

Meet Cute

by Paul Madden

EXT. SECOND CUP CAFÉ — MORNING

An empty patio outside a coffeehouse. There are round tables of various sizes with wicker-looking chairs around each table.

Only one table is occupied. A blond woman occupies one chair with a cup of coffee. She's reading a book—a mass market thriller. Her name is—

I had to stop as I considered what to name the character. Peering over the top of my laptop's screen, I studied the woman sitting across the patio. She looked like Penelope back when we met at a college party. Except that she wasn't hunched over a toilet in a frat house, throwing up while I held back her hair. I probably should have taken that as a sign.

Today was the first anniversary of our divorce being finalized. We had been separated for three years before that, most of that time spent saving up for the lawyers. By then Penelope had already moved on to greener pastures. But since this was my script, I was free to do some revisionist history.

Her name is PENELOPE. While she reads the book, she drums her fingers on the table, as if she's waiting for something to happen.

Enter from the left an adult golden retriever. The dog has a leash attached, but there's no one holding it.

The dog gallops towards Penelope, who pays it no attention. The dog leaps up at her playfully, its wagging tail batting the coffee from the table.

TOM—

I stopped again, wondering if it was really a good idea to name the character after myself. I glanced over the laptop again, where Penelope was still reading her book, unmolested by any canines. Well, why not? I could do a global replace later.

TOM comes running in from the same direction as the dog. He's wearing a T-shirt and running shorts from his morning jog.

TOM

(exasperatedly)

Max, down boy! Leave that nice lady alone.

Max the dog is licking Penelope's cheek while she is stroking his yellow fur and smiling. She's dropped the book to the ground.

PENELOPE

(laughing)

No, it's all right. I like dogs.

I groaned at this. A dog? What was I thinking? This wasn't supposed to be *Must Love Dogs*. And a golden retriever? Everyone would think I was ripping off *Marley & Me*.

I leaned back in my wicker-like seat and sipped at my cup of coffee. Turning away from "Penelope," I stared at the traffic plodding through the Financial District. At this time of day most everyone jamming the crosswalks and hunched in the cars, buses, and taxis was wearing business attire. I grinned at this, still wearing the T-shirt and running shirts I went to bed in. My meeting down the road at CBC headquarters wasn't scheduled until after lunch, so I had time to waste on my hobby.

After a wave of business attired people went by, I noticed a man sitting on the edge of a flower planter. From the torn army jacket, camouflage pants, and greasy beard, I knew he wasn't bound for any meetings. Must be one of the homeless guys who dot the sidewalk. I always thought Canada was such a clean, neat country, but there are still plenty of bums around. At least they aren't as aggressive as in Detroit; when we had a meeting there I started to wish I had one of those Taser things to keep the panhandlers away.

A new idea popped into my head. I turned back to my laptop and deleted everything from when the dog ran into the scene. This new idea would be much more intense. Always good to start with a bang, to get the audience right into the film.

Enter from the right a homeless man in filthy army jacket, camouflage pants, and T-shirt with wild, greasy hair.

Penelope is still innocently reading as the homeless man snatches her purse from the table. He runs off to the left while Penelope throws down her book and leaps out of her chair.

PENELOPE

Stop! That's my purse!

Off-screen is the sound of a punch followed by the homeless man groaning. TOM enters from the left. He's holding up Penelope's purse and smiling warmly.

TOM

I think you dropped something, ma'am.

PENELOPE

Oh thank you so much!

I had to stop myself yet again, letting out a louder groan. The real Penelope turned to glance in my direction; I hurried to look back down at my laptop. Beating up a purse snatcher would be fine if our hero was wearing a cape and tights. This was supposed to be a romantic comedy, not *Spider-Man 4*. Come on, think *funny!* Funny and cute, but not too cute—just cute enough so the audience will be rooting for them without getting diabetes.

“There you are!” Natalie blurted out. She sat down without asking at my table, obscuring my view of Penelope across the patio. In her dark blue suit and white blouse, Natalie didn't look any different from most of the people walking around the Financial District at this hour. She took a sip from her Starbucks cup and then shook her head. “They say it's the same Sumatra blend as in New York, but I swear there's a difference.”

“It's probably in your head,” I said. “Are you sure you should be drinking that here?” I looked back into the building, at the little Chinese lady wiping the counter, waiting for her to come racing out to scold Natalie for drinking the competition's coffee on her patio.

