

214 Minutes
A short story

At 5:30 PM, Clara called Max at the newspaper office to tell him she had to work late; she'd try to get home in time to change and make their 8:00 reservations.

At 5:42, Max, sensing something duplicitous in her voice, grabbed a cab and headed home.

At 5:47, Stanley, whose gray Audi was stopped in front of the library, rolled down his window and called out to Clara, "I didn't think you were going to make it," to which Clara responded, "Just had to make a quick call."

At 6:01, Max sat down on his sofa, reached for the remote control, turned on, then just as quickly turned off the TV.

At 6:15, Stanley and Clara arrived in the bar of the Drake Hotel and ordered drinks: a martini and a whiskey sour, respectively.

At 6:22, Max called the library and got an answering machine.

At 6:23, Max called the library and got an answering machine.

At 6:23, Max called the library and hung up on the third ring.

At 6:27, Clara told Stanley she had to be some place at 8:00.

At 6:28, Max dialed another number.

At 6:28, Clara heard her cell phone ringing, reached into her bag, glanced down at the phone, then shut it off.

At 6:30, Max put on his coat and went out for a walk.

At 6:32, Stanley ordered a grilled chicken club sandwich, French fries and coleslaw.

At 6:35, Lainie Hammett, who still lived at home with her ailing father, sat in her living room and listened to the sounds of him wheezing as he lay upstairs in his bed.

At 6:40, Clara ordered grilled salmon and another whiskey sour.

At 6:50, Max found himself at Lincoln Park Zoo, staring at seals.

At 6:53, Clara discussed at length her dissatisfaction with the three most important elements of her life: her job at the library, her nagging, marriage-minded mother, and her boyfriend who she said didn't "share (her) expectations."

At 7:11, after Clara was done with this discussion, Stanley asked where Clara lived. She said she was "between places."

At 7:14, Lainie Hammett walked upstairs to check on her father; he had stopped snoring.

At 7:18, Max watched seals.

At 7:19, Clara asked Stanley what time it was. He said it was "about quarter to seven."

At 7:20, Clara said she shouldn't drink anymore, but ordered another whiskey sour anyway.

At 7:25, Max walked up a cement stairway to get a better look at the seals.

At 7:28, Lainie Hammett, after seeing her father was breathing normally, went to her bedroom and sat down on the same bed where, twenty-eight years earlier, she had insisted on its being painted magenta.

At 7:40, Max stopped watching seals and started to walk home.

At 7:43, Clara, somewhat tipsy, excused herself from the table and grabbed her purse, saying she had to go "freshen up."

At 7:44, Stanley glanced at the opening face-off of the Black Hawks game on TV.

At 7:45, Clara called home and talked to the answering machine. She said "running late here at work" but it came out garbled.

At 7:59, Max arrived at his apartment building, looked up at his window; it was still dark.

At 8:01, Stanley asked the waiter for the check.

At 8:03, Max walked east towards the lake.

At 8:07, Lainie Hammett, bored beyond belief, walked to her bookshelf, picked out an old high school yearbook, tossed it on her bed and began thumbing through it.

At 8:09, Stanley told Clara he was sorry she couldn't stay out longer, but maybe they could do this again.

At 8:10, Clara told Stanley that probably wasn't a good idea.

At 8:14, Max stopped at the corner of Chicago and State and walked into a White Hen Pantry. He had wanted to buy a package of Chuckles, but bought a bouquet of slightly wilted pink carnations instead.

At 8:18, Clara arrived home; Max wasn't there.

At 8:21, Max, walking aimlessly west on Chicago, started to think about the last time he'd been stood up--prom night 18 years earlier.

At 8:25, Clara decided she liked her apartment a lot better when she was alone in it.

At 8:31, Max hailed a cab.

At 8:37, Clara stripped down to her underwear and turned up a Go-Go's album loud.

At 8:41, Stanley called Judy Lentz, who also worked in the library, to see if she was busy or had time for drinks.

At 8:47, Lainie Hammett ran through 34 years of her life in her mind and decided there were very few of them she wouldn't live differently if she had the chance.

At 8:54, Clara started dancing.

At 8:58, Stanley got out his cell phone and called information, asking for Doris Burns' number.

At 8:58, Clara made herself a banana split.

At 9:01, Stanley got a copy of the local alternative weekly and began scanning the Women Seeking Men advertisements.

At 9:03, Clara fell happily asleep on her couch.

At 9:03, Stanley's pen ran out of ink.

At 9:03, Max got out of his cab, forgetting to tip his driver.

At 9:04, Lainie Hammett got up from her bed, went downstairs and looked out the front window. Someone who looked very familiar to her was walking towards her with a bouquet of carnations.

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