

All Caroling

by Catherine Blake Smith

Victorian Christmas Cards: Return 2 Sender

Latitude Theatre | Center House Theater, Seattle Center

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Setting & Time

On an apartment building rooftop, in a major metropolis, during the witching hour: some time after midnight, but before 4 a.m.

On Format & Punctuation

A slash (/) indicates an interruption.

Characters

They're all cats. Roles are written gender neutral so that pronouns can be adapted as needed.

GUS wants to be in charge of the a cappella singing group they're in with Ruby and Max, but their catnip addiction has eroded their confidence. They sing alto.

RUBY has a great talent and passion for singing in the group as a soprano, but they'll happily pause rehearsal for good drama, or to look at their phone.

MAX is the founder of the singing group. They love holding the bass line, but now playing lacrosse takes up all of their time.

LEO is a newcomer to the group. Ideally, they're a tenor, and will round out the choral arrangements perfectly. They're also incredibly charming.



In silvery accents, whispering low ... A happy, happy Christmastide!

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In darkness, we hear [snow falling](#) as "[Carol of the Meows](#)" plays, increasing to a crescendo.

As the lights rise, the music fades, and we see GUS enter. They attempt gracefulness, but trip over their own feet. They check to make sure no one saw, then take a quick hit of catnip. They check to make sure no one saw that either. Now that they're ready, they prepare "the room" for rehearsal. They arrange some chairs and blocks to create a circle for two others. As they survey their work, they remember that they need to add another place for a newcomer and look around for another option.

Just as they find something that will work, RUBY bursts in from their workout, carrying too many things (an expensive beverage, keys, phone...). They come off as uber-elegant

and stand-offish, yet they'll flop over for a good scratch behind the ears anytime. GUS doesn't stop setting up their arrangement and second-guessing how they've set it up.

RUBY

Oh. Em. Gee. You will never believe what happened / to me on the way to rehearsal today—

GUS

Distracted.

/ Hi Ruby / how are you doing today?

RUBY

I was driving, and this Pomeranian just came out of NOWHERE—WHAT are you doing?

GUS

I'm setting up for rehearsal.

RUBY

That doesn't make any sense.

WHY are you setting up an extra spot?

GUS

... I'm guessing you didn't read the newsletter this week.

RUBY

Excuse me? I do not have time to read every message that comes in

DING. An alert comes in from RUBY'S phone. They read it, getting absorbed.

GUS

There was an announcement in the Meow You're Talking section, below the Performance Op-paw-tunities /

RUBY

/ Just a sec. Gotta take this.

RUBY is now furiously typing and no longer in the conversation. Eventually, they take a seat and start scrolling or taking selfies or texting or all of the above.

GUS

Paw-don meow...

GUS resumes setting up the rehearsal space, and pulls out a pitch pipe. They play a few notes. They're still anxious. They decide to make an announcement to the room.

Hopefully, we can start soon. I have a big announcement for anyone who may have missed it in the newsletter. Have you heard from Max today?

RUBY

They promised me they would be on time today so that we could go over the new arrangement for “Jingle Bells,” and we all know fifteen minutes early is on time. Even I can do it!

GUS

So where are they? *To themselves.* And I haven’t heard from Leo yet since they took the catamaran home after...

RUBY

Leo? That name sounds familiar. Do they sing?

GUS

Glowing.

They do sing. Very well.

RUBY

I met a Leo once on Kitty Nip. Terrible date, great kisser though.

GUS

Not ready to hear this...

Please don’t tell me —

RUBY

I thought we might hit it off because we’re both performers, but I’d never heard of their club before. Do you know where “The Met” is?

DING. RUBY gets distracted by another notification as GUS takes out their phone and furiously types out an email.

GUS

As they’re typing.

Hi Leo. Hope you made it home okay. I realized I don’t have your number yet, so I’m just sending this email to make sure you’re still able to come to our rehearsal today! Excited to see you again... I mean... See you soon. Best, Gus. Great. Send.

Their phone makes a WHOOSH then MEOW sound as the email sends and they put their phone away. RUBY looks up and around for a few moments to try to find the source of the sound, and paws at the sky a couple of times. Then they go back to their own phone.

GUS goes for their phone again, then stops. Then they go for the catnip, and stop. As a distraction, with their pitch pipe, they play the C above middle C and start to sing a few notes of “Carol of the Bells,” but give up. They remember that they have lyric sheets, and they start to distribute them as MAX enters. GUS and MAX bump into each other, but MAX is a formidable presence and dominates the moment. They both know that MAX is late. MAX does not apologize but makes a lap, taking it all in, including the extra spot. They pause when they get to RUBY, and say hello. They [bise](#), like Parisians.