Natalie snorted at this. "Like she's even going to notice." She took another sip of her coffee and then set it aside, making a sour face. "Shouldn't you be getting ready for the meeting?"

"It's not until two o'clock."

"They moved it up to eleven. Don't you remember? I sent you the Email last night."

I checked my Email and lo and behold, there was Natalie's Email about the change in meeting times. I had forgotten to check my work account last night; I was watching *Casablanca* for the two hundredth time on Turner Classic Movies. I could watch that with no sound and recite every line of it. I peeked over Natalie's shoulder at Penelope and thought, Of all the coffee shops in all of Toronto and she has to walk into mine.

Natalie snapped her fingers in my face. "Hey, Earth to Tom. Were you listening?"

"What?"

"The meeting, remember?" Natalie picked up her cup of coffee and then nodded slightly towards Penelope. "She's waiting for her boyfriend."

"How do you know that?"

"Women's intuition," Natalie said and then sipped her coffee before remembering that she didn't like it and setting it aside.

With timing like in a movie script, a handsome young man sat down at Penelope's table a moment later. From the way they hugged and kissed, it's obvious they weren't strangers. I looked away from them, focusing on my laptop as I put it back into its case.

Checking my watch, I saw there's not going to be time for a shower now. I'd have to splash on some cologne and hope the Canucks didn't notice. "Can you get a cab?" I asked Natalie. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Yeah, sure. Go ahead."

By the time I changed and came back down, Natalie had a cab waiting in front of the hotel. The driver didn't waste any time in diving into the thick morning traffic; I barely had time to shut my

door before he hit the accelerator. Natalie wasted even less time in saying, “Did you bathe in Old Spice?”

“It's not *that* bad—is it?”

“Let's just hope Canadians really like Old Spice.”

The CBC building was only a few blocks from our hotel, though it took twenty minutes to get there with the traffic. This gave us enough time to go over our presentation again. Natalie would take the lead to explain to the Canadian execs why they should dump the current beer sponsor of *Hockey Night in Canada* for our client's product. Given that our client was an American brew—owned by a Belgian conglomerate—and not a Canadian beer, it was going to be a tough sell. Natalie would go on about the benefits of exclusivity and synergy and a bunch of other buzzwords; my job would be to push buttons on my laptop to scroll through our PowerPoint slides. For that I got an all expenses paid trip to Toronto; not a bad deal really.

Though the meeting was rescheduled for eleven, we of course had to sit in a waiting room for a half hour. I know better than to talk to Natalie, who had her eyes closed to psych herself up before the big meeting or maybe she was just praying to God not to embarrass herself. In either case, if I tried to talk to her now she'd bite my head off—literally.

Instead, I spent most of my time staring at a poster for one of the network's show. In particular my attention was drawn to the attractive redhead named Ellen McDonald starring in the show. She couldn't be an A-lister, but could probably land a few gigs as the quirky best friend in a script like mine. I reached into my laptop case for the notepad I carried for just such emergencies and jotted down a note that Penelope needed such a best friend.

Looking at the poster again, I decided this actress did have that milf appeal, like Catherine Keener, though probably a few years younger. For that reason I decided to call her Cathy. She would have a kid, just one, probably not more than five or six. She'd be the one unlucky in love who would caution Penelope to be careful about falling for Tom. When inevitably Penelope and Tom run into a

problem and seem broken up, Cathy would be there to comfort Penelope before Tom made his big gesture to win her back.

I was furiously writing notes until the execs we came here to meet finally decided to let us in to see them. I had to stuff the notebook into my pocket in time to shake a bald man's hand and then exchange pleasantries about the weather, our flight, and our hotel. A woman strikingly similar to Natalie shook her hand; I wondered if they decided on this arrangement before they came out to greet us.

The conference room wasn't any different from those I'd been in a hundred times before. The good thing about Canada is they use the same electrical outlets as the US; setting up a slideshow like this in the Czech Republic with its different outlets is a real pain, requiring all sorts of converter devices that may or may not work. Instead it was relatively easy for me to get the laptop set up and our PowerPoint slideshow on the screen.

There are other execs in there, one of whom looked like George Clooney in his early *ER* days. That guy would make a much better Tom than me, I thought and imagined him smooching with Penelope at the café. From the look of it, this guy probably could punch out a purse snatcher too. He's probably one of those guys who used to be an athlete in college—in *university* as they say in Canada—and still went out for a jog every morning. Not like me, the type who was never really in shape in college and was in even worse shape now.

