

Two Together

Skeleton of a play to be performed at e.g. The National, centred around the use, misuse and romantic implications of the Two Together Railcard. 8 Acts (too much? Can it be achieved in fewer?).

ACT 1

Male and female are in early stages of relationship. Just beyond the honeymoon period, where unfettered lust has started to seep into domestic duties e.g. they've just done their first joint shop at Tesco. Male gives surprise gift. The surprise alone is too forward for female. But even more embarrassing and presumptuous is the gift itself: Two Together Railcard – *annual*. Emphasise date e.g. 15th December 2016 (decide on which month associates best with commitment/melancholy. September?). Female looks off stage as if looking into distant future. Uncertainty.

ACT 2

Male and female in better state after first joint trip to e.g. Doncaster. Pleasant trip, lots of leg room, refreshing beverages trolley. Assumption of audience is that significant savings have been made. *This* is the Two Together dream: two human beings fulfilling each other's desires in perfect symbiosis. Perhaps a montage.

ACT 3

Some time in the future. It's a Friday evening at Clapham Junction - typical panicked exodus from London to provinces etc etc, throngs of commuters (hire 2 or 3 dozen extra?). Male and female have had long, tiring days at work. They're going to somewhere like Andover i.e. implication is neither really wants to go. Tension between man and woman builds on the platform. Info screen says train is 'Due' for the whole Act (big hanging prop?). Crux of tension is thus:

She works in Surbiton, he in London Bridge. To travel with him, she has had to travel *back* to Clapham Junction, when a much more direct route for her would have been to go via Woking. She has a Zones 1-5 Travelcard, so it's no greater monetary cost, but *still*. He, on the other hand, would have ideally bought just one ticket with her from Waterloo (at the full one third discount), but instead had to buy a *peak-time Single* from London Bridge to Clapham Junction, their station of bitter compromise. He had asked her to come to Waterloo, since it's no extra cost to her, but this displays a lack of respect for her time.

[As far as possible, the details described here should be communicated in silence, through the facial expressions and subtle gestures of the actors. Where there are gaps, dialogue will step in if it must.]

Extra complications: he's anxious that they won't be able to find seats on the train, and that she will complain about it for each of the 56 minutes to Andover, even though *he* wanted to get the train from Waterloo where he would have found them seats. In a fiery reaction, instantly regretted words escape her about wishing she'd taken the Woking route and – even worse – just used her 16-25 Railcard, forsaking him to his fate as a single traveller paying an extortionate single fare. "I'm tired of subsidising your poor life choices" etc etc. Her 16-25 lies dormant at the bottom of her handbag, a weighty reminder of her vanishing youth. Perhaps from him (moment of madness): "You better make use of the 16-25 now, *you won't have it for much longer.*"

And why does *she* always have to carry the railcard? Why is it always *her* responsibility? Lots of fundamental issues raised e.g. who *is* their Two Together card *for*? Does she need him as much as he needs her? (Or perhaps leave these as ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM?).

Train turns from 'Due' to 'Cancelled' (too poignant?).

ACT 4

Perhaps a year in the future. On quiet Southern train. Female is on phone to friend, distraught. He has just broken up with her. We learn that male had initiated argument on the platform of Tulse Hill and left her there. Inspector comes up, rather too jolly. Female is in tears, finds it hard to find ticket and Two Together Railcard, hands shaking etc. Inspector's jollity rapidly transforms to scrutinising frown. "Where is your named partner?" With horror, she realises her journey is on their Two Together Railcard. Inspector has audacity to point to *male's picture* in the photo card, where male stands in a smile-less pose, by her side. Like it used to be. *Emotional outpouring*. Inspector starts to tap into his machine the details of a *fine* for breach of terms and conditions of Railcard. She cries / wails / clutches for him. Pit of despair. Nadir. Hope has left the theatre/universe. She begs for inspector's understanding (FORGIVENESS?). Conductor not forthcoming ("This Railcard is a commitment; you young folk just throw your chances away"). End act somewhere like Norbury.

ACT 5

More time has passed. Female is sitting on train, a singleton and ostensibly happy. Male walks into carriage. It's made clear that they haven't seen each other for some time. They make small talk: jobs, mutual friends, pop-up restaurants etc. Moment of gut-turning sadness when female brings out two faded, advanced purchase discounted tickets to Crewe which he'd left her with after the break-up. "I just couldn't go by myself. I just, legally, couldn't go." They try to laugh about it. *Then-*

Suddenly she notices he has a *new* Two Together Railcard. Shatters her composure. That photo used to be of *her*, and she used to hold him in *her* pocket. And he looks after the Railcard for this new woman, when he never looked after it for her. WOE. She's trying to get it together, just when the woman from the new Railcard walks in. It dawns on female that *he isn't even paying full price*. And he never has.

She runs away, clumsily knocking into the oversized beverages trolley, as our tumultuous heroine, our Eustacia Vye / Anna Karenina / Medea. (LOTS OF PATHETIC FALLACY e.g. roll of thunder, toddler wailing, & the sign on the toilet saying it's locked but we know there's nobody in there). He calls out to her: "I'll call you! *Wait!*" Fade to black.

ACT 6

A week later. Platform at Clapham Junction – *the same as from Act 3*. Woman is waiting, anxious, checking her phone. Male arrives. They're nervous around each other but civil. Reminisce about shared memories from years ago etc. etc. Before long he brings out an object and hands it to her. She takes it, hesitant. It's the Two Together Railcard. She asks: "Why do I want that? That's for you and her now." He says: "No... *It's for you.*" She opens it, gasps, puts her hand to her mouth. Embrace. Reconciliation.

They would use the Railcard straight away, but it's peak time (*hint-hint*: there's still a thorn in their relationship's side).

ACT 7

Perhaps a year or two later. On a pleasant train journey out of Birmingham New Street (just a connection). All signs of a 'happy ending': holding hands / playing travel Ludo / talking of mortgage rates. BUT something falls out of his pocket as he takes his shortbread from the beverages trolley. "*What's this?*" It's a second Two Together Railcard. Yet another woman. She orders him out of the train and onto the platform, at a deserted station on the outskirts of Wolverhampton. Then a Miller/Mamet-esque vitriol-drenched moralistic haranguing (10 minutes?). He is black with guilt, but looks for some forgiveness: "You've got to understand. Her family lives in Taunton. The prices are extortionate."

It's over. Female's last words focus on pivotal argument at Clapham Junction ("I should've gone via Woking!") Male is left alone, cast adrift with a return ticket which he can no longer legally use, and

two railcards with the dead, smile-less faces of the women who he has betrayed, on the outskirts of Wolverhampton

ACT 8

True independence and growth. She is happy, fulfilled, composed, reading a pleasant book (Life of Pi?) in a window seat that she booked *well* in advance. Overlay with voice-over coming from her, from a recent time, her voice confident and strong: "I'll take it. I'll take the Network Railcard. Is the photo-card ok? I got it in Boots." She smiles as she gazes wistfully out of the window whilst toying with her new Railcard. Curtain starts to fall. Apogee of self-actualisation is only hampered by audience's assumed knowledge of the limited coverage of Network Railcard, which is annoying if you want to get to e.g. Leeds.

End.

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