

strangers on a train

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH



'A GEM... A MAGNIFICENT SUSPENSE'  
DAILY MAIL



TV

# **Strangers on a Train**

*Patricia Highsmith*

First published in 1950

## Table Of Contents

<a href="#">One</a>	3
<a href="#">Two</a>	16
<a href="#">Three</a>	22
<a href="#">Four</a>	26
<a href="#">Five</a>	27
<a href="#">Six</a>	28
<a href="#">Seven</a>	29
<a href="#">Eight</a>	31
<a href="#">Nine</a>	32
<a href="#">Ten</a>	37
<a href="#">Eleven</a>	40
<a href="#">Twelve</a>	44
<a href="#">Thirteen</a>	54
<a href="#">Fourteen</a>	57
<a href="#">Fifteen</a>	61
<a href="#">Sixteen</a>	63
<a href="#">Seventeen</a>	65
<a href="#">Eighteen</a>	71
<a href="#">Nineteen</a>	74
<a href="#">Twenty</a>	76
<a href="#">Twenty-One</a>	79
<a href="#">Twenty-two</a>	86
<a href="#">Twenty-three</a>	90
<a href="#">Twenty-four</a>	100
<a href="#">Twenty-five</a>	103
<a href="#">Twenty-six</a>	107
<a href="#">Twenty-seven</a>	111
<a href="#">Twenty-eight</a>	113
<a href="#">Twenty-nine</a>	116
<a href="#">Thirty</a>	118
<a href="#">Thirty-one</a>	121
<a href="#">Thirty-two</a>	125
<a href="#">Thirty-three</a>	129

<a href="#"><u>Thirty-four</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>133</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Thirty-five</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>135</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Thirty-six</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>138</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Thirty-seven</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>140</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Thirty-eight</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>141</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Thirty-nine</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>145</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>147</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-one</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>149</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-two</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>152</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-three</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>156</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-four</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>159</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-five</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>165</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-six</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>170</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Forty-seven</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>171</u></a>

## One

The train tore along with an angry, irregular rhythm. It was having to stop at smaller and more frequent stations, where it would wait impatiently for a moment, then attack the prairie again. But progress was imperceptible. The prairie only undulated, like a vast, pink-tan blanket being casually shaken. The faster the train went, the more buoyant and taunting the undulations.

Guy took his eyes from the window and hitched himself back against the seat.

Miriam would delay the divorce at best, he thought. She might not even want a divorce, only money. Would there really ever be a divorce from her?

Hate had begun to paralyze his thinking, he realized, to make little blind alleys of the roads that logic had pointed out to him in New York. He could sense Miriam ahead of him, not much farther now, pink and tan-freckled, and radiating a kind of unhealthful heat, like the prairie out the window. Sullen and cruel.

Automatically, he reached for a cigarette, remembered for the tenth time that he couldn't smoke in the Pullman car, then took one anyway. He tapped it twice on the face of his wristwatch, read the time, 5:12, as if it meant anything today, and fitted the cigarette into the corner of his mouth before he brought the cupped match up. The cigarette replaced the match inside his hand, and he smoked in slow, steady pulls. Again and again his brown eyes dropped to the stubborn, fascinating ground out the window. A tab of his soft shirt collar began to ride up. In the reflection the dusk had started to create in the window's glass, the peak of white collar along his jaw suggested a style of the last century, like his black hair that grew high and loose on top and lay close in back. The rise of hair and the slope of his long nose gave him a look of intense purpose and somehow of forward motion, though from the front, his heavy, horizontal brows and mouth imposed a stillness and reserve. He wore flannel trousers that needed pressing, a dark jacket that slacked over his slight body and showed faintly purple where the light struck it, and a tomato-colored woolen tie, carelessly knotted.

He did not think Miriam would be having a child unless she wanted it. Which should mean the lover intended to marry her. But why had she sent for him? She didn't need him to get a divorce. And why did he go over the same dull ground he had four days ago when he had gotten her letter? The five or six lines

in Miriam's round handwriting had said only that she was going to have a child and wanted to see him. That she was pregnant guaranteed the divorce, he reasoned, so why was he nervous? A suspicion that he might, in some unreachable depth of himself, be jealous because she was going to bear another man's child and had once aborted his own tormented him above all. No, it was nothing but shame that nettled him, he told himself, shame that he had once loved such a person as Miriam. He mashed his cigarette on the heater's grilled cover. The stub rolled out at his feet, and he kicked it back under the heater.

