

TRAIN TO CANAAN

As humanity faces annihilation, a train programmer attempts a midnight escape with his aging mother on a train he helped build, but they soon learn they aren't the only ones taking the trip.

INT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

The echoing sound of footsteps. Sparse TRAIN PASSENGERS walk the hallway searching for their platforms.

Deep bass and screeching metal pervades. Rick (44, thin, white American with Euro-style and glasses) looks at the ceiling above blankly as he waits for someone to pick up his cell phone call. Prolonged beeps, then a click.

VOICEMAIL GREETING

(Cold female voice)

Hi, you've reached Jessica and I've purposefully ignored your call because I don't like you. If you'd like to waste your time by leaving a message, be my guest.

Rick hears muffled giggles as the voice pulls away.

VOICEMAIL GREETING (CONT.)

(Distant female voice)

I can't be this mean! And I'm telling you the beep thing won't work because of the delay!

(Distant male voice)

It's still recording! You got this!

(Female voice returns to mouthpiece, cold again)

And just remember that I think you're just a son. of. a-

Brief silence, then voicemail beep. Rick begins to strut.

RICK

Hi. I really wish you had picked up because I could use some normal interaction that is not with my mother. I only have a few more seconds before ol' crutchie catches up. More like hours. Okay, I just have to say this: (shouting whisper) she's killing me! Yes, I know she gave birth to me, but she is not the same woman, I swear it. She is just so... old! And so much more demanding. And so much... grosser! Maybe she was always gross, but at least she kept it quiet. She is really like a zombie with a corn. I'm sure zombies have corns, but you wouldn't know, would you? They don't go around complaining about them. No, they just politely moan. At this point,

I'd prefer the moaning, and even
the constant attacks!

WHACK! Rick is gesticulating as a crutch hits him in the
back.

RICK

Ouch! (Still into the phone) Be
careful what you wish for. That's
what I get for bring up zombies at
a time like this. Love you.

Rick puts his phone away and smiles. Rick's MOTHER (75,
white and proper) points her crutch accusingly at Rick.

MOTHER

If you leave her one more message,
I'm going to end you.

RICK

You know, some people might think
you're faking, mom, seeing you
standing up just fine, brandishing
that like a weapon.

MOTHER

I'm old. I'm allowed to raise
Cain.

Rick guffaws at the pun obligatorily. He then looks at
her, puzzled, as his Mother puts her crutch down.

RICK

Did you mean that joke just now?

MOTHER

You don't think you got your sense
of humor from your father, do you?
Now, come on, we need to hustle.
It would be embarrassing if a
train you built left without you.
And I don't think I can handle
this errant toenail any longer.

RICK

And we're back.

MOTHER

Well, I could barely get my sock
on this morning.

RICK

Why is it always the feet?

MOTHER

If you had to bear this old, saggy
burden, you'd fall apart, too.

Rick looks at his phone. The screen reads: "Platform 11."

RICK

Fear not, saggy burden, we're only
5 platforms away.

They walk on. This time, Rick stays back with his Mother.

MOTHER

I'm serious about calling Jessica.
Every hour is... unhealthy.

RICK

At your pace, I find myself with a
little extra time on my hands.

MOTHER

Maybe you should stay back with
your old mother. You might learn
something. Also, you shouldn't
leave me alone. We're in peril.

RICK

The train station is completely
safe, mom. They don't let anyone
in without a ticket.

MOTHER

How can we tell them apart? I
don't see anyone foaming at the
mouth.

RICK

They're called "white knuckles"
for a reason, mom. And remember,
they don't eat people. We don't
think. They kill and then infect.

MOTHER

But it's winter. Everyone is
wearing gloves. And what about
white people with white knuckles?
That's not fair to the blacks.

RICK

Everyone's pigment in their
knuckles changes when they're
infected, even white people.
They're called that because it
started in Africa. Don't you watch
the news?

MOTHER

I thought it was because of the
anger.

Suddenly, Mother's jacket is yanked by two black hands reaching up from the ground.

MOTHER

Release me, you cur!

Mother picks up her crutch and strikes a ragged black man sitting Indian-style on the ground several times. He lifts shaking hands to protect himself, revealing that his hands are thoroughly black. Rick grabs the crutch and pulls her away. A metal bowl clangs. Change spills out.

