

A Close Encounter

Steve noticed her the first time after checking in at the terminal desk. Impatiently looking around, wondering what he would do for two hours before his flight left for Chicago. Why did he leave the lap-top at home? At least he could have been working on the sales report... but he let the boss talk him into making this trip a mini-vacation. After going to the all day meeting, Steve would be free to explore the city for five days.

I guess he is right; I have been working too many hours, he mused. The divorce had hit him hard. It wasn't the best of marriages, but there was someone there at the end of the day. How he hated walking into an empty apartment at night! He tried to fill the hours by working out at the gym. The combination of exercise and loss of appetite made his slender frame very appealing to women. But he was oblivious to the female eyes that followed his walk toward the waiting room.

He looked around at the many passengers, and decided to play the "Who am I game?" Hmm. Those two are obvious; black and white clothes, crosses, talking quietly together. Nuns from a catholic order. Too easy. OK Steve, keep looking. That loud-mouthed cashmere coat fellow. What do I think he does for a living? The woman next to him with notepad is jotting down his every word, must be his secretary. The way he looks around to see if anyone is watching, he sure seems to be important to himself!

That couple must be on their honeymoon. The way they are laughing, holding hands, and looking so intently at each other. Then there's the pink corsage on her suit. Steve sighed. What I would give to be in their shoes. He glanced toward the panoramic windows overlooking the runway. A woman was looking out the window, a forlorn expression on her face. He noticed her face first, then the very expensive looking blue suit.

He didn't usually notice women's clothing, but his ex-wife had expensive taste so he unconsciously recognized the quality of the clothes. Versace? Maybe. It was that kind of expense that eventually led to the divorce. I couldn't believe her tantrum when I wouldn't let her spend another \$5,000 on a dress for the ball. Throwing vases and lamps like a petulant child. Don't even go there, Steve. He gave himself a mental kick and concentrated on the young woman.

The blond hair lay in curly layers, just brushing her shoulders. With a smile, she would have been a knock-out! It wasn't just her looks that attracted him, though. He remembered his mother's words "Stevie, you just want to hug the world to fix everyone's problems, and sometimes the world doesn't want to be hugged!" Was that the attraction? He wanted to find out why she was so sad and "fix" the problem?

She stared out the window occasionally, and then took a book from her bag. But instead of reading, she placed it on the empty seat on the left.

I want to meet her, Steve thought. He walked toward the windows.

Steve: Excuse me, is this seat taken?

- Woman: No, I'm sorry, let me move my book.
- Steve: Thank you, what are you reading?
- Woman: Reading? Oh, I don't know; a friend gave it to me to read on the plane.
- Steve: Are you taking a long trip?
- Woman: Yes, I'm flying to Chicago. And you?
- Steve: I'm going there too, on company business. How about you?
- Woman: I just wanted to get away from San Francisco for a while.
- Steve: There's a lot to do in the city. I'm hoping to do some sight-seeing after the meetings are finished.
- Woman: That sounds nice; my sister is going to show me a few touristy places.
- Steve: I am really fascinated with museums. Every time I travel, I try to see the local museums.
- Woman: I enjoy that, too. You can learn so much about cultures that way. You've probably been to the San Jose Rosicrucian one.
- Steve: No, I haven't. I'll have to put that one on my list and it's a lot closer. (They both laugh.) What's there?
- Woman: It has the largest Egyptian artifacts collection in the western US. Very interesting! You almost feel like you are in Egypt.
- Steve: I'd like to see that. By the way, my name is Steve.
- Woman: I'm Natalie; nice to meet you.
- Steve: And nice to meet you, Natalie. Since we both have to wait so long for our flight, would you like to get a cup of coffee with me?
- Natalie: That would be great; I could really use a cup of coffee! I've been awake since 4 am. (They walk toward a coffee kiosk.)
- Steve: Did you have a long drive to get here? (They sit down and a waitress takes their order of two coffees.)
- Natalie: Not really, I just had trouble sleeping. My husband is an invalid and I was nervous about leaving him for the next few days. But John

insisted I go visit my sister. He's right, I guess. I just haven't left him alone since his accident.

Steve: Do mind my asking what happened to him?

Natalie: He was working construction in downtown San Jose, the foreman asked him to go up on the roof to finish laying the boards. A section of the roof collapsed and John fell through. An investigation determined the boards were rotten. The foreman was taking a "kick-back" by using poor quality materials. He disappeared before the case went to court.

Steve: That's terrible!

Natalie: The worst part was the insurance agency would not pay for John's medical care. They cited fraud was responsible for the accident. Fraud! Can you believe it? I thought we could have fought the decision until finding out the foreman did not pay all the premiums. (She sips the coffee, then adds cream and sugar.)

Steve: How in the world are you managing?

