

Rumpole of the Sydenham Line

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a short play

by

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Cast

CLAUDIA a lawyer, 30-40
GRAEME a Greenkeeper, 50-60
LYNNE Claudia's secretary

Setting

Claudia's office in the city

Time

Week day, 9.30am.

Rumpole of the Sydenham Line

City. Office, 9.30am.

CLAUDIA sits at her desk, sipping coffee from a styrofoam cup. She is staring at a piece of paper in front of her. Pause.

LYNNE enters.

LYNNE: Mr Davids.

CLAUDIA DOES NOT RESPOND.

LYNNE: Mr Davids.

CLAUDIA: (STARTLED) Sorry.

CLAUDIA LOOKS AT LYNNE.

LYNNE: He's here.

CLAUDIA: Oh . Okay.

PAUSE.

LYNNE: Should I show him in ?

CLAUDIA: Yes. Yes.

LYNNE EXITS. CLAUDIA STANDS. HE WALKS TO THE WINDOW. HE LOOKS OUT. HE TURNS TO FACE THE DOOR. PAUSE.

GRAEME ENTERS.

GRAEME: Claudia.

CLAUDIA: Graeme.

GRAEME: Why do you call me that ?

CLAUDIA LAUGHS.

CLAUDIA: Because that's your name. Sit down. Yes.

CLAUDIA GETS A CHAIR FOR GRAEME. GRAEME SITS.

CLAUDIA: You made it in okay ?

GRAEME: I'm late. Missed the train.

CLAUDIA: Well you're here now.

GRAEME: It was on the station as I was walking up. I saw it but I just couldn't get there in time.

CLAUDIA: Nonsense.

GRAEME: My legs - they're too old.

CLAUDIA: But you're here now.

GRAEME: Old.

CLAUDIA: Nonsense. (**CLAUDIA SITS.**) And that's why you've come to see me. The reason for your visit. I mean – you don't mind, do you ?

GRAEME: Mind ?

CLAUDIA: If we get straight to it. I have a ten o'clock.

GRAEME: I understand.

CLAUDIA: I mean it would be great to chat, to ... catch up – but ten o'clock.

GRAEME: It's alright.

CLAUDIA: Good. Well then, it's as you said. Your problem is –

GRAEME LOOKS AT HER.

CLAUDIA: Trains.

GRAEME: I don't have a problem with trains.

OVERLAPPING:

CLAUDIA: (**HOLDING UP PAPER**) Then they have a problem with you.

GRAEME: The only problem I have –

CLAUDIA: This was faxed to me this morning.

GRAEME: is that I missed that one this morning.

CLAUDIA: It's from their solicitors.

GRAEME: When I was young I would've caught it -

CLAUDIA: These are serious questions.

GRAEME: A hop, a skip and a jump and I would've been –

CLAUDIA: Please !

SILENCE.

CLAUDIA: Ten o'clock. Now, if I am to understand correctly - you boarded the train at 9.45pm last Tuesday.

GRAEME NODS.

GRAEME: I was coming home from work.

CLAUDIA: You're still at the Golf Club ?

GRAEME: (NODDING) Tuesdays I stay till they finish the watering.

CLAUDIA: You entered the carriage in which Mr Grant was seated.

GRAEME: No. That's not right.

CLAUDIA: It's not ?

GRAEME: I got on at Erskineville. He didn't get on till the next stop. St Peters.

CLAUDIA: (HOLDING UP PAPER) That's not what it says here.

GRAEME: I got on at Erskineville. He got on at St Peters.

PAUSE.

CLAUDIA: Are you absolutely sure ?

GRAEME: Yes.

CLAUDIA: Absolutely. I mean – it does change things.

PAUSE. **GRAEME NODS. CLAUDIA WRITES SOMETHING DOWN.**

CLAUDIA: So you didn't sit next to Mr Grant ?

GRAEME: He sat next to me.

CLAUDIA: Then why do they say you sat next to him ?

GRAEME: You need to ask them that. He sat next to me.

CLAUDIA: But why ? Why in a completely empty carriage, with every other seat vacant – why would he choose to sit next to you ?