Thinking about this exec in turn sparked a new idea: what if Penelope was an actress trying out for a television show and Tom—or maybe I should rename him George—was one of the network execs in charge of the show? They would meet before the actual meeting at the café, before either had any idea they might be working together. That would set up Tom's moral dilemma of whether to hire her out of respect for her talent or to reject her so that they could date. He would decide to hire her and then as the shooting progressed the tension between them would escalate until something—a cast party or something—finally brought them together. They would run into some obstacle, like Tom having to ask her to compromise her “art” for ratings or something like that, and

they would break up. Tom would eventually reconsider, tell his bosses to shove their notes, and win Penelope back. Deep kiss at the end and roll credits.

I desperately wanted to fish out my notebook to write all of this down. Instead I had to sit there in the dark, half-listening to the annoying chipmunk voice Natalie used during presentations to sound more perky. She always signaled when it was time to transition to the next slide with a slight upward inflection in her voice, as if asking herself a question. I knew at that point to hit the button for the next slide.

This got repetitive enough that I could mostly tune out and try to think of titles for my new project. *The Pilot* or *The Series*? No, those sounded too generic. The title should be something quirky and fun, something with a double meaning would be best. *Midseason Replacement*? That was just stupid; titles were never my strength, which probably explained why I wasn't making the presentation right now. *Role of a Lifetime*? That was better, though probably not there yet. Still, it would work as a working title until I came up with something else.

After Natalie finished, my big part in the meeting was over. The lights came back on and the interrogation began. Most of it involved crunching numbers, which Natalie could quote without looking at the handouts given to the execs before the meeting started. Again I wanted to reach for my notebook, but then Natalie would probably ask to see my notes later, thinking it was something work related.

We leave without any kind of decision being made. The execs would of course want to discuss the matter among themselves. In a few days they'd contact our supervisor at Fulton & McBriar with their decision. Or they might ask us for more information, which could hopefully be done by a teleconference instead of dragging us back across the border.

Once all of the execs wish us a safe trip, we were finally allowed to go. Natalie didn't say anything until we were safely inside the cab. With a sigh, she said, "I am starved. You think they could have had some bagels or something in there."

“When would you have eaten them?” I asked. I could at last take out my notepad and scribble down the ideas I came up with before and during the meeting.

“What are you writing down?”

“Just a list of things to do before we go.”

For lunch we stopped at a Subway near our hotel. Natalie ordered a chicken breast sub while I got a turkey one, which were the same things we got back in New York. She took a bite of hers and then made a face like back at the café. “I know it’s crazy, but this bread tastes funny.”

“Maybe they put maple syrup in it,” I said.

It took Natalie a moment to catch on to the joke. “It’s probably that this chicken is really moose meat.”

We shared a laugh at this. Natalie broke hers off with a sigh. “Do you think they’ll go for it?”

“Probably not.”

“Yeah, me either. I guess it was a long shot. Napoleon is still probably going to chew my ass out about it.” I came up with the nickname of “Napoleon” for our boss, Mr. Overbay, due to his small stature and dictatorial memos about conserving toner, pens, and paper clips.

“We’ll get them next time, right?”

“Let’s hope there is a next time.”

We split up at the hotel so she could go check in with Napoleon about our performance—her performance really—at the meeting. Before she got onto the elevator, Natalie said, “You want to get dinner later? Like sevenish?”

“Sure.”

“I’ll meet you up at your room.”

“Great. See you then.” After the elevator whisked Natalie away, I hurried back to the Second Cup Café down at the end of the block. Penelope of course was gone; she and her boyfriend had probably gone off to see the sights or do shopping or whatever they were here for. The only people sitting on the patio at the moment were a couple of young Asian guys talking loudly about a video game.

I took a seat away from them and then fished out my iPod. The earbuds didn't do much good at blocking out the sound of the traffic or the Asian kids, but I didn't care. The moment I brought up MS Word, I entered a zone like Natalie did before a meeting. Now that I had a story for Penelope and Tom, the script started to come easily enough.

By the time Natalie found me, I was halfway through the script. I was in the middle of writing the scene where Penelope and Tom hook up at the cast party to celebrate their pilot episode when Natalie tapped my shoulder. I took out the earbuds and then looked up at her. "You get locked out or something?" I asked her.

