

Sure Thing

by David Ives (1988)

Scene: A café.

Betty, a woman in her late twenties, is reading at a café table.

An empty chair is opposite her. Bill, same age, enters.

Bill Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

Betty Excuse me?

Bill Is this taken?

Betty Yes it is.

Bill Oh. Sorry.

Betty Sure thing.

(A bell rings softly.)

Bill Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

Betty Excuse me?

Bill Is this taken?

Betty No, but I'm expecting somebody in a minute.

Bill Oh. Thanks anyway.

Betty Sure thing.

(A bell rings softly.)

Bill Excuse me. Is this chair taken?

Betty No, but I'm expecting somebody very shortly.

Bill Would you mind if I sit here till he or she or it comes?

Betty *(Glances at her watch)*: They do seem to be pretty late...

Bill You never know who you might be turning down.

Betty Sorry. Nice try, though.

Bill Sure thing.

(Bell)

Is this seat taken?

Betty No it's not.

Bill Would you mind if I sit here?

Betty Yes I would.

Bill Oh.

(Bell)

Is this chair taken?

Betty No it's not.

Bill Would you mind if I sit here?

Betty No. Go ahead.

Bill Thanks.

(He sits. She continues reading.)

Every place else seems to be taken.

Betty Mm-hm.

Bill Great place.

Betty Mm-hm.

Bill What's the book?

Betty I just wanted to read in quiet, if you don't mind.

Bill No. Sure thing.

(Bell)

Every place else seems to be taken.

Betty Mm-hm.

Bill Great place for reading.

Betty Yes, I like it.

Bill What's the book?

Betty The Sound and the Fury.

Bill Oh. Hemingway.

(Bell)

What's the book?

Betty The Sound and the Fury.

Bill Oh. Faulkner.

Betty Have you read it?

Bill Not...actually. I've sure read *about* it, though. It's supposed to be great.

Betty It is great.

Bill I hear it's great.

(Small pause)

Waiter?

(Bell)

What's the book?

Betty The Sound and the Fury.

Bill Oh. Faulkner.

Betty Have you read it?

Bill I'm a Mets fan, myself.

(Bell)

Betty Have you read it?

Bill Yeah, I read it in college.

Betty Where was college?

Bill I went to Oral Roberts University.
(Bell)

Betty Where was college?

Bill I was lying. I never really went to college. I just like to party.
(Bell)

Betty Where was college?

Bill Harvard.

Betty Do you like Faulkner?

Bill I love Faulkner. I spent a whole winter reading him once.

Betty I've just started.

Bill I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote. One of the greatest reading experiences of my life. I mean, all that incredible psychological understanding. Page after page of gorgeous prose. His profound grasp of the mystery of time and human existence. The smells of the earth. . . . What do you think?

Betty I think it's pretty boring.
(Bell)

Bill What's the book?

Betty The Sound and the Fury.

Bill Oh! Faulkner!

Betty Do you like Faulkner?

Bill I love Faulkner.

Betty He's incredible.

Bill I spent a whole winter reading him once.

Betty I was so excited after ten pages that I went out and bought everything else he wrote.

Bill All that incredible psychological understanding.

Betty And the prose is so gorgeous.

Bill And the way he's grasped the mystery of time--

Betty --and human existence. I can't believe I've waited this long to read him.

Bill You never know. You might not have liked him before.

Betty That's true.

Bill You might not have been ready for him. You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.

Betty That's happened to me.

Bill It's all in the timing. *(Small pause.)* My name's Bill, by the way.

Betty I'm Betty.

Bill Hi.

Betty Hi. *(Small pause.)*

Bill Yes I thought reading Faulkner was . . . a great experience.

Betty Yes. *(Small pause.)*

Bill The Sound and the Fury. . . *(Another small pause.)*

Betty Well. Onwards and upwards. *(She goes back to her book.)*

Bill Waiter--?
(Bell)

Bill You have to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good.

Betty That's happened to me.

Bill It's all in the timing. My name's Bill, by the way.

Betty I'm Betty.

Bill Hi.

Betty Hi.

Bill Do you come in here a lot?

