

Lothario: Stephen Cardew

Everyday, she went to the café straight from work, ordered a regular cappuccino, sometimes a plain croissant (no butter) and sat at the table she liked, tucked away but with a view of the street.

Every working day ended like this with her alone with her thoughts, either replaying the failures of the day or too tired, simply staring and sometimes seeing the folk around her.

She was jugged out of the memory of yet another poorly-managed playground incident by the rich tones of the man at the next table.

‘You’re far too lovely to be sitting there all alone,’ he offered.

She turned, startled, and looked into the eyes of a middle-aged lothario. At least, that was her initial reaction. That’s what he must be. After all, who else would have the effrontery to proffer such an unsolicited compliment in such a public place?

‘Sorry,’ she said.

‘I simply said it was a shame you’re on your own,’ he persisted.

‘Actually, I’m not,’ she said. ‘Well, technically I am - now - but that’s only a temporary state of affairs. I’m expecting my friend, any minute.’

‘Boyfriend?’

‘No! Not boyfriend. A friend, a woman friend.’ She was growing warmer with each new intrusion into her privacy, her space - the space she claimed here every day. ‘So, if you’ll excuse me ...’

He stared at her. ‘Why? What are you going to do?’

‘Nothing,’ she said. ‘I’m just going to sit here, drinking my coffee, and wait for my friend.’

He continued to stare at her, evenly, neither threatening nor encouraging.

'So,' she said.

'So?' he queried.

'So that's it! Conversation over,' she asserted.

He shrugged, a little too Gallic for her taste. Was he French? No, there was no trace in his accent. In fact, there was no trace of any accent at all. Perhaps he was an actor and had had elocution lessons. Perhaps he had travelled widely and lived in several places. Perhaps he had grown up in a place with no particular accent. Maybe a combination of all three. Certainly, Lotharios had chameleon-like qualities, so it was likely.

Now she came to look at him more closely, she could see more tell-tale indications: greying temples; well-cut jacket; crow's feet making his piercing blue-grey eyes seem rather bigger. Oh yes, this was definitely a man to avoid.

He smiled at her.

'What?' She said.