

Adelstrop – Again

A one act play

by

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ISBN: 978-1-910028-25-4
The Playwrights Publishing Co.

ADELSTROP - AGAIN

ADLESTROP AGAIN SYNOPSIS

Haunting, mysterious, *Adlestrop - Again* evokes Edward Thomas's poem about a train suddenly coming to a stop at a deserted station. The play uses time shifts to explore how, a hundred years later, the tragic events of WW1 continue to have a lasting effect on today's generation.

Emma and Ruby, teenage girls, set out for a fun day at a summer music festival. No time to check train departures, they jump on a what they think is the right train just as the whistle blows. Making their way down the carriage, they are surprised to see a smelly old military coat bundled in the corner. They debate what to do and decide to leave it there.

The train slows and comes to a standstill as they see a station name, "*Adlestrop*". It's supposed to be a non-stop train so where are they? They wait in the leaden soporific heat.

The owner of the coat pulls it back and reveals that he is a soldier from WW1. Emma is busy texting, doesn't see him and goes off to the buffet. The soldier tells Ruby that the train came to a stop just like this, the same station, at the outbreak of WW1. Referring to the imagery in Thomas's poem, he tells of the horror that that the men faced. One soldier, Tommy Crane cracked under the strain, deserted, destiny unknown. The only memento left was his harmonica.

Emma returns from the buffet bar and confirms it's the wrong train. Emma challenges Ruby's story about the soldier and tells her to live for today, the past is a waste of time. Differences between them grow and Emma stomps off. The soldier pleads with Ruby to return the harmonica to Tommy and to tell him he will always be 'one of the boys'. He recites the haunting words of Edward Thomas's poem *Adlestrop* ending by holding out the harmonica to her. Struggling to make sense of how the Soldier's history can fit with her own life, Ruby reluctantly accepts his request.

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CAST

EMMA – about 16 years

RUBY- friend of Emma, similar age

SOLDIER- early twenties

The action of the play takes place in a railway carriage. Two benches are set diagonally to the audience representing the seats of the carriage.

A train door slams. A whistle blows. On stage, RUBY and EMMA stand, gasping for breath after running for the train. They try to keep their balance showing the motion of the train. They giggle and talk over each other. Hidden under a heavy military coat, a figure is huddled in a corner of a bench away from them.

EMMA Fucking hell, Rubs.

RUBY What..?

EMMA For fuck's sake, where were you?

RUBY Looking for the platform, dud!

EMMA We could 'a missed it.

RUBY You got the wrong the number...

EMMA Nah!

RUBY You did!

EMMA Didn't you hear the whistle?

RUBY You said fifteen.

EMMA And you'd gone.

RUBY Ran as fast as I could, didn't I?

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EMMA Stop! Stop! I screamed, didn't I?

RUBY That guard...

EMMA Him!

RUBY Wha' d'e'say?

EMMA *(she imitates the GUARD) 'Come along girls, 'we can't hold the train up for you...*

They giggle.

EMMA Wanker.

RUBY Anyway, we done it.

EMMA takes a swig from a bottle of water, spilling it over her face. RUBY laughs.

 Crazy cow!

RUBY takes out a comb and a small mirror and turns to face EMMA. She ruffles her hair with her hands

 What d'you think?

EMMA takes out her mobile and snaps her picture. She shows it to RUBY

EMMA Pamela Anderson scrambled egg look.

They both laugh.

RUBY Where we going to sit, Em? Here?

EMMA Where ever.

RUBY glances at the place in the corner.

RUBY What's that?

EMMA What?

RUBY Can't you smell it?

EMMA sniffs.

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EMMA Pfff! Cor! Ripe, 'innit it'? Who'd leave a smelly old coat like that?

RUBY goes closer and sniffs

RUBY Pfff! Where's that been?

EMMA Let's chuck it.

RUBY No!

EMMA Scaredy cat!

RUBY No! We can't.

EMMA Why not?

RUBY Leave it, Em. Somebody might come...you never know. Just leave it.

EMMA walks downstage, looks to the audience as though looking out of the carriage window

EMMA Mmmm... ah, cool. Rubs, come and stand here.

(looks out as if feeling the wind) Phew! Good, 'innit'?

She pulls her tee shirt vest away from her body and blows down her front. RUBY goes to her. EMMA looks up as if reading a notice.

'Do not lean out of the window'. Never seen one of them before. *(pause)* Well we can. We can do anything!

