

Chugga's ears perked a little when she heard the doorbell ring.

She'd requested that this blind date meet her at her home, since she wasn't exactly feeling like going to a restaurant, or somewhere else too busy... it was always too noisy and crowded in those places, which made things difficult, made her ears smoke more, and made too many people crowd around her to ask if things were okay. Staying in was definitely the better choice - at least, it was for her.

She was a little worried, though - her date was late. She was almost going to resign herself that she had been stood up - maybe they were busy with something else? She wanted to ask right away, but she didn't want to be rude...

Instead, she just opened the door with a smile at the bun on the other side. "Hello—! You're Mallow, right? I'm Chugga, your— blind date, yeah!"

Mallow smiled back, crossing the threshold as Chugga stepped aside slightly to indicate he should come in. Handing her a paper grocery bag, he said sheepishly "uh, sorry I'm late... I didn't feel like I should come to someone's house without a gift but I wasn't sure what to bring for a chill out date. I decided on cookies and milk- it's a little silly but it's good, it's nostalgic, and it goes with everything."

Mallow had been happy to meet at Chugga's place, since truth told he tended to connect better when things could just be chill. He noticed that in busy social settings, others were sometimes put off by his not matching the high energy.

Chugga's eyes widened - he brought a present? To share? He even chose something that she was out of - she hadn't been able to go buy milk in a few days, and was really craving cookies—

She tried not to get too emotional. It was just a kind gesture, and nothing more, but Mallow could see her sniff a little, trying to stop tears from welling in her eyes. "Y—yeah!" She said, trying not to choke up. "Thank you, that's— that's really sweet of you—!"

She turned to place the milk and cookies onto a small table in the living room, setting out two glasses as well, distracting herself from getting too flustered. The smoke in her

ears billowed out softly, floating and dissipating into the air. “Feel free to make yourself at home, uh— I’ve got movies, or card games, I— could also show you my trains, if you’d like—!”

Her voice grew a little quieter at the last part, but her enthusiasm was very easily heard.

Mallow noticed that Chugga seemed a little discomfited. Many buns with augmented auras could have them affected by their emotional state, and Chugga’s smokey ears seemed to work along those lines. He was pleased that she seemed touched about the milk and cookies, but secretly hoped she was just a little shy and hadn’t been talked into the date by well-meaning but pushy friends. Setting his new friend at ease would be step one to them both enjoying the experience.

“Dude, you have trains? Like model trains? SWEET.” Mallow knew next to nothing about trains and train sets, but he knew that the elaborate setups they could have were very neat, that it was fun to see them chugging on their little tracks, and that it was clear his date liked them very much. Maybe there were interesting facts he didn’t know about them, that Chugga would know, and wanted to share with him. His ears perked up as something dawned on him.

“Oh... Chugga! It’s a nickname from your love of trains, isn’t it? That’s cool! The demon who cared for me gave me my name, because they said I was like a marshmallow, but even more mellow. So in that way, we’re a bit alike.” He took the glass of milk his date held out to him and took an oatmeal raisin cookie from the package- since he hadn’t thought to ask what Chugga liked, he’d come with oatmeal raisin, chocolate chip, and jam tarts, figuring something there would cater to nearly everyone. He liked all of them, so if there were any his date didn’t prefer he could take those back to the townhouse for himself and his roomie Drimi to share.

“Oh my gosh, that’s cute! I actually chose my own name because of that...” Chugga laughed. “Murmur raised me, and he thought it would be best if he let me pick out my own. I mean, he asked me if I wanted to name myself, or if he should name me— so I chose Chugga! There was this picture book about trains that he read to me all the time...”

She laughed a little, tail swishing back and forth as she did. It seemed like she couldn't seem to sit still now that this interest was brought up - the second Mallow suggested that he was fine with discussing this interest, she'd been doing her best not to tap her hooves on the ground too much in excitement.

"I've, uh, actually got one in the works that'll be used to bring a plate of food around the table!" She said, reaching up to a cupboard to bring out a model train - with a small tray affixed to the top of it. She set it down on the table, putting the cookies and milk carefully up on its tray. "I'm still working on the track layout, and making sure that it won't spill anything when it moves... but it's really pretty as decoration so far! It's one of my favorite old era Burrowgatory trains, uh, a Dante 120! You can tell because it's got a way bigger frame, for sturdiness and stability... so it works really well to put food on top of as a model, heh!"

Mallow was impressed. He didn't have a ton of technical knowledge himself so he always thought it was cool when others did tinkering, particularly with anything electric. "Wow! That's so creative! What a cool thing, it's both decorative and useful. Way cooler than a lazy Susan!"

He thought it was pretty cute the way Chugga kind of did a little dance of excitement when talking about her special interest. It was making him want to see more- if she got really excited, maybe she'd be less uncomfortable and open up a bit. There were some subjects he'd rather not listen to an impassioned lecture on, but the trains were sort of neat and the way she not only collected but clearly made creative use of them was intriguing. He wanted to see more. Maybe she had a little model track with moving trains on it, he'd love to see that!

"Thank you...!" She said, grinning widely at Mallow's compliment. "I haven't really set something like this up with my models before, so it was really fun to figure out... it did take a while, though, so I think I'm going to stick back to my realistic models for a while before doing something so ambitious again!"

She laughed a little, before her eyes widened. “Oh, um, if you want to see them, my model room is just through the door! I like to keep them all separate just so that I don’t trip or break them, or anything...”

“Makes sense,” nodded Mallow. “I used to have a buddy that liked fish in a similar way and he also had a room in his apartment just for them. It made it easier for him to care for them and kept them out of the way so bad things couldn’t happen to them, or at least not as easily.” He smiled, remembering the tidy racks and shelves full of tanks and little containers with plants and brightly colored fish. He wondered if Chugga’s train room was similar, or if she maybe had a different sort of setup. Maybe tracks all over!

“Let’s go see your models,” he grinned, holding out one hoof in a ‘lead the way’ sort of gesture.

Chugga grinned as she made her way over to the door, opening it wide to show off her model room. It was almost like what Mallow was expecting, but still different enough that it was intriguing - rather than shelves, many tables were present across the room, with models of not only trains, but also miniatures that added to the scenery around them - trees, model grass, even tiny plastic Succubun figurines to look like it was an entire little world on the tables.

“Uh... ta-dah!” Chugga announced, waving her arms a little awkwardly.

His eyes sparkling, Mallow came in and began to ask questions about the magical little scenes. They whiled away several hours (and most of the milk and cookies) sharing in the joy of the trains, and learning bits about one another as conversation began to flow more naturally.

A very successful date, Mallow later reflected, not sure where anything was going but glad to have a new friend.