Betty Actually I'm just in town for two days from Pakistan.

Bill Oh. Pakistan.
(Bell)

My name's Bill, by the way.

Betty I'm Betty.

Bill Hi.

Betty Hi.

Bill Do you come in here a lot?

Betty Every once in a while. Do you?

Bill Not so much anymore. Not as much as I used to. Before my nervous breakdown.
(Bell)

Do you come in here a lot?

Betty Why are you asking?

Bill Just interested.

Betty Are you really interested, or do you just want to pick me up?

Bill No, I'm really interested.

Betty Why would you be interested in whether I come in here a lot?

Bill Just . . . getting acquainted.

Betty Maybe you're only interested for the sake of making small talk long enough to ask me back to your place to listen to some music, or because you've just rented this great tape for your VCR, or because you've got this terrific unknown Django Reinhardt record, ~~only all you really want to do is **** which you won't do very well after which you'll go into the bathroom and pee very loudly, then pad into the kitchen and get yourself a beer from the refrigerator without asking me whether I'd like anything, and then--~~ only one thing. Then you'll proceed to lie back down beside me and confess that you've got a girlfriend named Stephanie who's away at medical school in Belgium for a year, and that you've been involved with her--off and on--in what you'll call a very "intricate" relationship, for about seven YEARS. None of which interests me, mister!

Bill Okay.

(Bell)

Bill Do you come in here a lot?

Betty Every other day, I think.

Bill I come in here quite a lot and I don't remember seeing you.

Betty I guess we must be on different schedules.

Bill Missed connections.

Betty Yes. Different time zones.

Bill Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

Betty I know.

Bill City life.

Betty It's crazy.

Bill We probably pass each other in the street every day. Right in front of this place, probably.

Betty Yep.

Bill *(Looks around):* Well the waiters here sure seem to be in some different time zone. I can't seem to locate one anywhere. . . .Waiter! *(He looks back.)* So what do you-- *(He sees that she's gone back to her book)*

Betty I beg pardon?

Bill Nothing. Sorry.

(Bell)

Betty I guess we must be on different schedules.
Bill Missed connections.

Betty Yes. Different time zones.

Bill Amazing how you can live right next door to somebody in this town and never even know it.

Betty I know.

Bill City life.

Betty It's crazy.

Bill You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

Betty Actually I was.

Bill Oh. Boyfriend?

Betty Sort of.

Bill What's a sort-of boyfriend?

Betty My husband.

Bill Ah-ha.

(Bell)

You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

Betty Actually I was.

Bill Oh. Boyfriend?

Betty Sort of.

Bill What's a sort-of boyfriend?

Betty We were meeting here to break up.

Bill Mm-hm. . .

(Bell)

What's a sort-of boyfriend?

Betty My lover. Here she comes right now!

(Bell)

Bill You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

Betty No, just reading.

Bill Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here, all by yourself?

Betty Do you think so?

Bill Well sure. I mean, what's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night?

Betty Trying to keep away from lines like that.

Bill No, listen—

(Bell)

You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?

Betty No, just reading.

Bill Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?
Betty I guess it is, in a way.
Bill What's a good-looking woman like you doing out alone on a Friday night anyway? No offense, but. . .
Betty I'm out alone on a Friday night for the first time in a very long time.
Bill Oh.
Betty You see, I just recently ended a relationship.
Bill Oh.
Betty Of rather long standing.
Bill I'm sorry. (Small pause.) Well listen, since reading by yourself *is* such a sad occupation for a Friday night, would you like to go elsewhere?
Betty No . . .
Bill Do something else?
Betty No thanks.
Bill I was headed out to the movies in a while anyway.
Betty I don't think so.
Bill Big chance to let Faulkner catch his breath. All those long sentences get him pretty tired.
Betty Thanks anyway.
Bill Okay.
Betty I appreciate the invitation.
Bill Sure thing.
(Bell)
You weren't waiting for somebody when I came in, were you?
Betty No, just reading.
Bill Sort of a sad occupation for a Friday night, isn't it? Reading here all by yourself?
Betty I guess I was trying to think of it as existentially romantic. You know-- cappuccino, great literature, rainy night. . .
Bill That only works in Paris. We *could* hop the late plane to Paris. Get on a Concorde. Find a cafe. . .
Betty I'm a little short on plane fare tonight.
Bill Darn it, so am I.
Betty To tell you the truth, I was headed to the movies after I finished this section. Would