"No. It's seven o'clock. Dinner, remember?"

"Oh, right," I said, my face turning warm from embarrassment. "I lost track of time."

"You can finish if you want."

"It's fine. I'm getting hungry anyway." This was a lie as I hadn't taken more than two sips of my coffee since I started. I just figured it would be easier to stop and accommodate Natalie than have her gripe at me passive-aggressively for the next three months.

I figured we would go to the Subway or somewhere similar, but instead Natalie leads me over to a waiting cab. She gave the cabbie an address and then we took off. I hadn't noticed until then that Natalie had changed into a white dress with spaghetti straps—not the kind of thing you'd wear to Subway or McDonald's.

The restaurant was the kind of place with a maitre d' in a tuxedo. I was lucky to still be wearing my suit or the maitre d' would probably run me out of the joint. Natalie gave him her name and he checked his little book. He focused solely on her when he looked up and said, "Ah yes, we have a very nice table for you. This way."

I trailed behind, already hearing Napoleon's lecture in my head about padding expense reports. The menu had nothing on it less than twenty dollars, which meant another of our boss' memos on not wasting company money when we got back. I tried to hide my trepidation, but of course Natalie sensed what I was thinking. "Don't worry, order whatever you want."

“What about Napoleon?”

“I’ve got it covered.”

I still decided on the cheapest entrée on the menu, using that tried and true technique of pointing at it to the waiter. To my surprise, Natalie spoke perfect French to order hers and a bottle of champagne. “I didn’t know you spoke French.”

“I don’t get much chance to use it in New York.”

“Are you sure about the champagne? We aren’t sure they’ll say yes.”

“So what? We’re here, we did our job, why can’t we celebrate?”

She said this loud enough that people at the tables around us glanced over. I expected the maitre d’ to return and tell us uncouth Americans to leave. To try and calm her down a little, I forced a smile to my face. “Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

The champagne came at the same time as our appetizers—ravioli in some kind of white sauce. I forked one of these and dumped it onto my plate, staring at it as if I expected it to come alive. I cut the ravioli in half, sticking one half into my mouth. It wasn’t bad, though really rich like most French food I’d ever eaten.

The waiter poured a glass of champagne for each of us. Natalie insisted on us raising our glasses and toasting. “To a job well done,” she said.

I echoed this and then we clinked the glasses together. I drank most of mine in one gulp, while Natalie more demurely sipped from hers. The champagne burned down my throat, packing more of a kick than I had imagined.

“So have you heard from Penelope lately?” Natalie asked.

“No,” I said.

“Anyone else been staying over at Casa de Tom lately?”

“Not really. There was this girl from an art gallery in SoHo. Didn’t work out.” Our relationship lasted long enough for us to share one lengthy kiss, after which she promptly threw up in the alley.

“You are really snakebit, you know that?”

“Yeah, well, ‘Tomorrow is another day.’”

"Scarlett O'Hare, right? *Gone With the Wind*?"

"That's right."

Natalie sighed. "When I was a kid I watched that movie just about every day. That's probably why my grades stunk so much. For Halloween in fourth grade I had my mom make a green dress just like the one Scarlett wore. Except Mom was colorblind so it wound up being blue instead of green."

We laughed at this and I finished the rest of my wine. Despite that Natalie and I had worked together for three years, we'd never spent much time together outside of work. On trips like these we usually spent most of our time discussing the presentation or running from and to the airport. "That is a great movie," I said. "One of the first real epics of the Golden Age."

"So you must be one of those big film buffs, right? You go to the arty theaters in the Village and watch all those movies with subtitles?"

"Most weekends. If there's something good."

"I mostly just go to the multiplex and see whatever trash is playing." She chuckled at her own joke. "You must think I'm such a philistine."

"No, of course not. No one who likes *Gone With the Wind* that much can be a philistine."

She nodded and then downed the rest of her glass of champagne. She leaned forward as she asked, "Maybe next weekend I could go with you to a movie? So you could educate me."

"Maybe," I said, though I really wanted to spend next weekend hammering out this script I'd been working on. Before I could say anything else, I felt an urgent need to use the bathroom; alcohol always passed through me faster than water. "Excuse me for a minute."