RICK

Mom, he's not infected! He's just homeless.

MOTHER

Oh dear! I'm so sorry. I thought..

Rick bends down to clean it up. Mother whispers to Rick.

MOTHER

Could you give him some money, Rick? Maybe 20 Euros? And I suppose I was being a bit racist, as well. Maybe 25?

Rick places a few bills in the bowl and returns it to the man, smiling apologetically. Rick spots a sign nearby.

RICK

Platform 11. Let's get you out of peril, mother.

Mother is wide-eyed after a realization.

MOTHER

I thought you said they didn't let anyone in without a ticket.

Rick helps his startled mother along by grabbing her under the arm and walking her to the platform stairs.

RICK

They don't. I've often fit in a little panhandling before a trip.

MOTHER

This is not the time for jokes.

RICK

Smart move, if you ask me. Trip pays for itself.

They begin to ascend the staircase in brief silence.

RICK
 Can we just talk about how you
 called that man a "cur?" Too much
 British TV, maybe?

MOTHER
 Like I said, you might learn
 something.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT

They stand waiting alone on the dimly lit, open-air
 platform, facing the tracks. The silent darkness is only
 unbroken by wind gusts and lights along the track.

Mother takes one glove off and itches her knuckles.

MOTHER
 You know, I was so excited when
 you got your job on the train.

RICK
 Well, I don't work "on the train."
 I program them from a comfy desk.

MOTHER
 I remember that day five years ago
 like it was yesterday.

RICK
 Three years.

Mother is beaming, looking into the distance.

MOTHER
 Jessica called me and was so
 proud. She never lost hope that
 you would find a job. Two years.

RICK
 One and a half.

MOTHER
 I remember thinking, I know I did
 a good job raising him, but how on
 God's green earth did he get her?

Rick looks down at his phone and scrolls in silence.

RICK
 Train should be here any minute.

Mother looks to her left and then turns back to Rick.

MOTHER
 I didn't notice him before.

RICK

Who?

Rick turns to look. He sees a white man with long, black, curly hair in a white jacket. The man also stands facing the tracks. Mother slaps Rick's arm and whispers loudly.

MOTHER

Don't look!

They both face forward toward the tracks. Rick talks quietly out of the corner of his mouth.

RICK

Good one, mother.

MOTHER

Good one what?

RICK

There's no one there? You're trying to scare me. You see ghosts; I get it. Almost worked.

MOTHER

Rick, I am dead serious!

RICK

See? Another good one.

MOTHER

Are you telling me you don't see that man over there? White jacket?

Rick attempts to turn and look, but Mother slaps his arm.

RICK

Oh, next thing you're going to tell me is that he has long, black, curly hair, right?

MOTHER

Well, how did you...

Mother slaps her son on the shoulder several times.

MOTHER

If your plan is to make fun of me by scaring me even more, you've got another thing coming!

Rick smiles, proud of himself. After the moment settles, he turns slightly to look out of the corner of his eye. The man is closer than before, about half the distance. He still faces the tracks, his hands in his pockets. Rick looks at his phone. The screen reads: ARRIVAL 1 MINUTE.

They can barely hear a train screech in the distance. They both instinctively turn to look. Simultaneously, Mother feels a hand on her shoulder. The man in the white jacket is now upon them. Mother gasps and Rick turns.

Rick looks at the man's hand on Mother's shoulder. The hand is all the same white skin color. Rick is relieved. The man blankly notices Rick's glance at his hand and quickly removes it, placing it in his pocket.

RICK

It's alright, mother. He's not diseased or homeless.

PASSENGER

Well, we're all homeless now, aren't we?

Rick and Mother both silently await an explanation. The Passenger speaks with his hands in his pockets.

PASSENGER

Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. Don't get a lot of interaction these days.

RICK

That's okay, we're just a little on edge. We're getting on this train for a reason, you know?

PASSENGER

Aha, that is just what I was going to ask about. This is the train to Canaan, right?

Mother pulls Rick's lapel down and whispers too loudly.

MOTHER

Isn't there a secret password?

The Passenger chuckles, leans in, speaking low.

PASSENGER

The crow flies south.

