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Sunday Will Come

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Julia pulled the pink shower curtain across the rod and turned the chrome, spoke-like faucets until the water became comfortably hot. The light penetrated through the plastic protection and deposited pastel brightness on each drop of water. She felt the hot liquid roll over her body and she felt her skin tingle. Her short dark hair began to moisten as the steam curled around the enclosure. Bob didn’t like her hair that short. He thought it took something away from her femininity. But Julia didn’t like the bother that accompanied long hair and she disliked people telling her that she looked like Cleopatra. She wasn’t Cleopatra and she didn’t want long hair. And, she usually did as she pleased.

The water was so hot that she was almost laughing. Or maybe she was just happy because she was going to see Bob again. She had seen him every night this week and was going to see him every night until Sunday. Sunday! Oh, the thought of it made her sick inside. She dreaded it and wished that she could turn around and run a million miles away from Sunday.

But the coldness that crept in from the rest of the bathroom, as she turned the shower off, startled her back to Wednesday. She pulled the curtains back and reached for a towel. "Ah, this certainly is next to Godliness," she thought, "or whatever cleanliness is supposed to be next to." She pulled on her robe and went to her bedroom.

Her mother called to her, "Julia, are you going to use the car tonight?"

"No, no, I just wondered, you have had the car every night this week. We don’t mind, but please try to get in a little earlier. You know how we worry about you when you are alone in that car so late at night."

"Yes Mother, but you know how it is when all the kids get together. You kind of lose track of time."

"Yes I know, well have a good time. I’m going across the street to see May. Good-Bye."

Julia managed to get a good-bye out as she pulled the sweat shirt over her head. She brushed her hair back in place with the palms of her hands and wet her lips before running over them with a bit of lipstick. She took a kleenex and wiped everything but a light flush off her lips. "Well, I had better get going," she thought, "Bob was expecting me a half-hour ago."

She skipped down the stairs, took the keys out of the desk drawer and walked out the front door. Julia’s father was nestled in a wicker chair reading the newspaper. He looked up from his paper, over the rims of his glasses, and at Julia. "Where are you going tonight?" he asked.
Julia felt that same chilled feeling as she swallowed and said, "Oh, just to see some friends."

"Have a good time, Sunday is almost here you know," her father replied laughingly.

Sunday, Sunday, why don't they stop talking about Sunday, thought Julia as she waved and got into the car. She headed the car West as she lit up a cigarette. The smoke rolled out of her nostrils when she sighed in relief. She always felt good when she was on her way to see Bob. Not only because she was happy to see him but she felt that none of her family, or friends that she did not care to see anymore, could reach her. She was completely independent of these people and they couldn't get at her once she left.

She began thinking of Sunday again. She had gone to college for two years here in the city and now her parents wanted her to go away to school. They wanted her to live in a dorm and meet nice people. And they also believed that one could become involved in red channels, or shades thereof, at the school she had been attending. Now Sunday she was going to leave for school, Sunday she was going to leave Bob. But, Sunday she was also going to leave her family. They couldn't reach her there. With this thought settled in the back of her mind she forgot about Sunday. She began thinking about the immediate. And that was Bob.

Her life had changed considerably since she had started seeing him four months ago. She had been pretty much the typical college co-ed before. Everything was just simple, ordinary, day by day living. Nothing unusual. Everything moving in the direction of a pleasant existence. But now, she had been picked out of this situation and had been placed in a situation which could sever her completely from her family and from society. She was in this situation but she had to continue to display an air befitting a young, carefree, college girl. The turmoil that went on inside her stayed there. But she considered herself the type that could be adapted to almost any situation. And whatever it called for, she could act accordingly.

She thought about the wonderful summer she had had this year. She remembered the discussions she and Bob had, the times they spent sketching and painting and the walks they took late at night. Oh, she remembered those walks. They couldn't go very many places together. But when it became sufficiently dark they would come out of the basement apartment, a few blocks away from the University, and walk in the night air. And the people. Those cruel people with eyes bulging out of their narrow-minded skulls yelling, "Nigger, Black Bitch!" Or staring at Julia saying, "White trash! You ain't nothing but White trash!" And they walked. They walked silently, his hand tightening over hers.

Julia didn't notice the crowds herding in and out of the department stores and super markets, or the old gang that was gathering to spend another night in the local tavern, or the children who were pleading for a few more minutes of outside activity. She detoured around the blockade where the new highway was coming through
without thinking. She headed straight West until she came to the University. There she turned left and passed Old Main, the Unitarian Church and the College bookstore. Julia pulled up in front of the funeral home, locked the car and ran between the traffic to the other side of the street. She opened the orange door, walked down a few steps and nervously knocked on the door at the left. She always felt a funny sensation in the bottom of her stomach when she waited for him to open the door. People said that after you see someone for any length of time the romance wears off. Although Julia and Bob's relationship had gone beyond the romantic stage and on to the depths of a very profound affinity, all the feeling she had for him seemed to creep over her entire being and settle in her stomach.

