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Lily Burke

MILESTONE BOOK

Comet Press Books

New York 1959

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I

She was filing catalog cards in the small library where she worked in the evenings as a volunteer. Hearing someone approach, she looked up and saw a man standing and smiling at her.

"May I have Gunther's book called 'Inside Africa'?"

"Certainly," she answered as she got down from her stool. "But you can't take it out: it is a reference book only."

"Yes, I know."

She went into the stack room for the book. He thanked her, read for about an hour, then handed her the book, saying, "My class begins now." He was only supposed to place it on a certain table as he left the library, and his courtesy in bringing it to her made her remember the incident as she was walking home.

The next Monday he asked for the same book, followed her to the door of the stack room, making his acceptance of it seem a little personal to her. She had taken the library work when her other job had ceased, for she preferred this way of spending the evenings rather than being alone

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in her apartment. On her way to work the following Monday, she hoped this reader would again appear. She was not disappointed, for at the exact time he entered the reading room. As he came towards her, she looked up and smiled, and asked "The same book?"

He nodded in affirmation. As they were walking across the room, she inquired, "Whose class are you taking?"

"I don't know his name. It is the one at 6:30 today."

"I studied that course under Professor Mitchell. I hope to take his advanced class next fall." It seemed strange that this small weekly incident became important to her: she would have distinctly missed him if a Monday had gone by without his appearing. He now invariably detained her for a few minutes to ask her certain questions about the course.

Months later, after vacation at her summer place, she attended the first class session and found him sitting in the room. With no hesitation whatsoever, she went over and took the seat next to his, and asked, "How are you?"

He looked up and smiled. "Very well, and yourself?" She wanted to say, "I'm so glad you decided to take this class," but instead, she asked:

"Have you read the assignment for tonight?"

"No, I don't have the book."

"Would you like to borrow mine?"

"But you will be needing it."

"I've read it, and I think I'll remember it well enough to follow the lectures."

"Thanks. In that case, I would like to borrow it. You know how hard it is to find a copy." Afterwards they walked down the stairs together, instead of taking the elevator. They said good-bye on the sidewalk. He crossed the street to the uptown entrance of the subway, although

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she realized they could have walked two blocks down to another entrance.

During the short distance to her apartment she seriously wondered whether she really wanted to start this friendship. She was very excited that she had found him there, and his attitude seemed to start with the premise of an acquaintanceship established through their casual meetings in the library. To her he seemed very attractive, and his pleasant and natural response to her advances made her feel that he liked her.

"But do I wish to go ahead?" she pondered. "Such a relationship entails real problems. I don't feel like paying any attention to the foolish talk that his people will dislike us as much as mine will boycott us. Those who would dislike our going together are the type we wouldn't want to associate with anyway. Why don't I let him decide? His position would be as equally difficult as mine, and I am sure he is aware of it.

"But next Wednesday I have promised to lend him the book. I just could not bring it. How would he take the excuse, 'I forgot the book,' or the fact that I never even mentioned it?" As she felt entirely compelled to choose the seat next to his again, she also wished to take him the book.

She was greeted with a broad smile the following week, and she responded, saying:

"I didn't forget the book." She consciously handed it to him before sitting down, so that those seated would see her give it to him. This gesture would show her classmates that she knew him well enough to lend him the valuable book; she felt he would understand and appreciate her willingness to reveal a desire for his friendship. During the few minutes before class they talked about the subject matter for the evening.

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When they left the building, she managed to show him that she wanted him to walk with the group down to the far entrance of the subway, and he especially said good-bye to her. The next week this same group of students stopped in for coffee, and were able to find a table for six. On the sidewalk she detained him for a few minutes to say good-bye, thus particularly singling him out from the others.

When he said, "I'll be seeing you next week," she felt that he also was beginning to look forward to the regularity of this event. These incidences took place in the gloom of night when faces were barely discernible to passers-by, or happened in class where everyone assumed a friendly attitude toward each other but which seldom continued beyond the confines of the building.

After the next session she walked only with him on the sidewalk. Consequently, when they reached the subway entrance he asked, "Won't you have a cup of coffee?"

She tried to keep her voice from trembling with excitement as she answered, "Oh, I would like to."

They went on ahead of the others and he chose a different restaurant. It was large, crowded and well-lighted. Did everyone especially look at them or was she imagining it? As an escort he was unusually attentive, moving the chair for her to sit down, and helping her off with her coat. These niceties somewhat compensated for her sudden consciousness of appearing conspicuous, and his completely relaxed manner certainly helped her. She already knew that the pleasure of being with him had to override any embarrassment or criticism of their going together.

The following week when they were leaving the restaurant where they had leisurely eaten a snack, she turned towards him.

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"There's a movie I'd like to see, would you? It's a European film in a midtown theatre."

His startled expression said, "Do you really mean it?" His voice acquiesced haltingly.

"Yes, I would like to go. Can I phone you?"