GRAEME SHRUGS.

GRAEME: Maybe he wanted some company.

GRAEME SMILES. CLAUDIA LOOKS AT GRAEME. PAUSE.

CLAUDIA: In an otherwise empty carriage ?

GRAEME: He wanted to sit next to me.

PAUSE.

CLAUDIA: Now, you were already drinking at that stage.

GRAEME: It was only a beer.

CLAUDIA: It's still alcohol.

GRAEME: They gave it to me at the club. I was hot.

CLAUDIA: That doesn't change the law.

CLAUDIA: But it was only –

CLAUDIA HOLDS UP HER HAND.

GRAEME: Your ten o'clock.

CLAUDIA: Thank you. Now you were drinking the beer and what happened next ?

GRAEME: Well I could see him, watching me. Sort of - out the corner of his eye. He was watching what I had in my hand. The beer. Watching me bringing it to my lips. He had little crinkles on his head. And he was sweating.

CLAUDIA: And what did you do ?

GRAEME: Well I guessed he was thirsty. So I turned to him and asked him if he wanted some.

CLAUDIA: If he wanted some ? What were your exact words ? Please be precise. It could be important.

GRAEME: I'm not sure.

CLAUDIA: Please. Try.

GRAEME THINKS.

GRAEME: Well, he was watching me so I turned to him and I raised the beer a bit. I had it in a brown paper bag. I pulled down the paper

CLAUDIA: You pulled down the paper ?

GRAEME: So he could see what it was and then I said ...

CLAUDIA: Yes ?

GRAEME: I said ... "You look thirsty. Would you like some ?"

CLAUDIA: Yes ?

GRAEME: I think that was it.

CLAUDIA: You pulled down the paper.

GRAEME: Yes.

CLAUDIA: And you said -

GRAEME: "You look thirsty. Would you like some ?"

PAUSE. CLAUDIA SITS BACK.

CLAUDIA: You are aware that it is illegal to drink alcohol on trains ?

GRAEME: It was only a beer.

CLAUDIA: (TO HERSELF) Ignorance is not a defence anyway.

GRAEME: I didn't think he'd mind.

CLAUDIA: Do we have a defence ?

GRAEME: Don't see why it's such a big deal.

CLAUDIA: Why did he sit next to you ?

GRAEME: Why'd he have to go and report me ? I can't afford no fine.

CLAUDIA LOOKS AT GRAEME. PAUSE. SHE STANDS.

CLAUDIA: Fine ? Do you think if it was just a fine I'd bother to get you in here. He's suing you. Mr Grant is suing you for a very considerable sum of money.

GRAEME: I was just drinking a beer.

CLAUDIA: Mr Grant is an alcoholic. He *was* a recovering alcoholic. He'd just spent three weeks in a very expensive treatment facility, paid for by his he employer, and was on his way to some meeting to celebrate a month without drinking – which is meant to be some kind of a landmark or something.

GRAEME: That's why he didn't drink any.

CLAUDIA: No, not then. But the thought of that beer stayed in his mind so when he got off the train he didn't go to the meeting as planned. He went straight to a bottle shop and brought two large bottles of Vodka. He consumed those within the next several hours –

GRAEME: Two whole bottles.

CLAUDIA: Where after he staggered to his car - I have no idea where that was parked or how he found it in his inebriated state – but somehow he managed to locate it and drive to his home. But on reaching his home he mistook the front path for the driveway and drove his car into the living room, destroying the car and the living room. His long suffering wife, who had up until then – I can't fathom exactly why – promised to give him one more chance said enough was enough, took the children and promptly filed for divorce. This was all too much for poor Mr Grant so he went on a real bender and two days later arrived at his place of work. His long suffering boss, who had also up until then given him one more chance, took one look at him, said enough was enough and promptly fired him. Mr Grant became so enraged at this that he attacked his employer, pushing him down the stairs whereon said employer broke both legs and his jaw.

PAUSE.

GRAEME: Probably should've taken that beer.

CLAUDIA: It's not a joke ! Do you think it's a joke ?

