

Approaching Danger

by [Armando Simón](#) (March 2023)



The Railway Bridge at Argenteuil, Claude Monet, 1874

One day in late spring, a couple of friends in their early thirties decided to go out of town and leisurely hike in the woods close by. Their names were Felix and Nestor and they strolled through a worn path looking at birds, insects, trees and bushes, enjoying the occasional breeze and the sounds and smells of nature and the absence of the noise that is unfortunately tied to civilization, noise like honking horns, nagging wives, construction, and “rap” being blasted out of car windows. From time to time, they would comment on something interesting that caught their eyes, though most of

the time they walked without speaking much since they were men.

The two walked content for almost two hours at which point they came across railroad tracks. They had known for some time that there was a railway line somewhere in the vicinity because on a couple of occasions during previous hikes they had heard the sound of the locomotive, but this time they encountered the tracks, and both felt a small degree of pleasure. Standing on foot on railroad tracks was a little out of the ordinary.

They decided to walk along the tracks. First, Felix balanced himself on one rail, lost his balance, then it was Nestor's turn, they both balanced on the rails until they began walking on the gray limestone rocks.

"I forgot what's the name of this," Felix muttered, motioning up and down the track, but obviously referring to the stones, "track something or other."

"It's track bed or track ballast. One or the other," Nestor responded. "I remember that in some way they hold these rails together. Don't see how, since the rocks are loose." He shrugged.

It was uncomfortable walking over the uneven stones, so they alternated with balancing on the rails, walking on the stones and on the wooden planks. They saw a dandelion somehow growing between the rocks. A little further along, they saw the smashed skeleton of a small animal.

"Poor critter didn't get out of the way in time," Felix surmised. "Rabbit?"

"Nah. If it'd been a rabbit he would've ran away. Besides," he pointed, "no incisors."

"Racoon, then."

“Or possum,” Felix countered. “If he played dead on seeing the train, he was in for a rude awakening.”

“Yeah,” he chuckled.

They continued their trek and presently they heard the lazy, mournful whistle of the train.

Hoooot.

“Train’s coming,” Nestor said, realizing he was stating the obvious. On an impulse, he bent down and pressed his ear to the rail to see if he could detect the train’s vibrations. He did and, amused, informed Felix.

“Uh-huh. You know, my grandfather used to put a coin, a quarter, on the rail, then wait for the train to pass by and the coin would be flat, real flat. We had to wait until it cooled off because the coin would get hot when it got flattened.”

“Really? Cool! Maybe we should try that here.” Nestor had never heard of someone doing that.

“Yeah.”

They could hear the train getting closer, around the bend way behind them, but they walked on.

A few minutes passed and they could see the locomotive slowly rounding the bend.

Hoooot.

They both smiled and continued. Then Nestor leisurely got off and walked away, but his friend continued on the path.

Hoooot.

“Come on, Felix. Train’s getting closer.” Indeed, the locomotive seemed to be speeding up once it rounded the bend.

Or perhaps it just seemed that way.

“Hey, Nestor, you got a coin?” Felix asked, searching his own pockets. “Ah, never mind. Found one.” He held it aloft with two fingers, then gingerly placed it on the metal surface.

Hoooot! Hoooot!”

Annoyed that his friend hadn't followed him, Nestor turned back towards his friend. “Come on, man. Get off!” but Felix seemed unconcerned.

“I'll come back for it,” Felix said. “It'll come out flat as a stamp.”

Nestor was becoming agitated. As it was, although he was off the track bed, Nestor still felt he himself was too close for comfort. “You'll be flat as a stamp! Move it, man! Quit kidding around.”

Hoooot! Hoooot! Hoooooooooot!

The locomotive was getting closer. And getting faster.

“Nestor, you know what's the problem with you? You worry too much. Nothing's going to happen.” He smiled at his friend.

“Felix ...” he tried to sound calm. It took a tremendous effort. “It's not funny anymore. You're scaring your good buddy. Now, then, get off the tracks—now!”

“Nah. Nothing's going to happen.”

Nestor quickly glanced down the tracks at the oncoming locomotive. “Don't you see the danger man!? You're going to end up like that rabbit!!”

“It wasn't a rabbit, it was a possum,” he explained patiently.

They could see the conductor, and he could see them.

Hooot!

The locomotive only seconds away, Nestor grabbed his arm, but Felix shook him off with an annoyed look.

Nestor jumped back out of the way barely in time. A split second before the locomotive struck Felix, to his own astonishment, Nestor saw a surprised look on his friend's face, the last time that he saw Felix alive and in one piece.

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