"My number is WA 9-73490. Can you remember it."

By then he was more at ease, and answered, "I'm not taking any chances of forgetting it." He wrote it down and they said good-night.

Would he call or would he not? Actually, she had made the request. She had not stopped to question the propriety of her act. He had certainly been surprised that she had asked to go out with him, though he had not acted displeased. Should she stay around the apartment in order to receive his call, or should she try to forget it? His unsuccessful attempts to find her at home would give him plenty of opportunity to become convinced that he really wanted to take her to the movie. On Thursday the telephone rang. She picked up the receiver.

"This is Philip Benson speaking. My friend Mary and I would like to take you to that show on Saturday night. Is Saturday evening O.K. for you?"

"Yes. How nice of you. Shall I meet you at the theatre?"

"If you don't mind." The time was arranged. She hung up the receiver. Her first thought was one of relief. "So he has a girl friend and is not a married man." Simultaneously, she was annoyed at the way her plans had materialized.

"How stupid of me! Of course if he isn't married, he has a girl friend. A tall, dark, handsome man, possessing a house and a good job. Why shouldn't he have, and what a fool I've been not to think of it. Just because he acted so pleasant to me is no reason for thinking otherwise. And

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this way of going means he is not willing to go out alone with me. He prefers that they, as a couple, take me as a friend."

With many compunctions she went to the theatre and had to wait fully twenty minutes in the lobby. When they came she stood up and went towards them.

He quickly placed both hands on her shoulders for a moment and explained, "I am sorry we are late."

She was thrilled that he had touched her, and momentarily forgot the much younger friend who was standing behind him. She didn't wish to feel that he was merely being solicitous to someone older, someone to be respected. She also wondered if Mary had been surprised at this rather familiar greeting. He introduced the young lady, and she asked if they would sit in the balcony where she could smoke. He sat between them, and occasionally spoke to both of them. She was constantly trying to detect the extent of their intimacy and did conclude that theirs was an acquaintanceship of long standing.

As they left the theatre, he said, "We'll get a taxi and take you downtown. Would you like a cup of coffee first?"

She disliked this formal way of being taken care of and answered, "A taxi isn't necessary. The subway takes me within a block of my apartment." He must think she would only wish to travel with them in the privacy of a taxi.

Mary spoke up. "You two have coffee. I can't, as I have to go to work very early. I live way out in the Bronx."

"It takes her longer to get to work than me, and I have to come from New Jersey."

"If you haven't time for coffee we won't stop," Louise answered. He was walking on the outer side by Mary but she moved purposefully so that he walked between them. They put her on the downtown train while they took

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the uptown. She had a terribly empty, left-out feeling as she travelled back to her apartment.

Later at class she tried to act just the same to him. She didn't want him to think that she minded going to the movie with both of them, but she also wanted him to know that she was not interested in that sort of a relationship. She had originally asked him to be her escort: surely that should be as agreeable to him as to her. His bringing Mary meant that he wished her to know that he already had a girl friend, but at the same time was quite willing to have a pleasant friendship with her.

She was surprised and extremely pleased when, a day later, he came to the library. He asked for certain books and settled down to a two-hour study. When he put on his overcoat she went over to him. "If you'll wait a minute, I can go now," she said.

For the first time they were walking on the street in broad daylight, and she wondered if he shared her feeling of disquietude. Evidently not, for he asked her if she would have a cup of coffee. She accepted, trying desperately not to mind if people stared at her. She was quite willing to forget the usual conventionalities in order to have this man for her friend, but she did not relish the idea of having to contend at the same time with another girl friend.

As they left the restaurant, he placed his hand on her arm, detaining her for a few minutes longer, saying, "The show has changed at the same theatre. There is a very good foreign film this week. Will you go with me?" She was delighted that he had asked her, but she wondered if there would be a repetition of their previous evening at the theatre.

"At least I am not going to wait," she decided. She deliberately arrived ten minutes late, and found him sitting

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alone in the lobby. He came toward her eagerly, grasped her hand and pressed it very hard for a moment. His whole manner showed he had been afraid that she wasn't coming. That was a joyous moment, and for the first time she was to spend an evening alone with him. They sat shoulder to shoulder, and through the entire film she was constantly conscious of his nearness. He brought his face very close to hers whenever he made some remark about the picture and her imagination depicted this gesture as a caress. She was sorely tempted to move her leg ever so slightly so that it would rest against his which protruded beyond his seat. He went on the subway downtown with her, but stayed within the gates, explaining that it was very late. This was a seldom-used exit, and they were entirely alone. She stood close to him, intimating she was perfectly willing for him to kiss her good-night. He seemed to comprehend her intentions, but was not able to realize that such a fantastic thing could take place. Every familiar step of that short distance to her apartment seemed transformed. She was extremely elated; he had definitely shown his willingness to start a deep friendship with her.

As they left class the following week, he asked, "Will you go to a show this Saturday night?"