There was so much to look forward to now. His divorce, the work in Florida—it was practically certain the board would pass on his drawings, and he would learn this week—and Anne. He and Anne could begin to plan now. For over a year he had been waiting, fretting, for something—this—to happen so he would be free. He felt a pleasant explosion of happiness inside him, and relaxed in the corner of the plush seat. For the last three years, really, he had been waiting for this to happen. He could have bought a divorce, of course, but he hadn't ever amassed that much spare money. Starting a career as an architect, without benefit of a job with a firm, had not been easy and still wasn't. Miriam had never asked for an income, but she plagued him in other ways, by talking of him in Metcalf as if they were still on the best of terms, as if he were up in New York only to establish himself and eventually send for her. Occasionally she wrote him for money, small but irritating amounts which he let her have because it would be so easy for her, so natural to her, to start a campaign in Metcalf against him, and his mother was in Metcalf.

A tall blond young man in a rust-brown suit dropped into the empty seat opposite Guy and, smiling with a vague friendliness, slid over into the corner. Guy glanced at his pallid, undersized face. There was a huge pimple in the exact center of his forehead. Guy looked out the window again.

The young man opposite him seemed to debate whether to start a conversation or take a nap. His elbow kept sliding along the window sill, and whenever the stubby lashes came open, the gray bloodshot eyes were looking at him and the soft smile came back. He might have been slightly drunk.

Guy opened his book, but his mind wandered after half a page. He looked up as the row of white fluorescent lights flickered on down the ceiling of the car, let his eyes wander to the unlighted cigar that still gyrated conversationally in a bony hand behind one of the seat backs, and to the monogram that trembled on a thin gold chain across the tie of the young man opposite him. The monogram was CAB, and the tie was of green silk, hand-painted with offensively orange-

colored palm trees. The long rust-brown body was sprawled vulnerably now, the head thrown back so that the big pimple or boil on the forehead might have been a topmost point that had erupted. It was an interesting face, though Guy did not know why. It looked neither young nor old, neither intelligent nor entirely stupid. Between the narrow bulging forehead and the lantern jaw, it scooped degenerately, deep where the mouth lay in a fine line, deepest in the blue hollows that held the small scallops of the lids. The skin was smooth as a girl's, even waxenly clear, as if all its impurities had been drained to feed the pimple's outburst.

For a few moments, Guy read again. The words made sense to him and began to lift his anxiety. But what good will Plato do you with Miriam, an inner voice asked him. It had asked him that in New York, but he had brought the book anyway, an old text from a high school philosophy course, an indulgence to compensate him, perhaps, for having to make the trip to Miriam.

He looked out the window and, seeing his own image, straightened his curling collar. Anne was always doing that for him. Suddenly he felt helpless without her. He shifted his position, accidentally touched the outstretched foot of the young man asleep, and watched fascinatedly as the lashes twitched and came open. The bloodshot eyes might have been focused on him all the while through the lids.

"Sorry," Guy murmured.

"S all right," the other said. He sat up and shook his head sharply. "Where are we?"

"Getting into Texas."

The blond young man brought a gold flask from his inside pocket, opened it, and extended it amiably.

"No, thanks," Guy said. The woman across the aisle, Guy noticed, who had not looked up from her knitting since St. Louis, glanced over just as the flask upended with a metallic splash.

"Where you bound?" The smile was a thin wet crescent now.

"Metcalf," Guy said.

"Oh. Nice town, Metcalf. Down on business?" He blinked his sore-looking eyes politely.

"Yes."

"What business?"

Guy looked up reluctantly from his book. "Architect."

"Oh," with wistful interest. "Build houses and things?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I've introduced myself." He half stood up. "Bruno. Charles Anthony Bruno."

Guy shook his hand briefly. "Guy Haines."

"Glad to meet you. You live in New York?" The hoarse baritone voice sounded false, as if he were talking to wake himself up.

"Yes."

"I live in Long Island. Going to Santa Fe for a little vacation. Ever been to Santa Fe?"

Guy shook his head.

"Great town to relax in." He smiled, showing poor teeth. "Mostly Indian architecture there, I guess."

A conductor stopped in the aisle, thumbing through tickets. "That your seat?" he asked Bruno.

Bruno leaned possessively into his corner. "Drawing room next car."

"Number Three?"

"I guess. Yeah."

The conductor went on.

"Those guys!" Bruno murmured. He leaned forward and gazed out the window amusedly.

Guy went back to his book, but the other's obtrusive boredom, a feeling he was about to say something in another instant, kept him from concentrating. Guy contemplated going to the diner, but for some reason sat on. The train was slowing again. When Bruno looked as if he were going to speak, Guy got up, retreated into the next car, and leapt the steps to the crunchy ground before the train had quite stopped.

