

A Brief Encounter

Arthur Keyser



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A BRIEF ENCOUNTER

By Arthur Keyser

CAST

SUSAN: a reasonably attractive fifty-two-year-old woman.

MAN: a male of indeterminate age.

BUILDING SUPER: a person of indeterminate age.

Place

A part of a hallway on the sixteenth floor of an office building, facing an elevator. Most of the play takes place inside a closed elevator. When produced, the action should occur in an imagined space to allow the audience to see and hear the performers.

Time

6:30 pm on a Friday evening.

A BRIEF ENCOUNTER

SETTING: *The hallway, within which the elevator is located. The elevator is situated in mid-stage.*

AT RISE: *Susan appears from off-stage and moves quickly toward the open elevator.*

SUSAN: Hold the elevator!

(Susan reaches the front of the elevator and pushes her arms through the closing elevator doors, forcing them open. She enters the elevator, briefly noticing Man standing in the far-left corner. She moves toward the far-right corner after which she turns to face the front of the elevator. She then slowly turns her head toward Man.)

SUSAN: *(cont'd)* *(in a quiet voice)* Didn't you hear me calling? I guess not. My boss says my voice is not very loud. He never hears anything I say to him.

SUSAN: *(cont'd)* The doors aren't closing. Oh my God! Do you think I broke something when I pushed the doors open?

MAN: I don't think so. Why don't you try pushing the close-elevator button?

(Susan pushes the button.)

SUSAN: Why didn't I think of that? They're closing now.

(A moment passes.)

SUSAN: *(cont'd)* *(in a quiet but apprehensive voice)* The elevator isn't moving.

MAN: You have to push a button to choose a floor.

SUSAN: Oh! I'm so stupid. Are you going to the first floor?

MAN: Yes.

(Susan pushes a button)

SUSAN: *(cont'd)* I think we're moving now.

(Suddenly, the body language of Susan and Man shows that the elevator has stopped)

SUSAN: *(cont'd)* What happened?

MAN: We've stopped.

(The regular elevator lights flicker and then turn off. At the same time, the emergency light in the elevator goes on.)

SUSAN: What happened to the lights?

MAN: The power is off.

SUSAN: *(in a voice that shows she is upset without sounding exaggerated)* I must have broken the elevator! I shouldn't have forced the doors open.

MAN: It's not your fault.

SUSAN: Most people would be angry with me for breaking the elevator.

MAN: I'm not angry with you.

SUSAN: Your voice sounds angry.

MAN: What do I have to do to convince you that I'm not angry?

SUSAN: I don't know. Don't come too close.

MAN: Why?

SUSAN: I'm sorry. It's just that I've never known a man I could trust.

MAN: If you knew me better, I'm sure you'd trust me.

SUSAN: Now what do we do? Do you think anyone knows we're stuck up here?

MAN: There's a call button up there. Do you want to push it?

SUSAN: I guess I should...unless—

MAN: Unless what?

SUSAN: You'd rather we wait a few minutes. They probably know we're here.

MAN: Stalled elevators have never upset me. Let's wait.

SUSAN: (*turning her head partly toward Man*) Do you work on the sixteenth floor? I don't remember ever seeing you.

MAN: I don't work here. I was just meeting with a client. Our meeting ran later than I expected. Do you work on this floor?

SUSAN: I've been a secretary here for almost eighteen years. I started when my daughter left home for college. I don't usually leave the office so late, but my boss left a lot of work for me this evening. I didn't feel like facing all of it when I came in on Monday.

MAN: Do you enjoy what you do?

SUSAN: It's just okay. Sometimes doing the same thing over and over gets boring. It helps if I let my mind wander and I make up stories.

MAN: Did you ever think of being a writer?

SUSAN: I did, before I got married, but things didn't work out.

MAN: Do you enjoy being married?

SUSAN: I hate it. My husband works from home and I'm only working because I had to find a reason to get away during the day.

MAN: Why did you marry him?

SUSAN: I don't know you well enough to tell you.

MAN: What would you like to know about me?

SUSAN: How old are you?

MAN: Is that important? How old are you?

SUSAN: *(in a sad voice)* I'm fifty-two.

MAN: You look much younger than that.

SUSAN: My husband wouldn't agree with you.

MAN: Is he younger than you?

SUSAN: He's fifty-five.

MAN: I don't understand. Why does he think you look old?

SUSAN: He likes women in their twenties.

MAN: Women in their twenties aren't nearly as interesting as someone your age. Maybe you should try to meet someone who would appreciate you. Not every man is looking for a young woman.

SUSAN: I don't know whether I'd have the courage to spend time with another man.

MAN: Are you afraid of what your husband might do if he found out?

SUSAN: He wouldn't even care. It's just the thought of being with a new man that scares me.

MAN: How long have you been married?

SUSAN: Almost thirty-five years.

MAN: There must have been some good years for you to stay married so long.

SUSAN: There weren't any good years. There weren't even any good days.

MAN: Do you do anything together...like take vacations?

SUSAN: My husband never wants to go anywhere with me. He doesn't like to leave his buddies. *(Susan pauses and stares up at the ceiling of the elevator, then continues)* I think a lot about traveling. I go to the library on my lunch hour almost every workday. I read books about places to see. Sometimes I imagine I'm visiting those places.

MAN: Did you travel anywhere before you were married?

SUSAN: I was too young and not very smart. Things happened that I didn't expect.

MAN: What sort of things?

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!