"I'd love to. There's an amateur opera theatre near where I live. Would you like to go there?"

"Yes, I would," he quickly responded.

"I can write for the tickets so that we can be sure of seats. Do you mind if we don't know what opera they are playing?"

"No, I'd enjoy any one of them. May I take you to dinner before the show?"

"Please come to my apartment instead. It's so much nicer that way." Later she regretted having turned down

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his invitation for he never asked her again. Perhaps she hurt his feelings; he may have concluded that she didn't wish to sit through a long meal in a restaurant with him. She had first asked him to take her out, and naturally he wouldn't consider that there was any difference between going to a show and having dinner in a restaurant. Unconsciously, it may have been true that she did not want this embarrassment and therefore had quickly refused, but she only admitted to herself that she wanted to be alone with him.

"As you wish," he answered. "What's the address?" She gave him directions as to time and place and they lingered in conversation many minutes before they said good-night.

"Shall I call you Friday night?"

"I'd like for you to, but it isn't necessary. You'll be at my place about six on Saturday."

"Yes, I will." Many days had to pass before that time, and she dreamed often of what might happen. Surely he was as ready as she for that first kiss. Would it mean as much to her as she wished, and would she satisfy him? That evening of his first coming to her apartment finally arrived. The bell rang, and she pressed the buzzer, and watched his walking up the stairs. She already loved the erectness of his figure, and the graceful agility of his movements, so unusual for such a large man. When he entered the apartment, she closed the door behind him. They were very close together in the small hallway. She raised her head and looked straight into his eyes, and that gesture asked him to take her in his arms. His kiss was long and possessive; when it became too intense she drew away from him; later she wondered why. That night when alone she felt she could live for a week on the memory of his kiss. However, she soon realized that it was foolish to be

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contented with this dream if there were something more wonderful in the offing.

"Do you mind if I take off my coat?" he asked.

"Of course not. I only planned for us to eat in the kitchen."

The dinner was ready, and they took a long time over the meal which they ate in the intimacy of her small kitchen. She could hardly believe they were sitting there alone, looking at each other across the table without the annoyance of prying eyes. She was very happy to find him so relaxed in this entirely new situation. He acted as if they had known each other for a long time.

"You look lovely tonight."

She was overcome with joy at his compliment and barely managed to whisper, "It is for you."

As soon as they rose from the table it was time to leave for the opera. He helped her on with her coat, but even at that proximity she was timid about expressing her desire for another sign of affection. During the music he gradually moved nearer to her so that their shoulders met, and they eventually found room for both elbows on the one arm of the seat. During the final aria, when she shifted her elbow a little, he found and held her hand; and, while leaving the theatre, he took her arm to guide her. When they had walked the few blocks back to her apartment she asked him to come in for a cup of tea. She was loath to bring this wonderful evening to a close.

But he responded with, "No, thank you. It's too late. It will take me nearly two hours to get home at this time of night."

"Did you enjoy the opera?"

"I certainly did. It's the kind of thing I need badly. Will you order seats when the program changes?"

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"I'll check on the date with you first."

"No, don't trouble. Any evening will be all right with me. Good-bye, now. Will see you at class." He bent over her so lovingly that she thought he was going to kiss her right there on the street. What a blissful evening! Merely having an escort was a great treat to her, and Philip was such an understanding, appreciative person. As she walked the few steps toward home she could hardly recognize herself.

The opera and dinner at her apartment became a part of their lives: they went every two weeks when the program changed. The atmosphere in this small theatre was very cordial. The audience consisted mostly of people who lived in the Village and had friends among the singers. They were a class of music lovers who could not afford Metropolitan prices, and were never critical of amateur rendering of the operas. She had selected this form of entertainment for she knew they would be as graciously treated as any other couple in the audience. She had not been disappointed. Each time they became more relaxed, they talked more during the intermissions, and learned more about each other. She even took special care to show the people around her that her escort was not merely a professional or business acquaintance, but a person whom she knew very well indeed. His manner in the theatre was totally unconstrained; never once did he appear conscious that he was an unusual individual in the audience. During the music he often held her hand, and they did not take the trouble to applaud along with everyone else.

But gradually she became impatient about seeing him only in classes and at the opera, yet at the same time she was fearful of jeopardizing their present, very satisfactory relationship. She could easily plan an evening in her own

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apartment, and thus solve her misgivings about his never returning there with her. She questioned whether he did not wish to enhance their friendship, or was nervous about leaving the house alone late at night. Outwardly he had shown no aversion to visiting, even though he knew she had lived there for years.

One evening she asked, "Would you mind if I invited two couples to dinner next time you are here? I would like you to meet my daughter and her husband."

"No, not at all. From what you say about them, I think they must be very interesting." He appeared casual, almost unconcerned, making her wonder why she had hesitated such a long time to bring about this occasion. Evidently he wanted her children to know that he existed as her friend, or at least he did not mind their knowing. But as the day for the dinner grew nearer she became very nervous and excited and wished she had been content to leave things as they were. Nevertheless, she was confident that this particular daughter and her husband would be glad she had found a man who was congenial to her. They themselves had so many different types of friends that they wouldn't mind this unconventional situation even though their own mother was involved.