I found the bathroom easily enough. It at least wasn't the kind with an attendant there to give you a towel and watch you piss. That left me alone to contemplate how to let Natalie down easy about next weekend. Probably the best thing to ensure harmony for the rest of this trip would be to say yes and then fake an excuse

once we got back to New York. I could say I had a sick aunt or something like that.

It happened then just like something from one of my scripts. As I stepped out of the bathroom, I saw a flash of mint green and then I was on my rear. I was still trying to put the pieces together when I saw a redheaded woman standing over me. She seemed familiar for a reason I couldn't think of at the moment.

"I'm so sorry!" she said. "I didn't see you coming out."

"Oh, no, it's all right," I said.

She offered me her hand to help me up to my feet. "Are you hurt at all?"

I examined myself, seeing no tears or holes in my clothes to indicate I'd done anything but gracelessly fall on my ass. "Just my pride. What about you?"

"I'm fine."

It was when she smiled that I finally recognized her as the woman from the poster in the CBC waiting room, the one who'd sparked my script idea. "You're Ellen McDonald, aren't you?"

"That's right. Are you a fan of the show?"

"Actually I'm from New York," I said. I added unnecessarily, "In America."

"Oh, one of those evil Yanks. How do you like our country so far?"

"It's very nice. The people are really friendly."

"Even those who stupidly run into you?"

I laughed too hard at this, my entire body feeling as warm as if I'd walked into a sauna. "Yes, even them."

"I'm really sorry about that—"

From the intentional pause, I knew she wanted my name. "Tom. Tom Harris." I wondered for a moment if I should give her a business card, but then I figure that would be stupid; she wasn't some prospective client at the country club.

"It's good to meet you Tom." From the way she subtly checked her watch, I figured she was about to give me the polite brush-off and send me packing as so many other women had done. Instead,

she said, "You want to get out of here? I've got a car waiting out front."

"Definitely," I said, my voice cracking like a thirteen-year-old's. I did have the wherewithal to take Ellen's arm and escort her out of the restaurant, forgetting to so much as look back at the table I had been sharing with Natalie.

To my disappointment, the car out front was not a stretch limo with a sunroof, fully stocked bar, and hot tub. It was a fairly new Mercedes with leather seats that felt like heaven after all the torn vinyl I'd been sitting on in cabs over the years. Ellen didn't have to tell the driver where to go, as if riding a horse she simply said, "Let's go."

Part of me considered asking where we were going, but the rest of me was still too shocked to attempt normal conversation. Getting picked up by an actress in a restaurant did not happen to guys like me. Stuff like that happened to the handsome, rugged guys like George the TV exec; it happened to people in the movies.

Ellen leaned back in her seat and then turned to me. "So what do you do, Tom?"

"I'm a screenwriter," I blurted out. This seemed like it would impress an actress far more than saying I'm a corporate drone at an ad agency.

This did suitably impress her enough that she smiled at me. "Anything I've heard of?"

"Not yet."

"It's a tough business to get into, especially in your country." She laughed bitterly. "I've been trying for fifteen years and all I can get are cameos in stupid teen dramas."

"I can't believe that."

"Sad but true." She shook her head. "A Juno award across the border means about as much as one of those participant ribbons everyone gets in the science fair."

"But at least you have plenty of fans here." I counted myself as one of them now, though I'd never seen her show or even heard of it before this morning.

“Sure, I’m a big star here. Except our audience is still smaller than some documentary about elephants humping each other on Animal Planet.” She sighed while I tried to think of something comforting to say. I was sure Natalie could provide reams of numbers to back what Ellen was saying. Thinking of Natalie reminded me that I should probably send her a text message saying I had felt sick and gone back to the hotel. I’d do that later, after we got where we were going.

“You’re working at least,” I said and managed a smile.

To my relief, Ellen smiled back at me. “I guess it is better than working at Hooters.”

This had the unintentional effect of me picturing her in a tight white top and tiny orange shorts. From up close like this, I had clearly misjudged her earlier. She could definitely be more than the quirky best friend in my movie—or any movie for that matter. I felt a bulge in my pants, followed by my face turning warm again as I prayed she wouldn’t notice.

She did notice, but to my relief she didn’t seem to mind. Instead, she leaned over to kiss me. Her tongue was already halfway down my throat before I realized what was happening and kissed her back. I distantly thought of the driver up front, who was getting a floor show now, but if Ellen didn’t care than neither would I.