A silhouette moved across the frosted glass window, opened the door, and said “Hi.” Julia smiled and whispered, “Hi.” Bob took her hand and led her into the apartment. He kissed her on the cheek and said, “I've missed you.” Julia laughed lightly. She never knew what to say when he told her that. With his hand still clasped around hers, he took her into the kitchen.

“As usual I've come at the right time,” Julia murmured, as she eyed the dishes stacked in the sink. He narrowed his eyes as he said, “You know very well you enjoy doing my dishes.” He took her hands in his again and continued, “and I like having you do them. It makes it seem as if you are the lady of the house. And that’s what you should be. You belong here with me.” She smiled as her eyes surveyed the floor. She left him standing there and started the water running. He went into the studio. He always painted while she did the dishes. He liked her to be around while he painted. He said she inspired him. Of course he said he painted quite well when he was waiting for her to come and also when they had arguments and he didn’t expect her to come back again. He could paint anywhere and at anytime. He once remarked that he could “paint in hell” if he had to. And he was quite certain that was where he would go if there happened to be a “hereafter.” But that, he doubted very seriously.

Julia’s hands burned as she put the dishes in the hot, soapy, water. There were a few plates, a cup and saucer, some silverware and two wine glasses that had been left from the night before. While she rinsed them and put them on the board to drain she became aware of the familiar lyrics of Leadbelly’s folk songs, coming from the phonograph in the studio.

Just as Julia was drying the dishes, Bob danced down the hall and into the kitchen. He pulled up a chair and sat there smiling at her. She finished and sat down across the table from him. He jumped up and went to the refrigerator. From there he bowed down and said, “We must celebrate, because you are here tonight.” Just as he had every other night she had been there, he brought out a bottle of Christian Brothers Cream Sherry. He set two glasses that had originally contained peanut-butter on the table. The wine rippled into the glasses and left liquid beads on the sides as it settled on the bottom. Julia put it up to her lips and swallowed some of the sweetness. She
smiled as the glow warmed the pathway that led to her stomach. Her hands and her lips felt sticky and she laughed and he laughed.

Bob circled the palms of his hands around the sticky glass as he asked, "Did your parents say anything about you getting home late last night?"

"No, nothing more than what they usually have to say," she replied. "But they just don't know where I manage to get all the friends that I tell them I go to see. I wish I could tell them where I go every night. I wish they could know you and like you and I wish everything could be okay."

"I wish everything could be okay too. I wish I could meet them and come and take you out, and I wish they could like me."

Julia hurriedly said, "Bob, I know they would like you if they could just take time to understand. But they won't. Not in all their lives could they take the time to understand."

"Yes, I know," he said looking into the brown liquid. "But if they could live long enough to look at me for what I am? If they could only see that first of all I am a human being, then an artist and lastly a Negro, they might accept me. But no, all they see is my dark skin. After a time they may see that I'm an artist and then finally recognize me as a human being."

Julia looked into his eyes and almost screamed, "But they won't live long enough!" Then she calmly added, "My brothers and sister wouldn't let them live long enough, even if they wanted to. They would take them and devour them up with all their prejudices and I would be dead to them and they to me."

Bob met Julia's hand half way across the table as he said, "They wouldn't take time to digest the situation. They are too busy mowing their lawns every Saturday, and painting their white houses each year, and drinking their fifteen cent beer. All they want is their weekly pay check so they can have all these things and so they can yell 'Give me fun, fun. Give it to me as fast as you can. Hurry, so I don't have to take time out to think.' Yes, so they don't have to take time out to think about people like me. That would displease them. You know why they don't like me, you want to know why? Because I'm not like them. People don't like things that are not like they are. And I have dark skin and they don't like dark skin and they don't like me. And the darker the skin, the more displeasing we become. Yes, I'm a Negro and I'm damned proud of it."

Julia beamed as she said, "And so am I."

Bob relaxed his grip on the glass, smiled and said "Hi."

Julia laughed as she blinked and said, "Hi."

Wine glasses in hand they walked into the studio. The single light overhead pointed to a painting in the corner. "This is my new baby," he said as her eyes followed the light. Julia did not notice the line and the color at first glance. All she could see was its magnitude. It must have been eight feet by five feet. And then the colors spread over the canvas as she concentrated on the quality. It was purple and then it was green and then there were dark forms and lines and points and
strokes. "That’s my baby," he boasted, "but she is developing into a mature form."