RICK

Actually, it's north.

MOTHER

I knew it, you imposter!

The Passenger laughs and Mother realizes it's a joke.

PASSENGER

Look, it's 3:26am, exactly when this train is supposed to arrive,

and I'm on this platform asking
about Canaan.

Rick and Mother, especially, are still quietly wary. The train begins its approach from the distance.

PASSENGER

How about this?

The man pulls both hands out of his pockets and holds them up at eye-level, flipping them back and forth.

MOTHER

Just because you're human doesn't
mean you're trustworthy. Ever
heard of "crime" before?

Passenger laughs heartily. The small, two-car train arrives loudly, interrupting conversation. Rick is preoccupied with his phone. The train halts and a single doorway parts open.

PASSENGER

Here, let me help you.

The Passenger places one hand under Mother's free arm, and helps her board. Mother looks at Rick frightened, but he gives her a placating look to put her at ease.

As the Passenger and Mother climb up, the train jostles a little, causing Mother to slip, but Passenger keeps her from falling. Rick sees something fall out of the Passenger's pocket and land on the platform. Mother breathes heavy sighs of relief with a hand on her chest.

MOTHER

Oh, alright, I guess you can come.

Passenger laughs warmly. Rick smiles at them as they turn onto the train. He quickly bends down to pick up a tiny, unmarked, circular plastic container. He opens his mouth to say something, but for some reason, places it in his own pocket instead. Passenger turns and smiles at Rick.

Rick steps up and boards the train.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

The three of them stand in the connecting standing area of the warm train, between the two cars. Again, Rick is occupied with his phone. Rick looks up at the entrance doors and they slide shut. The train slowly pulls out from the platform. The Passenger smiles at the two.

PASSENGER

Looks like we made it. I'll see
you two across the Chunnel. I, for

one, get tired at three in the morning. Go figure.

Passenger playfully smacks his forehead with his palm.

RICK

Strange indeed. Maybe you can get that treated in Canaan.

PASSENGER

Yes, all sick will be healed. Happily ever after. Good night.

The Passenger walks through the undulating train connection door as it slides open and shut for him as he salutes back. Mother and Rick enter the opposite car. Three scattered people sleep in their seats, two men and one woman. One man opens one eye as the two pass, waving lazily before folding his arms and shutting his eyes.

Rick and Mother find seats at the very back of the car, facing the backs of the other passengers, the connecting area, the first car, and ultimately, Canaan and safety.

INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Rick and Mother are sitting awake in the dimly lit car, their heads bobbing back and forth on their seat head rests. Rick closes his eyes.

MOTHER

How did we get on without no ticket? Where is the security?

Rick holds up his phone and raises his eye brows at her.

MOTHER

No, I don't need to use it, thank you. It's three in the morning. Plus, they're all dead.

Rick rolls his eyes, but attempts again in whisper-speak, waving the phone back and forth to get attention.

RICK

No, I let us on. I am our ticket.

Rick taps his phone screen and scrolls down. As the lights dim slowly, Rick grins with one eyebrow raised.

MOTHER

That was you? You're a magician!

Rick taps his phone a few more times in the dark car. Several rows forward, an overhead light blinks on and off above the sleeping man. The man wakes up looking around.

Mother hides, giggling. She slaps Rick flirtatiously.

MOTHER

You're so bad!

Rick taps his phone again. The window next to the man opens. Wind fills the car and others wake up confused.

MOTHER

Everyone will think you're a such a wanker!

Rick makes the window close and the overhead light turn off. Mother's giggle is audible now in the quiet.

RICK

And now for my next trick. Sleep.

Mother pats Rick's arm softly, placing her head on his shoulder and shutting her eyes.

After a moment, Rick hears Mother snoring. He pulls the container out of his pocket and examines it. He unscrews the top and finds a cream inside. He dabs it with his finger and smells it. He rubs it between his index finger and thumb. He realizes something, turns his other hand over and begins rubbing it on his knuckles. His eyes grow wide and he places it back in his pocket, looking around.

Rick opens and shuts the car door leading to the connecting area. His phone screen shows an open padlock button. He taps it and the padlock locks. Rick puts his head back, gulps and, knowing he must just sit and hope, his eyes scan the ceiling back and forth restlessly.