you like to come along? Since you can't locate a waiter?
Bill That's a very nice offer, but. . .
Betty Uh-huh. Girlfriend?
Bill Two, actually. One of them's pregnant, and Stephanie--
(Bell)
Betty Girlfriend?
Bill No, I don't have a girlfriend. Not if you mean the castrating bitch I dumped last night.
(Bell)
Betty Girlfriend?
Bill Sort of. Sort of.
Betty What's a sort-of girlfriend?
Bill My mother.
(Bell)
I just ended a relationship, actually.
Betty Oh.
Bill Of rather long standing.
Betty I'm sorry to hear it.
Bill This is my first night out alone in a long time. I feel a little bit at sea, to tell you the truth.
Betty So you didn't stop to talk because you're a Moonie, or you have some weird political affiliation--?
Bill Nope. Straight-down-the-ticket Republican.
(Bell)
Straight-down-the-ticket Democrat.
(Bell)
Can I tell you something about politics?
(Bell)
I like to think of myself a citizen of the universe.
(Bell)
I'm unaffiliated.
Betty That's a relief. So am I.
Bill I vote my beliefs.
Betty Labels are not important.
Bill Labels are not important, exactly. Take me, for example. I mean, what does it matter if I had a two- point at—
(Bell)
—three-point at—

(Bell)
 four-point at college? Or if I did come from
 Pittsburgh—
 (Bell)
 Cleveland—
 (Bell)
 Westchester County?
 Betty Sure.
 Bill I believe that a man is what he is.
 (Bell)
 A person is what he is.
 (Bell)
 A person is. . . what they are.
 Betty I think so too.
 Bill So what if I admire Trotsky?
 (Bell)
 So what if I once had a total-body
 liposuction?
 (Bell)
 So what if I don't have a penis?
 (Bell)
 So what if I once spent a year in the Peace
 Corps? I was acting on my convictions.
 Betty Sure.
 Bill You just can't hang a sign on a person.
 Betty Absolutely. I'll bet you're a Scorpio.
 (Many bells ring.)
 Listen, I was headed to the movies after I
 finished this section. Would you like to
 come along?
 Bill That sounds like fun. What's playing?
 Betty A couple of the really early Woody Allen
 movies.
 Bill Oh.
 Betty You don't like Woody Allen?
 Bill Sure. I like Woody Allen.
 Betty But you're not crazy about Woody Allen.
 Bill Those early ones kind of get on my nerves.
 Betty Uh-huh.

(Bell)

Bill Y'know I was headed to the--
 Betty (Simultaneously): I was thinking about--
 Bill I'm sorry.
 Betty No, go ahead.
 Bill I was going to say that I was headed to the
 movies in a little while, and. . .
 Betty So was I.
 Bill The Woody Allen festival?
 Betty Just up the street.
 Bill Do you like the early ones?
 Betty I think anybody who doesn't ought to be
 run off the planet.
 Bill How many times have you seen *Bananas*?
 Betty Eight times.
 Bill Twelve. So are you still interested? (Long
 pause.)
 Betty Do you like Entenmann's crumb cake. . .?
 Bill Last night I went out at two in the morning
 to get one. Did you have an Etch-a-Sketch
 as a child?
 Betty Yes! And do you like Brussels sprouts?
 (Pause.)
 Bill I think they're disgusting.
 Betty They *are* disgusting!
 Bill Do you still believe in marriage in spite of
 current sentiments against it?
 Betty Yes.
 Bill And children?
 Betty Three of them.
 Bill Two girls and a boy.
 Betty Harvard, Vassar and Brown.
 Bill And will you love me?
 Betty Yes.
 Bill And cherish me forever?
 Betty Yes.
 Bill Do you still want to go to the movies?
 Betty Sure thing.
 Bill and Betty (Together): Waiter!

Blackout