"You mean you aren’t finished with it?"

Bob shook his head.

"But how much further can you go? You will put so much of yourself into it that there will be nothing left of you."

"He stared at the painting and said, “It doesn’t work that way. Yes, you do put everything you have into it until it is finished. But it gives back to you. Not the same thing, but something completely new and different. And you are a bigger person and you have more to work with. You have more than you ever had before and you can put it all into your next painting and then you get it back again and again and again."

Julia sat on the low couch while Bob replaced Leadbelly with an album of Toch. She looked up and asked, “Are there any discriminations among artists?"

“No,” he replied. “That is one medium where we can all communicate on the same level.” He picked up his brush and began painting.

"Then art is sort of a melting pot?” Julia questioned.

“No, it isn’t. In a melting pot everyone gets together to try to iron out differences. In art there are no differences to begin with and no one is trying to do anything, except paint.”

“I wish everyone was an artist,” thought Julia out loud and then added, “I’m taking an art course this semester.” He smiled, and then thoughts of this semester brought thoughts of Sunday. And they both looked at each other with their smiles enclosed in the past. "I’m going to miss you!” he said as he put his brush down. He came over to her and knelt down beside her. “Why do you have to go? Why can’t you stay and go to the University with me? Then we could be together all the time."

“Bob, please don’t make it any harder than it is.”

He put his head on her lap and sighed “Julia, oh Julia. What is going to become of us? I’m afraid you are going to go away and forget me. I’m afraid I’m going to lose you.”

“Don’t talk like that,” she answered back. “Do you think I could go away and forget you, after all this? Do you think I could let our plans slip through my fingers?” Then she closed her eyes and murmured, “Plans, oh, what plans. Our plans are just dreams. Nothing more."

He jumped up and shook her by the shoulders. “Just dreams, what do you mean just dreams? Do you think I tell you all those things just to be making conversation. Do you think I would have continued to see you and have you down here all the time if I didn’t think there was any future in it?” He released his grip and said, “I’m sorry. I have no right to expect such things. This is just my selfishness coming out.” He sat down beside her and continued. “I know you couldn’t give up your family for me. Not for the kind of life we would have. Where would we live? I know there are some sections of the
country where we would be accepted more than in others. But there is no Utopia for people like us. And I wouldn't keep running all my life.”

Julia interrupted, “Bob, I know we could manage, you and I. But what about our children, what would they be and what would they have to go through all their lives because of us? And it is hard enough for people to get married and learn to live with each other, let alone people of different races.”

“And an artist on top of that,” Bob added.

Julia sighed. “Oh, sometimes I think that life is so long and that I should be so careful and take care before living. And other times I think it is so short that I should live. I should have you no matter what.”

Bob answered “No, it is long and you should take care. You must be awfully sure before you do anything. You are right. We have no business talking like this.” He looked away.

Julia got to her feet and walked toward the window. She stopped suddenly, turned to face him and asked, “What am I supposed to do about the way I feel about you? Do you think it is something I can just turn on and off?” And then pleadingly, “Oh why do we have to worry about everyone else? Why can’t we be happy?” Julia saw his eyes, filled with every bit of love he had inside him, call to her. She rose and walked over to him. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close to him. Then they felt each other’s lips and they were happy. They forgot for a moment what they were thinking about before and couldn’t seem to figure out what they were thinking about then.

But that moment passed and he released her and pushed her away from him. And he cried, “Get out of here, get out of here quick! Go as fast as you can, hurry!” She took a step toward him with wide eyes, and she faced his back. She saw him put his hands on his face and she saw him trembling. She turned and pulled the door open. She heard it slam as she raced up the steps. The night met her with a sudden shock. The traffic moved in front of her and she was afraid to cross the street. Tears peeked out from her eyelids but they wouldn’t run any further. They just stayed there. As she squinted to try and help them go one way or the other, all the bright lights spit their contents in every direction. And her throat hurt and she wanted to spit violently back at the lights.

Julia parked the car in front of the house and slowly walked up to the porch. The lights in the house were on. Her mother was waiting up for her. Julia opened the door with a cheery “Hi.” Her mother answered her with, “Well I’m glad you came in early tonight. Did you have a nice time?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Will you be using the car tomorrow night?” asked her mother.

“No, I won’t be using it for the rest of the week. I’m going to stay home and start my packing.”

“Good,” her mother said. “You know Sunday will be here before you know it.”