The more organic air, weighted with nightfall, struck him like a smothering pillow. There was a smell of dusty, sun-warm gravel, of oil and hot metal. He was hungry and lingered near the diner, pacing in slow strides with his hands in his pockets, breathing the air deeply, though he disliked it. A constellation of red and green and white lights hummed southward in the sky. Yesterday, Anne might have come this route, he thought, on her way to Mexico. He might have

been with her. She had wanted him to come with her as far as Metcalf. He might have asked her to stay over a day and meet his mother, if it had not been for Miriam. Or even regardless of Miriam, if he had been another sort of person, if he could be simply unconcerned. He had told Anne about Miriam, about almost all of it, but he could not bear the thought of their meeting. He had wanted to travel alone on the train in order to think. And what had he thought so far? What good had thinking or logic ever been where Miriam was concerned?

The conductor's voice shouted a warning, but Guy paced till the last moment, then swung himself aboard the car behind the diner.

The waiter had just taken his order when the blond young man appeared in the doorway of the car, swaying, looking a little truculent with a short cigarette in his mouth. Guy had put him quite out of mind and now his tall rust-brown figure was like a vaguely unpleasant memory. Guy saw him smile as he sighted him.

"Thought you might have missed the train," Bruno said cheerfully, pulling out a chair.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Bruno, I'd like some privacy for a while. I have some things to think over."

Bruno stabbed out the cigarette that was burning his fingers and looked at him blankly. He was drunker than before. His face seemed smeared and fuzzy at the edges. "We could have privacy in my place. We could have dinner there. How about it?"

"Thanks, I'd rather stay here."

"Oh, but I insist. Waiter!" Bruno clapped his hands. "Would you have this gentleman's order sent to Drawing Room Three and bring me a steak medium rare with French fries and apple pie? And two Scotch and sodas fast as you can, huh?" He looked at Guy and smiled, the soft wistful smile. "Okay?"

Guy debated, then got up and came with him. What did it matter after all? And wasn't he utterly sick of himself?

There was no need of the Scotches except to provide glasses and ice. The four yellow-labeled bottles of Scotch lined up on an alligator suitcase were the one neat unit of the little room. Suitcases and wardrobe trunks blocked passage everywhere except for a small labyrinthine area in the center of the floor, and on top of them were strewn sports clothes and equipment, tennis rackets, a bag of golf clubs, a couple of cameras, a wicker basket of fruit and wine bedded in fuchsia paper. A splay of current magazines, comic books and novels covered

the seat by the window. There was also a box of candy with a red ribbon across the lid.

"Looks kind of athletic, I guess," Bruno said, suddenly apologetic.

"It's fine." Guy smiled slowly. The room amused him and gave him a welcome sense of seclusion. With the smile his dark brows relaxed, transforming his whole expression. His eyes looked outward now. He stepped lithely in the alleys between suitcases, examining things like a curious cat.

"Brand-new. Never felt a ball," Bruno informed him, holding out a tennis racket for him to feel. "My mother makes me take all this stuff, hoping it'll keep me out of bars. Good to hock if I run out, anyway. I like to drink when I travel. It enhances things, don't you think?" The highballs arrived, and Bruno strengthened them from one of his bottles. "Sit down. Take off your coat."

But neither of them sat down or removed his coat. There was an awkward several minutes when they had nothing to say to each other. Guy took a swallow of the highball that seemed to be all Scotch, and looked down at the littered floor. Bruno had odd feet, Guy noticed, or maybe it was the shoes. Small, light tan shoes with a long plain toecap shaped like Bruno's lantern chin. Somehow old-fashioned-looking feet. And Bruno was not so slender as he had thought. His long legs were heavy and his body rounded.

"I hope you weren't annoyed," Bruno said cautiously, "when I came in the diner."

"Oh, no."

"I felt lonely. You know."

Guy said something about its being lonely traveling in a drawing room alone, then nearly tripped on something: the strap of a Rolleiflex camera. There was a new white scratch deep down the side of its leather case. He was conscious of Bruno's shy stare. He was going to be bored, of course. Why had he come? A pang of conscience made him want to return to the diner. Then the waiter arrived with a pewter-covered tray, and snapped up a table. The smell of charcoal-broiled meat cheered him. Bruno insisted so desperately on paying the check that Guy gave it up. Bruno had a big mushroom-covered steak. Guy had hamburger.

"What're you building in Metcalf?"

"Nothing," Guy said. "My mother lives there."

"Oh," Bruno said interestedly. "Visiting her? Is that where you're from?"