Natalie: It's been difficult; almost all of our savings are gone. That's another reason I didn't want to go on this trip, but my sister bought my ticket. But then, something happened... (She pauses, seems to hesitate.)

Steve: Something good?

Natalie: Oh, Steve, I've been talking too much! Let's change the subject and talk about you. What do you enjoy doing?

Steve: What do I enjoy doing? No one has ever asked me that. I used to enjoy so many things, but since my divorce...

Natalie: I'm sorry; if you'd rather not talk about it...

Steve: Well, I'm not going to bore you with a lot of "poor me" talk. But you are easy to talk to!

Natalie: Thank you. I think you are, too. I hope we are sitting near each other on plane. It would be a pleasant way to pass the hours.

Steve: Hey, check your ticket! Wouldn't it be too weird if we were next to each other?

Natalie: If I had that kind of luck; I would buy a lottery ticket! (She checks her ticket.) I have a window seat in row 14, what is yours?

Steve: It's too far away from your seat. If it's all right with you, I'll go see if I can change our seats to get two together. Is that OK?

Natalie: Yes, I think I'd like that.

Steve: OK, wait here and I'll be right back. (He hurries to the counter. A few minutes later he returns with a big grin on his face.) I got two tickets together!

Natalie: That's great! Maybe we should finish our coffee and get ready to board.

Steve: Good idea! They start boarding first class in 15 minutes.

Natalie: First class? (She is startled.) But you didn't...

Steve: It was the only place I could get two seats together. The plane is completely full.

Natalie: But you shouldn't have spent...

Steve: Don't worry about it. The company policy allows us to take someone along on these trips to Chicago. So I'm not spending my money.

Natalie (She is clearly embarrassed.) But you're not taking me along, I'm going to see my sister. This is a little awkward.

Steve: Please don't feel embarrassed, I enjoy talking to you and we might not ever meet again.

Natalie: That's true. I've never flown first class before. I'll feel like a VIP!

Steve: (Smiling.) Then I'm forgiven for buying you a first class ticket?

Natalie: (Laughing.) Yes, you're forgiven.

The boarding call is announced. They walk back to the gate in the waiting room. Steve hands the passes to the attendant and they proceed down the carpet and onto the plane. Another attendant stows their small suitcases and shows them where to sit. He then brings them a class of champagne and hors d'oeuvres. Fifteen minutes later, the plane is on its way to Chicago.

Vocabulary

mused	to be in deep or serious thought
divorce	official end of a marriage
oblivious	unaware of something or somebody
obvious	easy to see; no attempt to conceal
intently	having fixed attention on something
corsage	small arrangement of flowers worn on dress or jacket
panoramic	an unobstructed view in several directions
forlorn	looking lonely and miserable
petulant	ill tempered or sulky
knock-out	extremely good looking
occasionally	something that happens just once-in-awhile

Questions

1. Why do you think Steve is working so many hours?
2. What is the game Steve plays to keep from being bored?
3. What are some of the clues he observes about the honey-moon couple?
4. Why isn't Steve impressed by the man wearing a cashmere coat?
5. How did he recognize the expensive suit the woman was wearing?
6. What is one interest Steve and Natalie share?
7. How was Natalie's husband injured?
8. Are you curious when Natalie wants to change the subject?
9. How do you know that Steve and Natalie enjoy talking to each other?
10. Why is Natalie embarrassed about flying on a First Class ticket?
11. What is a VIP?

Answers

1. He just got divorced and is trying to forget it. OR He doesn't want to go home to an empty apartment.
2. He tries to guess what strangers do in their personal lives.
3. They are very happy, holding hands, and looking intently at each other.
4. The man seems to be loud so people will look at him and his cashmere coat.
5. His wife bought expensive clothes like the blue suit.
6. They both enjoy going to museums.
7. He had a bad fall through rotten boards.
8. Answers may vary. Good to discuss.
9. They are hoping to sit next to each other on the plane.
10. Steve is a stranger to her.
11. VIP means a Very Important Person.

Cloze Activity

1. John so seriously, he did not hear the phone ringing.
2. We were sad to hear that the marriage had ended in
3. We like to go out for dinner
4. When her father would not buy the \$100 doll, Sarah became
5. Being a happy mother was in her loving actions.
6. The view from the train was breathtaking!
7. John stared trying to remember the man's name.
8. Michelle wore a lovely on her formal.
9. The sudden rain soaked Jenny to the skin; she looked quite
10. Wow! Some makeup and new hair style made Layla a real
11. He was to the admiring stares from the women.

Answers (cloze activity)

1. mused
2. divorce
3. occasionally
4. petulant
5. obvious
6. panoramic
7. intently
8. corsage
9. forlorn
10. knock-out
11. oblivious