

Patricia Highsmith
STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

Adapted for the stage by Vilnis Vējš, 2021

The beginning

Lawyer Gerard talks about Patricia Highsmith and her essay “My life with Greta Garbo”, even though they never lived together and did not even know each other. He also talks about how in the novels of Highsmith there are men, that are obsessed with each other, everything usually ends with a murder anyway, because love is not allowed.

1st scene.

Train carriage where architect Guy meets the son of rich parents Charlie. They dine together and discover that Charlie does not love his father and would gladly get rid of him, whereas Guy has moved away from his wife, but they are not officially divorced. Charlie then suggests that the easiest way would be to get rid of the wife permanently. Guy does not think that is a good idea. Highsmith appears and explains that this scene at the beginning of the book is slow and boring, but it is important so the following events can unfold intensely. Gerard continues to talk about Highsmith – she is a good hater – a very unpleasant person, that is suspicious of the whole world. The only thing she loves – animals, but especially those that other people usually don’t love – snails.

2nd scene.

Guy visits his wife Miriam, who is pregnant, but she asks to go with him and not get divorced, because the father of the child will not marry her even if Miriam and Guy get divorced. Guy declines, because it is not his child.

3rd scene.

Charlies letter to Guy, to remind him about his plan – to kill the father and Miriam. Gerard continues talking about Highsmith – this time about her religiousness. He explains how she begged God for her books to be successful and also how her Christianity was special – there is no room for hope in it. Because the mercy of God is not bestowed upon everyone equally, there are people that are born for the eternal night, and she is one of them.

4th scene.

Charlie calls Guy, to remind Guy about him and his plans.

5th scene.

Guy is with his lover – Anne, she feels that Guy is depressed. Guy explains that it is because of Miriam, who does not want a divorce and wants to go with him. Anne receives a telegram from Guy’s mother that Miriam has lost the child. That means that Guy will be free.

6th scene.

Charlie’s conversation with his mother. The two of them do not talk like mother and son but rather like two lovers.

7th scene.

Charlie kills Miriam.

8th scene.

Gerard, being an investigator, meets Guy to inform him that Miriam has been found strangled in an adventure park. That is why it is important to find out where Guy was during this time and if he has an alibi. Guy explains that at the moment he is with Anne, but the will to divorce Miriam is not a reason to kill.

9th scene.

Charlie gushes over himself, he believes that what he has done is a perfect murder and that killing such a primitive woman is the same as killing a rat.

10th scene.

Guy is interviewed by the press, because he is confirmed as the architect for a recreation centre in Florida. Soon after that he receives a letter from Charlie reminding him that now he has to kill Charlie's father, because Miriam is no longer a problem for Guy.

11th scene.

Charlie tells his mother that the newspaper writes about a murder in the adventure park and that the murdered person is the wife of his friend. And that his mother should be happy, because he finally has a friend. His mother, however, points out that Charlie drinks too much whiskey. A letter from Guy arrives, in which he writes that Charlie should not call him or his mother, they have nothing in common to be friends.

12th scene.

Guy and Anne are having lunch in a restaurant, Guy is nervous, Anne keeps talking about their future together and about the house they should build. Charlie arrives at the restaurant "by chance" and tries to make Guy introduce him to Anne.

13th scene.

Guy clearly tells Charlie to leave them alone. Charlie says that it is too late – one murder has already been committed, the police will more likely believe the person that tells them Guy killed Miriam to be together with Anne, he starts blackmailing Guy. Charlie threatens to write a letter to Anne, where he says that Guy is the murderer. They get into a fight.

14th scene.

Guy receives a bunch of letters from Charlie, they all say the same thing – it is Guy's "obligation" to kill Charlie's father. Anne sees that Guy is terrified and tries to calm him down.

15th scene.

Charlies letter containing instructions on how to get into his home and into his father's bedroom.

16th scene.

Anne is mad a Guy for not being home for three days. Guy makes excuses and tells her it was because of work. Anne lets Guy know that she received an anonymous letter saying that Guy is connected to the death of Miriam.

17th scene.

Charlie visits Guy. Guy agrees to kill, if Charlie promises that they will never, ever meet again. Charlie gives Guy a revolver and a pair of gloves.

SECOND ACT**1st scene.**

Gerard interrogates Charlie, concerning his father's death. Charlie evades answering any of his questions and tells Gerard that his family does not need his private detective services anymore. Gerard promises to keep investigating this case.

2nd scene.

Gerard keeps talking about Highsmith, how writers are usually unbearable people, but the name "unbearable" has somehow stuck to Highsmith. But maybe it is easier to accept what is written in her work, by excusing it with Highsmith's own personal qualities.

3rd scene.

Guy and Anne are preparing for their wedding. Guy is still distressed, he has panic-attacks. Anne is compassionate, because she thinks Miriam's weird death is to blame. A comment from Gerard – there are no happy endings in Highsmith's work.

4th scene.

Charlie is having lunch and dancing at a restaurant with his mother. The mother again points out that Charlie drinks too much and asks if Charlie knows who had a reason to kill his father. Charlie avoids answering the question, but says that he hates Gerard.

5th scene.

Guy and Anne's wedding, Charlie shows up uninvited. Anne, unaware of anything, treats him kindly.

6th scene.

Charlie shows up again and gallantly flirts with Anne, that is why she questions why Charlie dislikes such a nice person, that happens to be Guy's friend, even more. While Anne is in the next room, Guy confronts Charlie about his lies, because they are not friends. Charlie disagrees – they are friends, because they are both bound for life by the secret of committing a double-murder. Guy: "You bring misfortune to everyone!", Guy is afraid that Charlie is being followed by the police and that his plan, that the alibi of them not knowing each other, will soon be uncovered.

7th scene.

That is exactly what happens. Gerard visits Guy and introduces himself as a private investigator. He questions Guy about Charlie and asks if he knows anything about the murder of Charlie's father. Guy avoids answering Gerard's questions.

8th scene.

Gerard visits Charlie and catches him lying about how and when he met Guy. Then Gerard orders Guy to enter the room and confronts them both. Guy desperately keeps lying. Charlie announces that they love each other. Gerard believes this story, he goes on to explain that his responsibility was to only reveal who murdered his friend,

Charlie's father. The "boys" can carry on with their lives.

9th scene.

Charlie has rented a yacht for the three of them, he's drinking and boasting about a new beautiful life, that will begin for the three of them together, but he slips and falls into the sea.

10th scene.

Guy's new architecture project is unveiled. Guy is interviewed and one of the reporters turns out to be Owen – Miriam's lover, the father of her child who refused to marry her. Guy explains that he is not responsible for the death of Miriam, but he knows who the killer is, he also admits that he himself has killed. Owen advises Guy to leave it be, if no one has uncovered the truth. At this moment, Gerard appears, he listened to the whole conversation and has therefore discovered the missing details of the crimes.

THE END