and began again. This time, the pattern held together. The bass player listened, then added four quiet notes.

They repeated the rhythm until the teacher lifted her hand. Leo expected her to ask for a proper song. Instead, she asked where the idea had come from. "The number sixteen bus," he said. The bass player laughed. "I take that one too. Yours sounds much better."

Leo did not become the band's drummer that afternoon. The teacher invited him to the next practice and said they would work on keeping a steady beat. Walking home, he recorded the sound of a loose gate in the wind. He still wanted to learn the difficult song. But beside its title in his notebook, he wrote another one: "Wednesday Morning, Bus Sixteen." This time, he already knew how it started.



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