GUS

Trying not to interrupt the moment but really interrupting the moment.

Hi, hiiii. So glad you could make it, Max. Did you get a chance to read the Meow You’re Talking in this week’s newsletter?

MAX stops chittering with RUBY to look at GUS from across the room.

MAX

Gus. You know that I only encouraged you to start that newsletter to give you something to distract you while you *tried* to kick the ‘nip. How’s that going, by the way? You know, we’re all rooting for you.

RUBY nods, sympathetically.

But there’s only so much we can do in a day, between a full schedule of eating, being attentive to our landlords, marking our territory in the neighborhood, napping, don’t you think? I know you do prefer to skip the naps—why that’s so, I’ll never understand—but you didn’t think that we’d actually have time to read a newsletter every week, did you? Especially when I contribute most of the business for it, anyway? I pretty much already know what it’s going to say. You did include the announcement about my upcoming lacrosse meet, yes?

MAX smiles. RUBY giggles. GUS cannot respond. They need catnip. BAD.

MAX

When would we even have the time to slog our way through your cat puns just to read about your favorite new brand of salmon treat?

RUBY’S laughter intensifies. GUS cowers.

MAX

Aw, poor Gus. Need some ‘nip?

MAX and RUBY laugh together. GUS shuffles papers. MAX and RUBY calm down.

Meow, it's well past the start time for rehearsal, let's get it together, shall we? Let's start with "Jingle Bells"!

RUBY is ready to sing and squeaks out the first note or two of a jazzy rendition of "Jingle Bells."

GUS

Actually, I was thinking /

MAX

Rubes, hon, you want to start on the 2, / like this

MAX starts to sing in a deeper voice and jazzier style.

GUS

Excuse me, I was saying, I would like / to try another song this time

RUBY

Flirting.

Every time I try to do that, you know, I just lose my place /

MAX

Flirting back.

Here, sing with me /

GUS

Hey, so I was thinking we could try something a little harder this time, and that might require / four singers

MAX

When you laugh all the way / you really want to use your belly

LEO enters.

LEO

Hi y'all! Looks like a great a cappella group you all have here. Mind if I join?

LEO gives GUS a small wave as MAX and RUBY turn slowly to look at LEO.

Did y'all know there's someone watching your rehearsal?

They all start talking at once, but GUS is heard last.

RUBY

I've been trying to tell them about that guy and keep suggesting new locations for our rehearsals but Max thinks that we should just ignore him and says we have a right to be here first

MAX

He's harmless. You know, the real problem is that Gus thinks that this is the most secretive spot where he can dip his nose into some 'nip without us seeing it happen before we start rehearsal

GUS

... I happen to like Walter. He always puts out some salmon treats just for me when Ruby and Max aren't around, and I think he only likes me and doesn't like anybody else, which honestly, I can understand

LEO

Okay! Okay, okay. Sounds... good. Just as long as y'all are cool knowing that we've got a... menacing looking audience. I know I don't mind. I'm happy to perform for anybody.

LEO grins at RUBY. RUBY preens.

RUBY

You know, I do love to put on a show.

LEO

Making another "cool guy" move.

Oh, I remember.

RUBY tries to remember how they know LEO.

So, I am here for the audition. So sorry that I'm a bit late.

MAX

No, there's no audition happening here. You must have the wrong

GUS

Yes! Leo? It's so nice to see, err meet you, I'm Gus.

GUS moves toward LEO to shake their hand. They try to pull it off as if this is the first time they've met, when it most definitely isn't. MAX is puffing out to show off that they are, in fact, the biggest and scariest one in the group, but LEO doesn't really notice.

RUBY remembers how they know LEO, and becomes delighted by whatever mess appears to be happening.

GUS

I hope everything went well today with your commute from the island, Leo. We're all so excited to see you, I mean, meet you.

MAX harrumphs.

LEO

Hi there.

Letting the handshake linger for a moment too long. To MAX.
Nice to meet you. I'm Leo.

LEO *offers a hand to MAX.*

MAX

They shake LEO'S hand begrudgingly.
Hello, Leo.

Realizing.
Fluffernutter? As in, Leo Fluffernutter? THE Leo Fluffernutter?
Flabbergasted and star struck, MAX becomes suspicious as RUBY slides in between.

RUBY

On the nonchalant charm offensive.
Hi, Leo, yes? I'm / Ruby

LEO

Hi Ruby, so nice to see you again. Are you still dancing at the Kit Kat on Thursdays and Saturdays?

