

Dear reader, my eye was on him

SO I'M 27, 28 in September, and, I hope, a lot less starry-eyed than I was. OK, as a young girl and teen, well, we all were, but I thought I'd be over it. Now? I'm not bloody sure. Will I ever? Maybe. But mainly, I feel silly, really silly, and that's what gets me most, being really, really naive. Just feeling sorry for myself? Why not? That's what my friend says. Eve, she says, give yourself a bloody break, it happens, already, and if you think about it, it's almost funny. It happens, Eve.

Funny? It wasn't funny yesterday and it's still not funny today. I felt so stupid! OK, I can see what she means, but how did I miss it? How! But I did, and that's why I feel so silly, stupid, really naive like a high school kid with her first crush.

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I noticed his eyes at first, so blue, so so blue, blue as eyes only are in a chick-lit story, almost sparkling, clear as ice. But they were real. There should be a law against eyes that blue. They were almost too blue, too clear, too sparkling and at first that irritated me. No one should have eyes that blue. They irritated me a lot, but that was before I got to know him a little.

What surprised me was that for a guy, a hunk, trim and with such blue eyes, he was so unaffected, not an ounce of that look-at-me-aren't-I-just-something, not a bit. That's what first grabbed me, though I was soon dying to be grabbed by him anyway, in every sense of the word. He knew he was good-looking, he must have known, but he didn't come across as vain as too many good-looking guys do, think they're God's gift and let everyone know. Funny, they would be God's gift if they weren't so bloody vain, but that's what kills it, totally. It's a real turn-off seeing a guy admire himself in every mirror and every window, a sly glance here, another there, and then that satisfied smile. Jesus, do some men love themselves! But he didn't and that's the irony. Irony? Oh, I can see it now, sure, and maybe I'll laugh about it too some time, but, not yet, sister, not yet. It'll take a while.

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'Eve, you know that guy you keep looking at?'

'I don't keep looking!'

'You do! You know you do, but it's nothing to feel bad about. I think he likes you!'

'Yeah, right.'

'He does, I'm sure.'

That was my friend. Now even she tells me she 'knew' from the start. Well, she couldn't have 'known', could she? But what the hell.

'He's not said a word.'

'So why would he, Eve?'

'Why wouldn't he?'

'It means he's not pushy.'

'I don't mind pushy, not always, sometimes I don't mind.'

'Well, get talking, sweetheart.'

'Yeah right, you start a conversation and try to sound natural, it never works, everything screams "I think you're gorgeous and want to spend time with you". No, sister, I ain't taking that road.'

'So let him get away, Eve, and regret it for ever. You can do it, if you try, you'll think of something.'

'It's those blue eyes, they're too perfect.'

'Now you're being silly, nothing and no one is too perfect.'

'Well, those eyes are pretty damn close.'

'Well, just imagine him on the john, that should settle your nerves.'

'Stop it!'

We giggled, and the joke did help. I was 27, for God's sakes, why was I acting like a lovestruck teen? But I was, and I couldn't deny it.

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We first saw him every now and then in the coffee bar that was part of Bleeker Book's, and it was those eyes that did it to me. The shoulders, too, and the hips and, I'll be straight, just everything else. Not too tall, not small, not too thin, and certainly not fat. And so natural, God he was natural. So if he could do it, I could, too. He was polite to everyone, I liked that, and smiled at the barrista when he was served, waited his turn, always courteous, nothing phoney, the regular, good-looking guy you always wanted and so not a numbskull who thinks he's God's gift.

Then one day we did get talking, though not in Bleeker's. It was downtown where I didn't much go. I was as surprised to see him there as he was me, and he nodded as I walked in. I nodded back as you do when you see someone familiar

where it's unfamiliar. It was like we knew each other. He was sitting by the window with a laptop, working I supposed. I queued for my skinny latte and Danish, which took a while as it always does. I found the courage. I took my tray over to his table.

'Can I?'

'Sure,' he said, 'sit, be my guest.'

And then I was shy and couldn't look at him.

'I don't . . .' I started.

'I don't . . .' he started.

We both stopped and laughed.

'You first.'

'No, ladies first.'

'I was going to say I've never been in this place before and met someone I know, well, not someone I know, but . . .'

It did not go as well as I was hoping.

'I'm here a lot, it's more or less my regular bar, I live just a block away.'

'So what takes you to Bleeker's, it's some way?'

'Oh, I get all over and I often have to visit Bleeker's and other bookstores.'