The dinner was formal, carefully laid out on the extended gate-leg table in the living room. The other guests were Ruth and John, friends who attended the same class with them. Ruth and her son-in-law, William, did most of the talking. Philip was very quiet. The evening progressed so naturally that soon she was merely concerned as to whether she would have some time alone with him. Would he stay after the other people left? This was a new situation for them. There had been the many times she had said good-bye to him on the street, and the occasions when they

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had left the apartment together, but never his being there intending to leave without her.

While her daughter and William were putting on their coats, Marie turned to Philip, who was standing near her. "We are having a large party in a few weeks, and hope you and Mother will come."

His answer was only, "Thank you."

But Louise said, "We certainly will come." For at that moment she felt sure he would go with her.

"We have to be at work early in the morning," Ruth explained, as she and her husband were preparing to leave. Philip remained seated while Ruth followed Louise to the back room for her coat, and the two men continued to talk. She was very much afraid that he would leave with them. Did he want to remain with her, or did he not wish to intrude himself upon them? Also did he not mind their knowing that he desired to have some time alone with her. She hoped her face did not reveal a tremendous relief when they finally went out the door in front of her while Philip stood behind her.

He immediately took her in his arms when the door closed and at last she was sure that he intended to stay behind with her. What an advance in their friendship—a proof that he was willing to accept her along with her children. The anxiety she had felt in planning this event had been worth while and to her utmost enjoyment they settled down to love making, different from anything that had happened before. For the first time she knew what a wonderful lover he could be. He was gentle, though persistent; he sensed the importance of mutual satisfaction. His caresses finally caused her so say:

"I could enjoy it so much." She wanted him to know that even at her age she could experience the utmost pleas-

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ure in love making. He had understood her, for he replied: "Not now. It's so hard to get up and leave right afterwards. Perhaps you could come out to my place?"

"I'd love to." His expressed hope for the future pleased her tremendously even though she was left physically unsatisfied. His asking her to come to his house came as a total surprise; she could not believe that he cared that much about her.

II

When she arrived at class on Monday he was already seated at the long table. She quickly hung up her coat and sat down next to him. He looked up from his reading, and seemed rather demure to her when he asked, "How are you this evening?"

"Fine, and how are you?" She thought, "How commonplace a remark and yet how can he act any differently when we are not alone. He surely hasn't forgotten our last evening together."

As the class straggled in, the general conversation turned to movies apropos their studies. However she had carefully brought the name of a book he might be able to use for reference in the article he was writing. She placed the note on the table. His hand held hers for an instant as he picked up the piece of paper. That one unnecessary touch told her that he also was thinking of their last evening together. She needn't think that her desires had progressed too far ahead of his. At the study table they sat far apart, however, beneath the table their knees were together—not pressed tightly together, but pleasantly, closely relaxed. Generally

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he did not contribute to the class discussion but that evening he twice volunteered information. They left alone and walked the two blocks to the subway entrance where he hurriedly said, while descending the steps:

"Good-bye, Louise. I'm late for a meeting." He said, "No," for Saturday night. "I must work on my report for next week. I will call you."

She remained standing where he had left her, completely stunned. Was he angry about something, or was he truly in a great hurry? Tonight she had really expected more of him. "Did he regret having asked me to his house? Does he live in a community where my appearance would cause much gossip among his neighbors?"

There was no call from him on Tuesday, nor on Wednesday by seven o'clock when she had to leave her apartment. "But, remember, he has no phone," she tried to comfort herself. "And he told me how much he hated going to that restaurant-bar, because he had to stay around and talk to all his friends." It was impossible to wait for a whole week without seeing him; by that time she wouldn't even be able to remember what had happened between them. After much deliberation she addressed an envelope to him and enclosed the short note:

Dear Philip:

Walking home the other night I realized I should have offered to help you with your research, as I do help many other people. Also, from what you hurriedly said, I may not see you again for a whole week. I will meet you at the 25th St. library where you said you would be working at 9 Saturday morning unless you phone me otherwise.

Yours,

Louise.

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P.S. You can find the material and I can copy it for you.

She hesitated about signing it "yours." She wanted this one word to mean more than "yours truly," and she hoped he would interpret it in the way she intended.

Having mailed the letter, she was able to settle down to her daily tasks hoping her plans would materialize. Now she was glad there was no call on Friday. At five minutes after nine she was at the library, trying to wait confidently in the lobby on the ground floor. The outer door, then the inner, opened and closed. Someone entered; she looked up. "No." Again someone entered, and again "No." When this happened four times, she was beginning to fear he wasn't coming. Then the outer door opened, and when she looked through the inner glass door, she saw him. As usual he came very fast, smiling happily. Bending over her, he squeezed both her hands together very hard. She could not speak for pure joy.

