

Critique of "Mysterious Meeting"

Critiqued by Fred Roth
DocuWright Technical Services
<http://www.docuwright.com>

Overall, "Mysterious Meeting" is a good story and quite well written. I got to know your main character, Marilyn, fairly well, even though some parts of her character remain mysterious (as they should). You use dialog well to bring out the personality of your characters, and I particularly liked your description of the sleazy bartender. Good job.

There were some things in the story that puzzled me, though. The title says that this story is going to be about a "mysterious meeting," and the story opens with Marilyn meeting Celeste. I immediately thought this must be the "mysterious meeting" hinted at in the title. This assumption is supported by the mystical way you portray Celeste. She "appeared to glow," she had a mystical "radiant energy," and even her name is celestial. The leering, fish-eyed bartender becomes obsequious and fawning in her presence, and Celeste seems to have a deeper wisdom than Marilyn. All these hints made me think that the meeting with Celeste was the mysterious meeting I was to expect.

But I was wrong. Even though the first six pages are devoted to visiting with Celeste, Celeste was really just a pleasant chatty woman who happened to share a table with a stranger. After 30 minutes, she walked out of the story and out of Marilyn's life, serving no purpose other than to give Marilyn somebody to talk to. Marilyn could have talked to the bartender as well.

By the end, I decided that the "real" mysterious meeting was her "meeting" with Mike at 3:00, even though she had "met" him a year before and on a few occasions after that. That meeting contains only two words of dialog and covers less than a page of the story. That seemed to create a balance problem to me.

I also was puzzled by some of the things associated with Marilyn's meeting with Mike. Why didn't Mike know when Marilyn was scheduled to arrive? I would have imagined that two people in their 50s who were planning to meet would have communicated their travel plans better.

What happened to Mike between 2:30 (when he was cold and hardened) and 3:00 (when he was an ardent lover surrounded by light)? If he "always wears a business suit," and if he was at work in his office at 2:30, and in casual clothes at 3:00, when did he find time to change clothes and still race to the airport in half an hour? Why did he say he wasn't going to come, and then immediately rush to the airport? Was he just trying to tease her? And most of all, why didn't Marilyn recognize him even when he was holding her in his arms and speaking her name in that deep, sexy voice that she loved so much? Was his suit all she had seen before, so that she didn't recognize him? All these questions left me puzzled by the way the story ended.

What's your real attitude toward psychics? You present the psychic's reading as both right (she knows what color clothes Mike's going to wear) and wrong (she's off by a year). Is Marilyn's meeting with the psychic (which we don't see, but only hear about) the "real" mysterious meeting?

A few comments on mechanics: You lower-cased "diet coke," even though it is a proper name and registered trademark, but you capped "Ginger Ale," even though it is a generic term. You capped Mystic and Psychic, even though they are common nouns. You were inconsistent in your punctuation of quotations. (In the U.S., periods and commas *always* come inside the closing quotation mark.) In a few places, you used a period to separate an introductory sentence from the quotation it introduced. (e.g., She said. "Let's go to dinner.") A comma should be used to connect the introductory sentence to its quotation.

Perhaps I've been too critical, though. Overall, this was a well-written story and a good character sketch. If you intend this story to become part of a larger work (a novel, perhaps?), many of the things that I found puzzling in this short piece will probably become clear. If I had been asked to proofread this piece, there would have been very few corrections to make (a few capitals and punctuation marks).

Thanks for letting me read it.

Fred Roth
fred@docuwright.com