'How come?'

'Work,' but he didn't add anything. And I liked that. He wasn't a show-off. For a guy who takes in Bleeker's as part of his work, he sure wasn't a junior assistant deputy stand-in city transport manager or some City Hall geek pen-pusher. OK, that makes me sound snobby, maybe I am snobby, but a guy with those blue eyes and gorgeous in so many way needs to keep up in all departments for us chick-lit girls to be satisfied. A sexy job helps.

'OK, so who are you?'

'What do you mean?'

'I don't know your name.'

'It's Eve.'

'Oh.'

'Why? You've just divorced an Eve.'

'No, nothing like that.'

He laughed.

'I'm Adam.'

'No! No! Really?' I held out my hand.

'Well, nice to meet you, Adam.'

'It's good to meet you, Eve.'

Then, as happens, there was a brief silence, and the longer it lasts, just a moment, then a few more moments, we both became self-conscious. So when we spoke it was in a rush and at the same time.

'What do you . . .?'

'Do you . . .'

'Once again, Eve, ladies first.'

'I was going to ask what work you do that takes you to bookstores throughout the city.'

'Not just the city, upstate, too.'

'So?'

'I work for Stumpf. In the marketing department.'

'Stumpf!'

'There's nothing special about Stumpf, believe me, they're just another publisher, all they do is print and sell books. Some companies sell insurance or tights or food, Stumpf sell books.'

'But Stumpf!'

'But Stumpf what?'

'Well, you know, Stumpf!'

He sighed and smiled.

'We get this all the time, and I don't know why.'

It was getting better. The blue eyes, the great rig, the honest politeness and now the modesty.

'So what do you do, Eve?'

'I teach.'

'So how come you get to hang out in coffee bars at any time of the day? Playing hooky?'

'I work for myself, freelance, just given a lesson across the street.'

'What do you teach?'

This was now going well, as good as it could get, but I had to be off uptown soon for my next gig.

'French. We lived in France when I was young and learned to speak it as I grew up.'

But I didn't want to get snagged up on just general chat.

'Where else do you hang out, Adam, I mean what kind of things do you like doing?'

'That's a big question, covers so much ground, so many things.'

'Well, maybe . . .'

'Maybe what?'

I'm sure he knew what I meant, but didn't follow up. And my next question was too rushed, too eager, ah God, I hated that.

'Maybe you could tell me more about your work. Or . . .'

Just how feeble can a woman sound? I was finding out.

'What do you want to know?'

Thing was, we were back in polite conversation and not where I wanted to be. I busked.

'It's just that a job like yours with Stumpf . . .'

'I gotta stress, Eve, just unexciting my job is, even with Stumpf.'

'Well, publishing isn't an everyday job, it's a bit more out there.'

'No, it's not, Eve, it really isn't. Like I said, some sell insurance, some sell tights, we publish books.'

'That's not very romantic.'

'That's what I'm saying.'

He looked up over my shoulder and waved a hand, to a guy who had just walked in. The guy joined us at our table, a little older than Adam but not a lot.

'Eve, this is Greg, he works at Stumpf, too. I keep telling this young lady how unexciting our work is.'

'Speak for yourself, Adam, my every day's a big, bright, new adventure, especially when my boss changes his mind five times an hour.'

They laughed.

'Thought he was retiring.'

'He certainly is, they started collecting for his leaving present years ago and have already got ten times more than they need. People are generous.'

'Greg's in the art department, all those tasteful dust-jackets that keep winning industry prizes for Stumpf, that's him.'

'No, it's not me, it's me and several others.'

'Eve, teaches French.'

'Oh, yeah, do you go over there a lot?'

'I have a brother in Lyons, he stayed when we came back to the States and I go see him.'

Greg seemed a nice guy, as friendly and straightforward as Adam, but this was not where I wanted to be with Adam and I wished he hadn't shown.

'Who's for another cappuccino? Or latte. Adam? Eve?'

We were no takers, and Greg got up and joined the counter queue. It was now or never, before he came back.

'What I wanted to ask was . . . '

'Where I also hang out?'

'Well, sort of more, would you like to hang out a little with me? This is now, Adam, and a girl can ask.'

'I'd like that, Eve, yes.'

A warm feeling, a very warm feeling, but it lasted just a second.

'But you should know, Greg and I are partners.'

'Partners?'

'Yeah, partners.'

'Oh.'

Yeah, oh.