GRAEME: No.

CLAUDIA: He's suing you for the car, the house, the job, the injuries to his boss, the emotional trauma to his wife and children and his own suffering – both physical and mental. It will run into millions of dollars.

GRAEME: But I wasn't driving the car.

CLAUDIA: But you were drinking on the train – where you were not meant to be drinking -and you set in motion the whole unfortunate chain of events.

GRAEME: But he could've seen anybody drinking.

CLAUDIA: He says that he knew how sensitive he was to the sight of alcohol and so he had worked out a route to get from his work to the meeting without being confronted by people drinking.

GRAEME: He could've bumped into someone on the street.

CLAUDIA: But he didn't. And even if he had - to him all he had to do was reach the sanctuary of the alcohol free train and then he would be safe. But he wasn't

safe because of you and your one little beer. That's what Mr Grant says.
 GRAEME: Is that what you think ?

CLAUDIA: It doesn't matter what I think.

GRAEME: It matters to me.

CLAUDIA LOOKS AT GRAEME.

CLAUDIA: My ten o'clock.

CLAUDIA SITS.

GRAEME: So what are we going to do ?

CLAUDIA: I have no idea. Maybe somebody at the Golf Club will lend you the money.

GRAEME: I just work there.

CLAUDIA: It was a joke. (PAUSE) In cases like this I usually try to counter sue but I have absolutely no idea what to sue him for. All he did was get on a train.

GRAEME: That's all I did too. It's not my fault. He sat next to me.

CLAUDIA: As you said.

GRAEME: I was just minding my own business.

PAUSE.

CLAUDIA: Yes ... yes you were.

GRAEME: I was minding my own business –

CLAUDIA: And he came and sat next to you. He initiated the contact.

GRAEME: That's right.

CLAUDIA: The carriage was empty. You had the reasonable expectation that he would sit somewhere else. But he didn't. He was at fault. That's why they said you approached him,

GRAEME: But I didn't.

CLAUDIA: Of course you didn't. Yes, this might work ... This - lunatic, this - anti-social animal, this - *alcoholic* blundered over to you and nearly fell on your lap. He violated your personal space. He harangued you until in self defence you offered up the only possession you had. A tiny can of beer. He got what he deserved. He got what was coming to him.

GRAEME: He just sat next to me.

CLAUDIA: And for that – he will pay !

PAUSE. **CLAUDIA OPENS THE DOOR.**

CLAUDIA: I'll draw up the letter. Lynne will see you out.

GRAEME: Is it going to be alright then ?

CLAUDIA: Maybe. Maybe not. But there is some light at the end of our very dark tunnel. And at least if it doesn't work it'll tie them up in some red tape until I can think of something that will.

GRAEME COMES TO THE DOOR. HE LOOKS OUT. HE LOOKS BACK AT CLAUDIA. PAUSE.

GRAEME: I'll be going then.

CLAUDIA: Thanks for coming in. And give my love to Janine.

GRAEME LOOKS AT CLAUDIA.

GRAEME: Your mother and I haven't lived together for two years Claudia.

CLAUDIA: Of course. Well ... you should probably give her a call, Dad. (SLIGHT PAUSE) My ten o'clock.

GRAEME STARTS TO EXIT. HE STOPS AND LOOKS BACK. PAUSE. CLAUDIA SMILES. GRAEME SAYS NOTHING.

GRAEME TURNS AND EXITS. CLAUDIA CLOSES THE DOOR.

PAUSE. **CLAUDIA WALKS SLOWLY TO THE DESK. SHE RESTS BOTH HANDS ON IT, LOOKING DOWN.**

LYNNE ENTERS

LYNNE: Miss Davids. Your ten o'clock is here.

CLAUDIA DOES NOT RESPOND.

LYNNE: Miss Davids ? Are you alright ?

CLAUDIA TURNS AND STANDS UPRIGHT

CLAUDIA: Ten o'clock. Yes. Show him in. Show him in.

LYNNE EXITS. CLAUDIA STANDS WATCHING THE DOOR. LIGHTS FADE.

END PLAY.