"How long have you been waiting?"

"Only five minutes. Let's walk up; it's only one flight."

"I have never been here before, have you?" he asked as he took her arm going up the stairs.

All she said was, "Yes," for at a time like this she became speechless, overcome by the feeling that she really belonged to him.

He had a list of dates and names of newspapers he wanted for reference. She wrote up three call cards, and they sat down at a long library table to wait for the bound volumes. He hung up his overcoat and came back for hers. His polite consideration of her in a public place made her very happy. No one seemed to bother about them while they were studying together, frequently working on the

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same large regular newspaper pages, while he explained to her the detailed material he was trying to find. But later, when he went with her downtown on the subway, many people stared at them. She did not care, but she noticed being singled out from the crowd, and she wondered if he minded.

While waiting for his train on the platform, he took hold of her arm and remarked, "I do appreciate your coming today. You certainly taught me a lot about research."

"I don't feel like I helped you at all."

"But you did, and I'm going now to work on the material." It was a crowded spot but she forgot about all the people milling around them, and was glad that the limited space made it necessary for him to stand so close to her. As usual she hated to say good-bye, and stayed with him until he took an uptown train.

The next Monday evening, as he was walking her home from class, she wished to plan something that would follow the intimacy of the previous night when they had been alone in her apartment. Otherwise he might think that his love making had displeased her, and especially she wanted to hold him to his invitation to come to his house. He had given his report, and was discouraged about it. She consoled him, stating that the length of time he had been allowed was totally inadequate for presenting the material he had compiled.

"There's a class tomorrow night I'm going to start. Do you want to go?" he asked her. "We only have one more session here."

"I'm not sure; in fact, I didn't know about it."

"But you will join?"

"That makes quite a full schedule for me."

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He turned and looked at her, appearing quite annoyed. "Do you know when I have to get up to be at work by eight o'clock?"

"Six o'clock?" she queried.

"No, five. I have to travel such a distance."

She thought, and wished she could have the courage to say, "How much easier for you if you lived with me on Twelfth Street."

They walked another block and he insistingly questioned, "You will come tomorrow night?"

Her mind was occupied with something more immediately important to her. She enjoyed being with him in class, but she was anxious for something more personal between them.

"I'll try to. But I was thinking that you should get your notes in better order. If I typed them for you, couldn't you work on them better?"

"I certainly could. They would be easier to read, and I could get them organized. But the article would still have to be retyped. Would you mind that?"

"You know I wouldn't. But we would have to work on them together. I couldn't do it alone." As he said nothing she anxiously continued, "How about Saturday? Will you come to my house or shall I come to yours?" With all propriety she could ask him, as he had previously suggested her coming to his place, even though he had given an entirely different reason for wanting her to come then.

"I wish you would come to my place if it wouldn't be too inconvenient."

"I'd like to. But . . . ." She hesitated so long that he asked:

"But what?"

"It's your house, and they are your neighbors. Have you

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thought of what they might say? I don't mind at all but it might make a difference to you."

"No," he answered very emphatically. "No one would be thinking anything like that. No, don't you worry about that." What did he mean? Was he interpreting her words to mean something entirely different from what she had intended? By suggesting what people might suspect in her coming alone to his house, she had made him believe that she minded what they might think. In fact, she didn't care, and she was anxious to let him know she didn't; she was only afraid that what his neighbors might say to him later would prevent him from seeing her again. As much as she wanted to go there, she didn't wish to do anything that might break up their friendship. Not knowing exactly how to answer him, she remained quiet, and he changed the subject by saying:

"Hope I'll see you tomorrow night. 'Bye now." Fearing that she had brought up something of a dissenting nature between them, she was happy to hear this more familiar way of saying good-bye.

Of course she did as he asked and went to the new class. He was not in the appointed room, so she waited with friends on a bench in the hall. When he stepped off the elevator, she said, "There's my friend," and went to meet him.

He greeted her with a smile. "So you did come after all."

They entered the class room; he helped her off with her coat and hung it up. This little incident was a real acknowledgment to everyone present that they were friends beyond the confines of the class; they came and left together, quite oblivious of everyone else. They turned off Fifth Avenue, west on Thirteenth Street, which is a long, almost deserted street at night. She reached for his hand, and they

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walked with their hands and arms interlocked. Many days had passed since this intimacy had been possible; she wondered if he enjoyed it as much as she. She did not ask him into the apartment, as he had refused many times. He always gave the same excuse about early rising. Would he mention Saturday? She would be forced to if he didn't, because she wanted so much to be with him that day.

At the corner where they often parted, he said, "I'll call and give you directions how to reach my house on Saturday."

"Oh, but you might forget. Can't you tell me now?"

"No, I'll call you tomorrow between four-thirty and five." She didn't insist further, but said, "I hope you do, but you haven't always called when you said you would."

He walked away, facing her, smiling and saying, "I will call."

