

Networking (Runner-Up, WriteInvite, January 2015)

"So in conclusion, I would urge you all to network as much as possible, whenever you can, with whomever you can - you never know what will come of it."

The elegant woman at the front of the room sat down with a smile, acknowledging the warm round of applause. I assume she must have taken some questions over the next few minutes, as I could see her mouth opening and closing, but frankly, I didn't hear a single word. I was in love! Not in a sexual way, not even in a fraternal way - but in the way that I wanted to be her. I wanted to be a rich, famous, spectacularly successful author - just like her.

When I came to, the formal session was ended and a queue was forming at the table where she was signing her latest book. I didn't have any money; at least, not enough to spend nearly twenty quid on a glossy hardback. But I wanted to talk to her; I needed to have a conversation with this vision in front of me, see if some of her advice would rub off. She'd said in her speech that she was always happy to help others further down the ladder than her - at least, I'm sure that's what she said.

So I joined the queue. It was really long so I had plenty of time to plan my question. And then I had time to get really nervous about it. And finally, I had time to think "hell, it's only networking; and that's what she recommended." But before I could get to the front of the queue, the worst happened. She sold out of books! Her agent made an announcement: "that's all folks, sorry." My idol stood up, smiled sweetly at everyone - and was gone.

And that should have been it; my chance was lost. Until I was strolling down the High Street a little later and spotted her, with her agent, sitting in the bar of the local Italian restaurant. They looked relaxed, off-duty, sipping white wine and reading the menus. It was early evening and the place was nearly empty.

I didn't give myself time to think. Pushing open the door, I enquired if they had a table for 1. The waiter smiled, grabbed a menu and walked me across the room, right past where SHE was sitting. I stopped and held out my hand.

"Well hello," I said with a bigger smile than I was feeling, "how nice to see you. I loved your talk."

She looked taken aback and her agent jumped up, trying to step between us. She put her hand on his arm.

"No, it's alright," she said. Then to me, "Sorry, have we met?"

"Well only in the sense that I am one of your biggest fans," I said "and I wanted to talk more about your networking advice."

"Yes?" she looked a little less certain now.

"Look," I said, "I can see you're trying to relax. I'll not disturb you now. Can I ring you next week to ask you a few questions, I was hoping you might give me some pointers; I've written this novel, you see."

"I tell you what," she said, "I don't have any cards on me. Why don't you give me your number and I'll ring you."

So I grabbed a bit of paper, scribbled my number on it and handed it to her. She glanced at it and pushed it in her pocket. As I walked on to my table, I heard her laugh at something her agent said.

She hasn't phoned yet, but I'm sure she will. I'm really looking forward to having another conversation with her.