

Up in the Air

“We value your loyalty.” –American Airlines marketing slogan

Key Characters

Ryan Bingham - the protagonist

Alex Goran - a fellow “frequent flyer” whom Ryan meets while traveling

Natalie Keener - the new hire at Ryan's company whose ideas change Ryan's job

Craig Gregory - Ryan and Natalie's boss

Kara Bingham - Ryan's older sister, who is already married

Julie Bingham - Ryan's younger sister, who is engaged to be married

Jim Miller - Julie Bingham's fiancé

Some Key Questions

- 1) What are Ryan Bingham's most important character traits? For example, what does Ryan value and care about *most*? In contrast, what does Ryan value and care about *least*?
- 2) In what ways is Ryan's chosen career consistent with the philosophy he preaches? Moreover, in what ways are Ryan's personal life and personal relationships consistent with his philosophy?
- 3) Have you noticed any interesting contradictions, incongruities, or ironies in Ryan's character so far?
- 4) One duality in the story so far is created by the two important women Ryan meets: Alex Goran and Natalie Keener. How would you describe the impact each of these women has on Ryan and his life? Do Ryan's interactions with Natalie or Alex begin to change Ryan's character, values, and decisions in any ways?

Some Quotations

RYAN: [narrating] Last year I spent 322 days on the road, which means I had to spend 43 miserable days at home.

ALEX: Oh, my God. I wasn't sure this actually existed. This is the American Airlines...

RYAN: It's a Concierge Key, yeah.

ALEX: What is that, carbon fiber?

RYAN: Graphite.

ALEX: Oh, I love the weight.

RYAN: I was pretty excited the day that bad boy came in.

ALEX: I'll say. I put up pretty pedestrian numbers. 60 thousand a year, domestic.

RYAN: That's not bad.

ALEX: Don't patronize me. What's your total?

RYAN: It's a personal question.

ALEX: Please.

RYAN: And we hardly know each other.

ALEX: Come on, show some hubris. Come on, impress me. I bet it's huge.

RYAN: You have no idea.

ALEX: How big? What is it, this big? This big?

RYAN: I don't want to brag.

ALEX: Oh, come on! Come on.

RYAN: Let's just say I have a number in mind and I haven't hit it yet.

ALEX: This is pretty sexy.

RYAN: Hope it doesn't cheapen our relationship.

ALEX: We're two people who get turned on by elite status. I think cheap is our starting point.

RYAN: There's nothing cheap about loyalty.

ALEX: You never called.

RYAN: Well, I wasn't sure what was appropriate.

ALEX: Appropriate? Ryan, I'm not some waitress you banged in a snowstorm. That word has no place in our vocabulary. I am the woman that you don't have to worry about.

RYAN: Sounds like a trap.

ALEX: Listen, the next time you're worried about matters, don't. If you want to call, call. Just think of me as yourself with a vagina.

RYAN: [sitting across the aisle from each other on a plane] Natalie, what is it you think we do here?

NATALIE: We prepare the newly unemployed for the emotional and physical hurdles of job hunting, while minimizing legal blow-back.

RYAN: That's what we're selling. It's not what we're doing.

NATALIE: Okay, what are we doing?

RYAN: We are here to make limbo tolerable, to ferry wounded souls across the river of dread until the point where hope is dimly visible. And then stop the boat, shove them in the water and make them swim.