She had to believe him, though she distinctly felt his hesitancy about committing himself finally to his promise. Perhaps he hadn't wanted to subject her to standing on the sidewalk taking notes from him while people were passing by. However, she went to the library at nine in the morning, and kept herself occupied with her work. Only ten minutes after returning to her apartment, the telephone rang.

"Oh, is it he?" Yes, it was. He was especially loquacious, asking her how she had spent the day, telling her that he had left work early and would appreciate a long night's rest. Finally he asked, "Have you a pencil and paper?"

"Yes."

"Here are the directions. Take the A train up to the New Jersey Bus Terminal at One Hundred and Sixty-Eighth Street. Take bus Sixty-Three to Glenwood, and get off at Wendell Place. This ride is about twenty minutes.

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Continue walking a block as the bus travels. My house is the first one on the right of the next street. You have the address, haven't you? Do you think you can find it?"

"Yes. I have written it down very carefully."

"You must give me time to clean up the place."

"Don't worry about that; I won't mind. Shall I come out in the morning?"

"Yes, we have a lot of work to do."

"Shall I bring something for lunch?"

"No no; I'll take care of that." The operator asked for another coin; they simultaneously said:

"Goodbye, will see you Saturday."

Then he asked, "You will come, even if I don't call you again on Friday?"

She did not stay home on Friday night, because it had snowed steadily for forty-eight hours, and she was afraid he might call up to say the weather was too rough out in the country. She dressed leisurely and warmly Saturday morning, finding and wearing her best lace panties and slip. After trying on three pairs of earrings, she decided to wear none at all. She would take her portfolio instead of a pocket book. It looked professional and would substantiate his explanation to the other family occupants of his two-party house that she had come to help him with his writing.

The telephone rang. She was frightened.

"Surely it isn't he. I just won't answer; I could have left by now." But at the third ring she automatically picked up the receiver and said, "Hello."

"I tried to get you last night, Louise. I don't think you should come out. The snow is very deep here, and I have to clear my path and sidewalk. Also I haven't cleaned up my apartment and I hate for you to see it this way."

What could she say except, "Oh, I'm so disappointed.

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There are only a couple of blocks to walk, and I will wear my high boots." But evidently he had distinctly decided that she shouldn't come, for he added, "I will be so tired shovelling snow that I won't be able to work on the notes anyway."

There were actual tears in her voice when she said, "I'm so sorry. I'd just finished dressing, and I made some cookies to bring."

Still he did not relent and ask her to come. She sensed that he wished to have everything in perfect readiness for her. She felt she could have persuaded him, but she merely said, "Good-bye." Not waiting a single moment to brood over her disappointment, she put on her hat and coat, snatched up her note-book, and left to bury her thoughts in her work. On the subway ride home, after spending many hours reading and writing, she consoled herself, "I'll be seeing him again the day after tomorrow."

She could not resist going early to class. He was there alone, seated at the long table. She hurriedly hung up her coat and eagerly sat down beside him. As he leaned toward her while not touching her, she felt as if he were engulfing her in a tremendous embrace.

"I was so sorry I asked you not to come out on Saturday. I really wanted you to come, and hoped you would insist."

"I don't understand."

"Yes. I asked you not to come because I was ashamed for you to see the place so untidy."

She was astounded. Her feelings had been unduly hurt; he had actually wanted her to come, although he had asked her not to. For the first time she realized that he must have as many doubts and misgivings as she about the progress of their friendship. Truly she had not been devastatingly unhappy about not going, because he had been sweeter to

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her on the telephone than ever before. And now he was unquestionably telling her she must come.

She laughed. "Are you asking me to come and help you clean up?"

"Yes, I'll never get around to doing it myself. I even left everything as it was."

"All right. But we have tickets for 'The Barber of Seville' on Friday. I ordered them for that night as we are invited to a party at Marie's on Saturday. Do you remember?" When he did not answer she refrained from telling him that she would like to go and work at his place during the day, and return with him to the party. She would tell him this plan on Friday night at the opera.

"Can you come for dinner before the show?"

"Yes, I'll be there at six-thirty."

"That's good." She would liked to have said, "Even though we have seen each other often during the past weeks, in all that time I have not had one single kiss."

When her youngest daughter called her for a dinner date, she said, "Come have dinner at the apartment. Philip will be here; we have tickets for a show."

"Shall I come?" Laura asked.

"Why not? Then you will get to meet him."

"Are you sure you want me to come if he's going to be there?" This question gave her ample opportunity to reply, "You're right. I'd rather be alone with him."

However, she answered, "Oh no. I want you to meet him."

Hanging up the receiver she immediately thought, "Will he get here before Laura does? Will I lose those precious moments I've been longing for these many weeks? But if he doesn't come first, perhaps she'll leave before we do. I certainly have acted foolishly. Am I really in love with the

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man? Do I unconsciously keep putting things in the way of our friendship, or do I now feel sure about everything, and therefore am anxious to go one step farther by having him meet and like my youngest daughter?"

