

The Couple on the Train

by Garf Collins

“Wow! We just about made it,” I said to Gill as we found our seats on the West Coast mainline.

“I can relax now. I’m really looking forward to a few days in the Lakes. Life’s been a bit hectic recently. Could you give me my book?”

As we settled down to read, I noticed the couple sitting opposite us. They were probably around thirty. He sat by the window dressed in smart casual clothes with a neatly trimmed dark beard. His even featured face portrayed an air of resignation. As the train drew away from Euston, he was looking out with sad eyes. She had dark hair. Her features and a slight accent perhaps indicated an Indian ancestry. There was something between them that was not right. She was trying very hard to engage him, but he mostly answered in monosyllables often while glancing out of the window. Occasionally, he would look at his phone as if he were expecting an important message.

Although we shared a table, I couldn’t hear most of what they said. So, in the absence of any clues, I decided that they had recently become lovers. She was very keen for their relationship to succeed now they had finally decided to live together. They were moving away from London, where they had met and setting up home somewhere in the North of England. The main difficulty was that he was married with two small children. His eyes betrayed his longing for his kids as their journey emphasized his increasing separation from them.

Sensing his reservation, she was trying hard to bring him back to her. She often leaned towards him and spoke quietly and lovingly and persevered despite his lack of engagement. She started showing him things on her phone with comments like,

“I like that. That’s cool. No, perhaps this one would be better, don’t you think?”

Later the images seemed to be about some social occasion. He looked grumpily at the photos she showed him. I couldn’t catch their conversation except that at one

point, she said emphatically, “Nobody will remember what the bride looked like, and everyone had a good time. Didn’t they?” His only response was to look again at his phone - perhaps to see if pictures of his children had been posted on WhatsApp.

By the time we arrived at Penrith, I was quite concerned for them. If this was the start of their life together, what chance had they as a couple.

As we waited for a taxi outside the station, I said to Gill,

“I felt sorry for that poor girl. I think they must have just got together, but he’s not very interested in her.” I told her about my imagined scenario. But Gill, having managed to hear much of the conversation, said,

“You’ve got it wrong. They were married two days ago, and the conversation was mostly about a wedding present his mother wanted to give them. A dinner service. She thought it was very old fashioned and was trying to persuade him to change it for something else.”

“I see, hence showing him all those things on her phone. But he wasn’t impressed at all, was he? What a miserable man. Sulking because Mummy might be put out that her present wasn’t welcomed. So, that comment I picked up about the bride not looking right was referring to herself?”

“Yes, and she said that she had packed up the wedding dress and sent it off somewhere, perhaps to a charity shop.”

“It’s far worse than I had thought. Perhaps she had surprised him by walking down the aisle in traditional Indian dress, and his straight-laced mother had taken against it. Any idea where they were going?”

“They were on their honeymoon. They’re going on a five-day coach trip around Scotland then having a week in a hotel on a remote island.”

“I can’t imagine how that’s going to work out. He doesn’t deserve her. She ought to cut her losses and say goodbye in Glasgow. But she won’t. She’s so committed she’ll waste her life on a pathetic Mummies boy.”