

THE ENCOUNTER

A SHORT DUOLOGUE

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At Rise:

PAUL is observing a painting. LAURA approaches. SHE is carrying a nearly empty glass of wine and has drunk too much already during the evening, but SHE is not drunk. PAUL is unsure.

LAURA

Do you like his work?

PAUL

He's very talented. It's a ... modern ...

LAURA

Yeah. What do you think's good about it?

PAUL

Well ...

LAURA

Tell me what you think. What do you see? You said you liked what he does.

PAUL

I don't know. I don't really care for it one way or the other.

LAURA

Take it or leave it?

PAUL

No actually, I don't like it. I don't see the point.

LAURA

Really ...

PAUL

It's the kind of thing you see in an office ... I don't know ... I would never see it ... it would blend away ... for me.

LAURA

I see what you mean. Still, it's interesting ...

PAUL

I don't know ...

LAURA

We've met, haven't we?

PAUL

Yes. I think so. I've seen you before.

LAURA

(Quickly)

At a social event, something like this?

PAUL

At a luncheon once, we sat near one another.

LAURA

I remember. You spilt something.

PAUL

Red Cross or something?

LAURA

Cultural Drive.

PAUL

You were across from me.

LAURA

Yes, I think I was.

PAUL

I took your dessert.

LAURA

But I didn't like the dessert.

PAUL

Then you really didn't mind.

LAURA

I asked you something.

(Pause)

I thought I was obvious.

(Pause)

LAURA cont'd)

I wanted those people around the table at that banquet to stop talking and go away, instead you took my cake. I thought you were flirting with me.

PAUL

I think I was.

LAURA

Flirting with me?

PAUL

Taking your cake.

LAURA

Did you think I wouldn't have understood?

PAUL

I don't know.

LAURA

Sitting across from one another. I would have liked it if we had talked.

(SHE gets more wine)

LAURA (cont'd)

I hate being alone at these things. But I wanted to see the exhibit.

PAUL

You must like art?

LAURA

Where I lived before there were a lot of museums. I had a friend, an artist, we were young and we were out and about all the time. It was great fun.

PAUL

You painted or ... ?

LAURA

No. I just liked going. Then I married and moved, it was just easier then to do the things I liked. Does that sound selfish?

(Pause)

But you don't really know me, do you?

PAUL

No.

LAURA

Life was less accountable ... more easily accepting. You don't think of how things are supposed to be then ... you just ... sometimes you make mistakes. Do you think there're too many expectations? Maybe it's just me.

PAUL

I guess.

LAURA

But a lot's changed ... it was a long time ago. I'm not twenty. Still, I miss doing things ... being around people who're less restrictive. I don't know. People that are nice. What do you think?

PAUL

I don't know.

LAURA

You don't think about those things?

PAUL

I guess not.

LAURA

I was glad to see you here. I've wanted to meet you.

PAUL

Paul Simmons.

LAURA

I know.

(Pause)

Don't you see people sometimes and you want to meet them? They make you feel a certain way. I just felt we should speak. Don't you see people and want to speak to them?

PAUL

I don't know.

LAURA

I do. We're just talking. I'm not a reporter. You can say what you want. I'm not going to talk about you. It's not like we're going to run off together. You don't have to think that.

PAUL

What!

LAURA

I liked you when you were across the room looking at me ... then we were perfectly safe ... just our imaginations ... wondering ... didn't you imagine how I might be ...

(HE says nothing)

LAURA (cont'd)

Did you or didn't you?

PAUL

All right ... yes I did. I imagined.

LAURA

Excellent. You don't like the art, you liked my dessert and you wondered about me. I'm learning all about you, Paul.

PAUL

I was going to say something ...

LAURA

Once your wife left? I don't mean anything drastic by that.

PAUL

She's ...

LAURA

(Quickly)

Do you think I'm attractive?

(Pause)

Should I be offhanded, polite, casual, glance about indifferently? That would be so pointless anyway. I can have all I want of that. I've had all I want of that. Have you?

(Slight pause)

Sometimes you see someone and you find they let you feel a certain way. Not always good feelings, some people frighten me ... you don't. I wanted to be near you. I think we'd understand one another. I might be wrong ... I just felt we would.

PAUL

I didn't think I was going to be talking to you.

LAURA

You are.

PAUL

I didn't think I would.

LAURA

I knew you wouldn't speak to me. You wouldn't then. I manoeuvred my way over here ... inch in ... sneak up on you ... find out.

PAUL

I was thinking just a moment ago ... when I saw you, I was thinking of my asking you if you were enjoying the exhibit. If you wanted a glass of wine ... I sounded so ridiculous ...

LAURA

Were you going to sneak up on me?

PAUL

I couldn't think of anything to say.