She was much more relaxed than she had been when her other daughter first met Philip. She knew him much better though the interim had only been three weeks, and she was certain that he would like Laura. Her daughter came first.

"I hope you aren't nervous, Mother. I'm sure everything will be pleasant and easy."

"No, I'm not; I'm just excited. I always am when I'm going to see him. As much as I try to control myself, I get upset for fear something will keep him from coming. This is all mixed up with being so happy these days."

"You shouldn't be so intense."

"Yes, I know. I do wish I could be calmer about it." The buzzer rang, and as Louise answered it, Laura thoughtfully moved to another chair where she wouldn't see him enter the apartment.

"We have company for dinner tonight," she said to him. Perhaps he didn't hear her as the door was still open, or he wasn't going to allow her words to make an exception to his way of greeting her there. When she closed the door, they both forgot everything except their being together. She vaguely understood that he must have been longing for this moment as much as she. The embrace was prolonged and fervent, and her daughter could place no other interpretation on the long silence. She kept her hand on his arm as they went into the front room, as she distinctly wanted Laura to know the extent of their friendship.

The atmosphere during the meal was even more casual

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than she had dared to anticipate. Laura's manner was very light and easy-going, while she told of her experiences as a social worker in a large hospital, and Philip spoke of his wife's having been a hospital nurse when she was alive. Laura had an engagement for the evening, and left while they were still seated at the table.

Philip immediately said, "I can't understand why such an attractive girl hasn't married."

This remark led to a lengthy discussion of the pros and cons of the man's and woman's part in marriage. She explained that the older a woman became, the more she wished for freedom of action in the things of interest she had acquired during her unmarried years.

"Generally, a man doesn't like to give his wife such freedom."

"I don't know why not. He ought to be glad she is that way."

"But most men wouldn't agree with you. They might talk differently, but at the same time, they really would be jealous of their wives. I'm glad you feel that way about it." She arose from the table and deliberately walked across the room and sat down in his lap. The repeated kisses, intense kisses, she felt should go on forever. Why did she extricate herself from his embrace, gather up a pile of dishes from the table, and take them into the kitchen? He followed her, but she had ruthlessly interrupted their intimacy. If she had only stayed where she was, they might never have gone to the opera, and might have spent the entire evening love making. Why did that detestable characteristic of doing always what she should do instead of what she wanted to do have to crop up at such a crucial moment? Or, was she afraid that, as she had asked for his

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show of affection, the situation was not truly indicative of his feelings? She knew, however, that he enjoyed the kisses as much as she did.

Walking home from the opera, she asked him if she could come out to his house the following day and return with him for the party that night. He said he would call her before twelve o'clock. After waiting until one-thirty she left but returned in a couple of hours, knowing he had plenty of time to call her again if she had missed his first call. Nothing happened. It proved to her that she had taken an unnecessary risk by not waiting indefinitely for his call. Very unhappy, she went to the party alone, feeling that for some unknown reason he had not wanted to go. It is true they would have gone to her daughter's home, and he would have been the escort of the hostess's mother, and everyone there would have been a stranger to him. Under such circumstances would he have enjoyed the evening? Perhaps she should have told him this would be an interracial party, though she always refrained from using this word in their conversations.

When she was with him she knew that their love was reciprocal. But when she did not see him for a few days she always became afraid that she was only an incidental person in his completely filled life. In order to constantly reassure herself that he did care for her, she would do such foolish little things as keeping his Yellow Bus #63 schedule conspicuously standing on her bureau. She loved this folder; it was so worn and frayed that he must have carried it in his pocket for months. This dirty little piece of paper represented a definite future for her.

"He must have had something else he preferred to do," she thought. "I must remember that he may be still going with his former girl friend. Even though I'm with him

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every weekend, there is still another day for someone else. A man is perfectly capable of loving two women at the same time, not even feeling he is doing an injustice to either one of them." These disquieting thoughts were always dispelled as soon as she was with him again.

When he saw her on Monday night his first words were, "I called you on Saturday and you weren't at home." Inwardly she moaned, "Why didn't I wait patiently all afternoon?" Aloud she asked:

"When?"

"I was late getting to town. It must have been two o'clock." So he was used to having people waiting around for him indefinitely.

"I had to go to New Jersey to visit my former father-in-law who is a lonely old man. I waited for you till one-thirty. Would you have gone to the party?"

"Yes."

She wanted to say, "Well, you could have called again later if you had really wished to go." However, she was always careful about saying anything that might annoy him.

"I'm so sorry. I went alone. It was a good party."

"Did they stay late?"

"Yes, they danced till the liquor gave out."

He laughed, saying, "I must have missed a good party."