He pulls his phone out of his pocket, taps the screen, then pins it to his shoulder with his cheek, listening.

FEMALE VOICE

(Beep)

Hi, you geek! You got this in the bag, or in the motherboard, I guess? I don't know how you programmers talk. I should just leave this voicemail in ones and zeroes, right? (giggles) Listen, you're so good at interviews, there's no way those train people don't offer you this job! You're smart, funny, and at least mildly sexy (giggles). Uh oh, your daughter is crying, probably for her daddy, but mommy will just have to do. Let me know how it goes! Love you!

(Beep)

Hey, babe, I'm anxious to hear how
it went...

Phone audio drifts into the background of the train
noise. Rick unintentionally falls asleep.

INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Rick wakes with a start when his phone falls from his
shoulder into his lap. He wakes to the same dark car,
except that there is the sound of wind, an open window.
Mother is still sleeping, but now her head rests against
the wall. Rick can barely see the rest of the seats, so
he pulls his phone out. He flickers the same overhead
light he had earlier. He turns and grins at Mother,
hoping she can enjoy the joke again, but she is asleep.
He looks back at the row of his blinking light and
notices there's no longer anyone there. He turns off that
light, and taps his phone again. He turns on the light
over the seats across the aisle. No one there. It blinks
off. Now he tries one row back. Seats on the right? No
one. Left? No one. Back one right? Back one left? Back
one right? Back one left? Now, he tries the row in front
of him. The overhead light on the right? No one.

Rick takes a moment before turning on the overhead light
of the seats directly in front of them. It blinks on and
reveals someone sitting in the seat directly in front of
his mother, to Rick's diagonal left.

Rick's eyes widen when he sees through the sliver between
the seats a man's hand on the armrest connected to a
white jacket. The hand is white with black pigment on the
knuckles. The hand is tapping the armrest slowly. The
tapping picks up speed until it is uncannily fast.

Rick looks over at his mother. She is now wide awake,
also staring at the hand between the seats.

MOTHER

Well, I was falling apart anyway.
Maybe I will be the zombie with a
corn after all.

Mother chuckles. Rick turns and looks at her, baffled.

MOTHER

Oh, my feet are ruined, but my
ears are just fine. It's funny I
was so scared before, but now I'm
as right as rain. Maybe a trick is
in order, Merlin.

Rick looks at his phone and taps it a few times. Water
rains down from sprinklers on the entire train car. The
Passenger is startled for a mere moment, but just enough
time for Rick to have the jump on him.

Rick grabs Mother's crutch, stands up and strikes the Passenger with it. The blow jars the Passenger briefly. Meanwhile, Rick extends a saving hand to his mother.

Mother shakes her head "no." Rick is flabbergasted, but there's no time. He attempts to strike the Passenger again, but this time, the Passenger grabs the crutch. Rick lets go and the Passenger moves to swing at Rick. Mother intervenes and grabs the Passenger's arm from behind. Rick sprints toward the connecting area. He pulls out his phone and opens the door. Behind him the Passenger has thrown Mother aside and is running at Rick.

Rick dives into the connecting area, landing near bodies of the other passengers, their eyes open but lifeless.

Rick turns and taps his phone. The door slides shut, but the Passenger is there and squeezes one hand into the doorway, stopping the door at the last second. The Passenger pulls the door open wide open and grins.

PASSENGER

All will be healed in Canaan
indeed! Just depends on your
definition of sick, doesn't it?

RICK

Nice try getting in without your
makeup!

Rick throws the container into the car behind the Passenger, distracting him. Rick sees a raised crutch behind the Passenger, which comes down on the top of his head like a hammer on a nail. The Passenger clutches his head and sways, turning around to address his attacker.

MOTHER

Say hello to Jessica for me!

RICK

No, I think it's time I said
goodbye.

MOTHER

Well, then I will for you.

Rick gets up and taps his phone. The door into the front train car opens. He runs inside and closes the door. He looks back through the glass door and sees the Passenger lunge at Mother. Rick frantically taps his phone and looks up to see the connecting area, and the car behind it, disconnect from the train. He watches powerlessly.

Rick sits alone, tears streaming, on the train to Canaan.

THE END