RUBY

Kitty Nip! That's how we know each other.

LEO

Laughing.
Yes, Kitty Nip.

RUBY

I took you to a tasting party for Cat Sip Liqueurs and *then* you told me you were sober.

LEO

And then when I told you I used to perform with the Meowtropolitan Opera in New York City, you asked me if they charge a cover after 10 pm.

RUBY

Ooooooh. I did. That's "The Met"?

LEO

It's actually become quite a funny anecdote in my friend circle.

LEO extends a hand.
Friends?

RUBY

Wow. So if I'm known in your friend circle, does that mean I'm like, a celebrity?

LEO laughs and nods. RUBY beams.

MAX

If you two are quite done, I'd like to know why one of the House Tenors from the Meowtropolitan Opera wants to sing in Straight, Meow Chaser.

LEO stops laughing.

GUS

I invited them.

MAX

Excuse me?

GUS

It was in the newsletter.

LEO

To GUS.

Which I very much enjoyed reading over a cup of my favorite catnip substitute, by the way.

GUS smiles and "aw, shucks" the moment away.

MAX

You can't just invite someone / who's

GUS

Who's better than *you*, Max? I can, and I did. Walter has requested that we sing "Carol of the Bells."

LEO

And I happen to know a lovely arrangement, which I / shared with Gus when we met up for drinks

MAX

Walter doesn't get to make requests!

RUBY

He's our biggest fan!

MAX

He's our ONLY fan!

GUS

I have the arrangements here, and I thought maybe we could audition Leo for Straight, Meow Chaser, and start practicing meow.

RUBY

Walter is always so angry when he watches us, Max. Maybe having a song he's looking forward to will cheer him up. And then maybe we'll *all* get salmon treats.

MAX

Unsure.

It's a hard song.

GUS

You mostly just go "ding dong" / and don't do much else

LEO

Yes! Max, it is SO complex. That's what makes it such a great choice for a caroling repertoire. People like Walter will be very impressed, and look forward to hearing us sing. Gus was telling me on our date, I mean at my pre-audition, that sometimes Walter will throw shoes during rehearsal. Now I, for one, have never taken a shoe at The Met, so we were thinking that I might be able to share a thing or two with y'all that I've learned.

MAX

You think you know what it takes to impress Walter.

RUBY

I do love salmon treats.

Looking at the sheet music GUS has provided.

And this does look like a fun part.

RUBY starts practicing their "meows meows" on the soprano part.

GUS

Max, I need this. I need a distraction.

MAX

What's that, Gus?

LEO notices that this could be more of a private conversation, and goes to help RUBY silently with some of the parts.

GUS

I need to focus on something else to stop overusing the catnip. Maybe that's impressing Walter, who knows. But Leo even told me about a substitution that they get / from someone who's a familiar for this witch

MAX

That's why I gave you the newsletter. As a distraction.

GUS

You didn't *give* me anything.

MAX

I gave you *this*! All this! That's why I started the singing group in the first place. I couldn't stand to see you hurting all the time at home, so I came up with something to distract you, since, it turns out, you've got a pretty good voice. But no matter what I do, it's never enough. Ever since I got captain / it's gotten so much worse

GUS

It was bad before you became captain of your lacrosse team. I want to be challenged. I want to know why it matters to keep trying every day. Not just for Walter. This isn't even about him. I just want to know why it's important, for me. This song is hard, yes, but that's why it's a good song to work on. And I need you to hold the bass line. The song just doesn't make much sense without all four parts happening together. I am grateful that you started Straight, Meow Chaser. At the time, it was what I needed, and it was enough. Singing has given me something to live for. And now that I know what I can have, I want more.

GUS glances at LEO, then looks back to MAX. MAX doesn't know what to say.

MAX

Coming for a big bear hug.

I can't believe I missed the announcement that the Met's House Tenor wants to join my freaking a cappella group. You're pretty amazing, little sib. Plus, did you notice that they're kinda cute?

GUS

Squished in the hug and beaming.

Not you too. Can we sing now?

MAX

Ha! Yes, let's sing.

RUBY

Looking toward the window.

Ooh! He's watching!

Waving and half smiling.

Hi, Walter.

The cats spread out to the four spots. GUS plays C above middle C on their pitch pipe.

GUS

Let's just mark it this first time through, but feel out how we all sound together, as a group.

Ready?

MAX/RUBY/LEO

Ready!

*They all take a deep breath as the lights go out and we "Carol of the Meows"
crescendo.*

END OF PLAY.