"You did; but there'll be others." She did wish she could be sure of how much he cared for her. In this room there were no tables; there were only rows of chairs placed close together. When he wrote notes his elbow would touch her arm, and he would leave it there. Often he moved away from her; he was tired and restless; he had completed a hard day's work. But during most of the class their arms were against each other; she seemed to sense his desire to

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have some proof that she really cared for him. She was more than glad to please him, even though their nearness might be noticeable to those sitting directly behind them.

He hunted for her coat among many others. "This is yours, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is." She was surprised and pleased that he recognized it, and he familiarly helped her on with it while she was talking to a friend of hers. He opened the door for her to precede him, took her arm as she got on the crowded elevator and waited for her on the ground floor. They were intimately contented as they slowly walked toward her apartment. On the corner of Twelfth Street and Sixth Avenue he stopped her to look in the window at the plans of a large apartment house in construction there. She thought that he, as a carpenter, was primarily interested in the diagram of the layout of the project.

But he said, "This is where I should apply for an apartment." She was astounded that he would even suggest the possibility of his application's being considered.

"It's an impressive layout. I wonder how expensive they are."

"One hundred dollars and up," he answered with assurance. "But I would be better off paying that rent than keeping up my place in New Jersey."

When another couple approached the window she took his arm, led him away, and talked about something entirely different. Hereafter, when she passed this apartment house she remembered the incident, and thoroughly blamed herself for acting disinterested in his applying for a place there. A totally diverse approach could have enhanced their friendship. Even though she had cause to believe it would be impossible for him to rent an apartment there, even though he himself knew this problem when he sug-

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gested applying, she should have firmly acquiesced. He would have been pleased; he would have known that she, at least, felt he should be allowed to live wherever he wished.

After walking a half a block she asked, "How about tomorrow night?"

"It's Wednesday. I'll see you at the writer's group in Harlem. If I'm too tired to come, I'll call you between five and five thirty."

"I hope you can come because they'll be discussing your story." Soon they were saying those terribly frustrating good-byes on the street corner.

In the morning she had a call from her daughter, Marie.

"Can you have supper with the children? It's one of my teaching nights, and William is away in Detroit."

"Yes, I'll be there about five thirty. Does that give you plenty of time?" She had agreed, as she always did, having acquired this habit over many years. Immediately she remembered she would miss his call if he were not planning to be at the study group. She had often intended to give him her daughter's number, but she felt that he would never call her there.

He was not at the writers' session and she had not received his call when they would have made plans for the weekend. Would he think she was avoiding him by not being at home when he had promised to call? Would a whole week pass without her seeing him? Was she again going to become steeped with doubts and fears? He had no telephone; he would try to get in touch with her a few times, and then give up, and she would have to wait patiently until next Tuesday. This situation could have been avoided if she had only said "no" to her daughter's request.

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"But I was so sure he'd call some day later if he weren't at the club. Of course there've been many times he could have called and not found me at home."

III

Tuesday finally came. As she was going to be with him, she dressed very carefully. He would be wearing his corduroy jacket, having come straight from work, but she knew he liked to claim a well-dressed woman as his friend. The walk to Fifth Avenue only took a few minutes; she planned to arrive ahead of time. When she entered the building, he was standing there alone waiting for the elevator. The rapturous expression on his face as she went towards him was overpowering. She dropped her gaze as he took both hands and kissed her. His inarticulate murmurings of minged relief and joy said more than a hundred "I-love-you's." This time her intense emotion was reciprocated. The embrace was brief; he must have seen the person who had entered the building immediately behind her. The three went up on the elevator.

She started talking, totally ignoring the other man. She was so elatedly happy that she hardly knew what she was saying.

"You missed an interesting session last Wednesday. They discussed your story."

"I couldn't make it; I was too tired. Remember we were both out the two previous nights." She was glad that he wished the other man to hear this remark. "What did they say about your story?"

"They liked it. I read aloud both yours and mine. I

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asked them to interrupt me whenever they wished. I took notes, and have some very constructive criticism for you." By that time they were in the classroom. The chairs were arranged close together; they did not take the trouble to move them farther apart.

After class, they had barely left the building when he turned to her. "I missed you very much this weekend. Which day are you coming out to my place?"

"Do you prefer Saturday or Sunday?" She wished to be assured that Mary no longer existed as his girl friend.

His answer, "Either day is all right with me," confirmed her hope that he did not have to fit her coming into any other plans. However, she had to admit that perhaps he could appear at Mary's apartment without even letting her know. She had always understood that it was more difficult for a man to abstain from love making, and she often wondered whether the meager show of affection was sufficient for him during the progressing weeks, and now, months of their friendship.

Suddenly she heard him saying, "If you and I stay together we will make a wonderful contribution with the articles we are writing."

She replied, "I have always hoped that our friendship would continue." He said nothing else personal, but continued with a rough sketch of his projected pamphlet on industrial workers in New York City.

"I shall see you Saturday," she said as they parted.

"I'd like to see you before then. Won't you be at the library Thursday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"I can't get there before four-thirty. Can we go out to dinner after I look up a few references?"

"I'd like to."

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