She leans out towards the audience and sticks out her tongue and laughs.

We're free, you know. Do whatever. Aren't we? Well, say yes.

RUBY Yes! yes!

EMMA takes a shot of Ruby. With her mobile.

EMMA Smile, gorgeous!

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More laughter as they look at picture.

RUBY Don't! Em, don't!

EMMA There! Saved!

RUBY Don't send it, Em! I swear.

EMMA stretches out on a bench. She looks up as if following the scene outside.

EMMA Great, 'innit'? Fucking brilliant. Look at that sky, Rubs.

RUBY Gonna be a scorcher.

EMMA Blue, blue, blue, blue, blue!

RUBY Not real, is it?

EMMA Nothing but sky and them woods.

RUBY And us!

EMMA Amazing!

RUBY Will it last?

EMMA Eh? What?

RUBY Will it? Go on forever? Just like this?

EMMA Dunno... today anyway.

RUBY More than that Em. Much longer than that.

EM If you say...

They laugh. Screech of brakes and Ruby lurches forwards, Emma nearly falls off the bench.

EMMA Fucking hell!

RUBY You alright?

EMMA (*giggling*) Driver still got his L plates.

RUBY Leaves on the line!

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EMMA What's going on?

RUBY We're stopped.

EMMA Know that. But why? *(Pause)* Get on, will ya? Chugg, chugg...

They giggle.

EMMA) *(together)* Chugg, chugg, chugg, chugg
RUBY) Chugg..

RUBY You're mad. *(looks out to audience)* Hey, coming into a station.

EMMA What?

RUBY Not meant to stop. Straight through.

EMMA Well, it is.

A silence falls.

EMMA Gawd! Don't believe it!

RUBY See anything?

EMMA Na. This can't happen. Late for the festival!

EMMA takes out her phone and tries to make contact.

 Great. No signal.

RUBY Nothing?

EMMA Fucking useless..

RUBY leans out of the window

EMMA Anyone there Rubs?

RUBY Na.

EMMA Must be!

RUBY I'm telling you. It's deserted.

EMMA Where is this place? Does it say?

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RUBY leans forward trying to make out the letters

RUBY Mmm... A..d...Adle....st...st...

EMMA *(laughing)* Can't you read?

RUBY This the wrong train?

EMMA Don't tell me.

RUBY What if we are? Should've checked.

EMMA Don't you start!

RUBY Where are we going?

EMMA Don't know....

RUBY Shit!

EMMA Ask.

RUBY Who?

EMMA How do I know?

RUBY Could be miles away.

EMMA Come on, let's go to refreshments, might know there.

EMMA picks up her things. RUBY looks left and right as if looking up and down the platform

Rubs... you coming?

RUBY Jus' a minute.

EMMA Come on!

RUBY I'll see you there.

EMMA waits then exits. RUBY stares out. The huddled figure under the coat coughs. She stands on tiptoe and tries to read the sign.

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RUBY Adle... Adelstr...

SOLDIER Adlestrop.

RUBY gives a start of surprise.

RUBY Wha... what...who said that?

The figure in the corner pushes back his coat revealing a SOLDIER dressed in the uniform of WWI.

RUBY Aaah...my god! Wha... ? What...? Who are you? Where d'you come from? What you doing there? You been there all the time? Why didn't you say? You should've!

SOLDIER Mind if I close the window?

He makes a move forwards.

RUBY Keep away! *(She calls)* Em!

SOLDIER What's the matter with you?

RUBY *(calling)* Em! Come 'ere, will ya? Em!

SOLDIER Blimey...only asked.

RUBY Gawd! Look at yer!

SOLDIER The window?

RUBY You can't close it.

SOLDIER Bloody freezing in here.

RUBY Freezing! Boiling more like!

SOLDIER Can't get warm. No matter what.

RUBY Were you under that coat all this time? What you doing there? Why you dressed like that? What's going on? Where is this place? Weird. Totally.

SOLDIER Adlestrop isn't a place. It's a time.

RUBY Time! What's that mean?

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SOLDIER Don't you realise anything?

RUBY What you talking about?

SOLDIER The time our lives share.

RUBY D'you mean now?

SOLDIER Yes, now. But also then.

RUBY Don't get it – share? We don't share nothing.

SOLDIER When we stop here. ... when we stand still...
When we notice what's around us.

RUBY Us? Who's 'us'? In this carriage?

SOLDIER And outside there. (*Pause*) Listen, d'you
hear?