

“First Encounter”
A Semi-Romantic Adventure on a Train in 1924

Characters:

Mr. Paul C. Taylor
Ms. Elizabeth “Liz” Board

Paul

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to welcome you aboard the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad on our inaugural passenger trip on Train # 84 from our brand new station in Fort Myers, Florida. We will be traveling to the north, up into Woodrow, er, I mean Samville, through many interesting and exotic locales as we explore the Southwest Florida area. One highlight in particular is our now historic Caloosahatchee River crossing, first completed almost 20 years ago. The Atlantic Coast Line was the first train to cross the Caloosahatchee River and make no mistake, we are the only railroad you need depend on for passenger service here in Fort Myers.

Liz

What about these rumors of the Seaboard Airline Railroad coming to town?

Paul

Pay no attention to rumors, dear girl. Make no mistake, ladies and gentlemen; the Atlantic Coastline is the only railroad for all of South Florida.

Liz

But I’ve heard that the Seaboard will be cheaper and the cars are much nicer, too, or so the paper says.

Paul

Please, young lady. Everyone who’s anyone in this town knows you can’t trust the *Fort Myers Press*. They will print anything to sell their newspapers.

Liz

I’m not so young

Paul

I’m sorry, what?

Liz

I said, I'm not so young.

Paul

Consider it a compliment, my dear. Now, as I was saying before I was interrupted... I will be your conductor for the duration of your trip on our newly christened "Seminole & Gulf Excursion Train." My name is Paul Taylor.

Liz

Oh, yeah, the name says it all – BORED.

Paul

Not that bored. Board like a piece of wood.

Liz

Oh, yes, that's so much better. A wooden conductor for a forest journey.

Paul

Forest and swamp.

Liz

What?

Paul

Forest and swamp. We go through forests and swampland. And we cross the river.

Liz

My apologies. I was right the first time – BORED.

Paul

Well, what's your name, dear girl?

Liz

Elizabeth Board. But my friends call me Liz.

Paul

Well, then, Liz

Liz

Who said you were my friend?

Paul

The train conductor is a friend to all. Now, then, if your quite finished, Miss Board, I have some history to share with these kind riders of our train.

Liz

But history can be so boring. Why can't we talk about what's going on now? All the latest gossip from town hall. I bet you've heard some juicy stories on your trip down from Punta Gorda.

Paul

Well, now that you mention it... No, no, wait. I am not here to tell tales out of school about the shining stars of the Fort Myers community.

Liz

So you did hear something!

Paul

Well, yes, but I really shouldn't.

Liz

What are you, a conductor or a priest? Is it about Mr. Edison? Is Mrs. Edison making him stay in the spare bedroom again? Or Mr. Collier? Now that's he got his own county, there's got to be plenty of dirt. Oh, what about Miss Minnie and Mr. Bertie – is something strange afoot at the Jelly Factory?

Paul

No, none of that. I was only thinking about Mr. Charles Stadler.

Liz

The esteemed senator from New York?

Paul

Yes, rumor has it that American Home magazine wants to feature his house on the cover of one of their upcoming issues.

Liz

Well, he's spending \$80-thousand dollars! I mean, in this day and age, really. It should be on the cover of a magazine. *Really Expensive* Better Homes and Gardens. I mean seriously. You might as well buy stock in the International Business Machines company.

Paul

Well, you've got to admit, it's no Franklin Arms.

Liz

Yes, well, that's a hotel – it should cost more. And they had to upgrade it – it hadn't changed since those lovely Hill ladies ran things back 30 years ago.

Paul

If you say so... And if you're finished, I am sure these fine folks would like to get back to the history of the area. You know, Thomas Edison comes to fish, decides to spend the winter here, his former employee Henry Ford builds a fortune in cars and comes to join him, Ambrose and Tootie McGregor.

Liz

Oh, the McGregor's. Now there's some history to talk about. Can you believe what a gold digger that Tootie was?

Paul

Now, I'm sure most of that is just rumors

Liz

Oh, I heard that she chose to marry Mr. McGregor even though she was madly in love with Dr. Terry. And then after McGregor died, she married Terry anyways and got both of their fortunes.

Paul

Now, I'm sure she loved Mr. McGregor. She just made what she thought was the most economic choice. She should be commended for her wise use of logic.

Liz

Leave it to a man to admire a woman who he thinks can use logic. Of course she was logical. And she managed to marry the love of her life and two of the top ten richest men in America – one a president of Standard Oil and the other a Brigadier General and former Surgeon General. What a role model!

Paul

Well, that's not exactly the sentiment I was going for. Remember, she also did a lot of great things for this community too. Like the Fort Myers Yacht and Country Club

Liz

In Terry Park, named for her second husband, but too far away from town to be successful.

Paul

The Bradford Hotel

Liz

Named for her dead son. Built by Harvie Heitman. Now there's a cutie.

Paul

How about the road from Whiskey Creek

Liz

Named for her first husband, paid for by her second husband. Not to mention the skeletons – now there's a spooky story.

Paul

Not really. Dr. Phillips said those skeletons were from pirates the Navy killed.

Liz