The rest of the night went by in a blur. We ended up in her suite at a hotel about three blocks away from where Natalie and I were staying. It wasn’t the penthouse, but it did make my room look like a closet by comparison. I didn’t get to see much of the suite, though, before we wound up in the bedroom.

We made love three times that night. The first time she did most of the work as I was too shell-shocked to realize what was happening. The second time I rallied to become more of a willing participant. The last time we were just a couple of sweaty animals flailing away on each other. What I remembered the most was the predatory gleam in her eyes and the operatic soprano she hit when she came. She was definitely more than someone’s best friend—a lot more.

Between bouts, she lay next to me on the bed, smoking a cigarette despite the hotel's non-smoking policy. She offered one to me and I gratefully took it. I hadn't smoked since high school, so that I coughed like a beginner. She laughed at me, but in a playful way. "These are really hard-core French ones," she said. "I have a friend in Montreal who gets them for me."

"They're pretty good," I said, despite that my eyes were watering and my stomach churned.

After the third time we fell asleep, her hand on my back and hair tickling my shoulder. I wanted to stay awake and savor the moment as long as possible. In the end, though, the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak; I closed my eyes and fell into a deep, blissful sleep.

I awoke the next morning I awoke to golden light in my face. Opening my eyes, I stared at the sheer curtains of the bedroom window, trying to remember where I was. The memories trickled in: running into Ellen McDonald at the restaurant, making out with her in the car, and then coming back to her hotel.

Before I turned over, I already suspected she wasn't in the bed anymore. I confirmed this and then dragged myself out of bed. The mint green dress she had been wearing lay on the floor, beside the suit I'd discarded in a frenzied rush. My first thought was she had gone to use the bathroom. The bathroom door was shut, so I tapped on it. She didn't answer. I tried again with the same result. Then I turned the knob and saw the bathroom was empty.

I didn't find her in the rest of the suite either. She wasn't in the tiny living room/dining room combo. Nor was she in the miniature kitchen. After finding a towel to put around my waist, I stepped onto the balcony, but she wasn't there either. Maybe she went to get us breakfast, I thought with increasing desperation.

She did at least leave a note for me. I found it on the dresser when I went back to get my clothes. On the hotel stationary she'd scribbled, "Had to leave early for shooting. Help yourself to anything in the kitchen. Thanks for a great night!" Beneath this she added a postscript, "Here's something to remember me by."

That something was a photograph. It was a glossy black-and-white head shot, the kind aspiring actresses spread around like résumés. It was also the kind of photograph given to fans as a keepsake. She'd autographed it in silver in with the caption, "Remember me when you get to Hollywood."

From the tone of the note and the picture, it was obvious that we were not going to see each other again. This was not a love affair, just a one-night stand. I felt the shame of a prostitute as I put on my clothes and then scooped her note and picture from off the dresser. I could have destroyed both of these, but I wasn't angry with her; I was angry at myself for reading too much into things.

I had enough pride that I didn't eat breakfast in her suite. I left after I dressed and then got a donut and coffee from Tim Horton's. It was only then I checked my phone and saw two-dozen messages from Natalie. They were all in the vein of, "Where are you?" The last message said only, "Meet you on plane."

I barely made it in time. By the time I packed, checked out, and got to the airport, there was still two hours before our flight. But I needed all of that to get through security. One of the guards found the note and picture from Ellen McDonald. Sweat dribbled down my forehead as I waited for him to say something. Instead he only slipped these back into my laptop case; apparently he wasn't a big fan of the show. He let me go after that, but I had to run to make it to the gate before the doors closed.

Fulton & McBriar used one of those cut-rate airlines for our travel, the kind without reserved seating. Natalie did not save me a seat, allowing some old guy to sit next to her. She resolutely stared out the window as I walked by. Even from the aisle I could feel the chill of her indifference; work was going to be hell for the next few weeks.

The only seat left was next to a fat guy in a Blue Jays hat who was already sweating buckets. I jammed my luggage into the overhead bin and then with a sigh squeezed myself into the seat. Clutching my laptop case to my chest like a life preserver, I thought of my

script and then my night with Ellen McDonald. Some things just worked better in the movies.

[END]

[Of course in the rom-com script version Tom would probably hook up with Ellen for a little while, long enough for him to realize that she's a bitch. Then he would realize that Natalie loves him and make some big gesture to win her love.]

