

000 Cooper Union Orientation Reading Group, Chris Curro
001
002 August 30, 2019

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004 *What follows is Dorothy Parker's "A Telephone Call" — first published in*
005 *1928 — and a piece that rings true today. *cue groans* In a*
006 *straightforward reading we might discuss texting culture, ghosting, and*
007 *other hallmarks of the twenty-first century interpersonal relationship*
008 *scene. Instead, let's challenge ourselves to discuss coworking, dependency,*
009 *privilege, performativity, heteronormativity, gender roles, and maybe*
010 *even colonialism.*
011

012 Please, God, let him telephone me now. Dear God, let him call me
013 now. I won't ask anything else of You, truly I won't. It isn't very
014 much to ask. It would be so little to You, God, such a little, little
015 thing. Only let him telephone now. Please, God. Please, please,
016 please.
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020 If I didn't think about it, maybe the telephone might ring.
021 Sometimes it does that. If I could think of something else. If I
022 could think of something else. Knobby if I counted five hundred by
023 fives, it might ring by that time. I'll count slowly. I won't cheat.
024 And if it rings when I get to three hundred, I won't stop; I won't
025 answer it until I get to five hundred. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty,
026 twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-five, fifty...Oh, please
027 ring. Please.
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033 This is the last time I'll look at the clock. I will not look at it again.
034 It's ten minutes past seven. He said he would telephone at five
035 o'clock. "I'll call you at five, darling." I think that's where he said
036 "darling." I'm almost sure he said it there. I know he called me
037 "darling" twice, and the other time was when he said good-by.
038 "Good-by, darling." He was busy, and he can't say much in the
039 office, but he called me "darling" twice. He couldn't have minded
040 my calling him up. I know you shouldn't keep telephoning them—I
041 know they don't like that. When you do that they know you are
042 thinking about them and wanting them, and that makes them hate
043 you. But I hadn't talked to him in three days—not in three days. And
044 all I did was ask him how he was; it was just the way anybody might
045 have called him up. He couldn't have minded that. He couldn't
046 have thought I was bothering him. "No, of course you're not," he
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054 said. And he said he'd telephone me. He didn't have to say that. I
055 didn't ask him to, truly I didn't. I'm sure I didn't. I don't think he
056 would say he'd telephone me, and then just never do it. Please don't
057 let him do that, God. Please don't.
058

060 "I'll call you at five, darling." "Good-by, darling.,' He was busy, and
061 he was in a hurry, and there were people around him, but he called
062 me "darling" twice. That's mine, that's mine. I have that, even if I
063 never see him again. Oh, but that's so little. That isn't enough.
064 Nothing's enough, if I never see him again. Please let me see him
065 again, God. Please, I want him so much. I want him so much. I'll
066 be good, God. I will try to be better, I will, If you will let me see
067 him again. If You will let him telephone me. Oh, let him telephone
068 me now.
069

074 Ah, don't let my prayer seem too little to You, God. You sit up
075 there, so white and old, with all the angels about You and the stars
076 slipping by. And I come to You with a prayer about a telephone call.
077 Ah, don't laugh, God. You see, You don't know how it feels. You're
078 so safe, there on Your throne, with the blue swirling under You.
079 Nothing can touch You; no one can twist Your heart in his hands.
080 This is suffering, God, this is bad, bad suffering. Won't You help
081 me? For Your Son's sake, help me. You said You would do whatever
082 was asked of You in His name. Oh, God, in the name of Thine only
083 beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, let him telephone me now.
084

090 I must stop this. I mustn't be this way. Look. Suppose a young man
091 says he'll call a girl up, and then something happens, and he doesn't.
092 That isn't so terrible, is it? Why, it's gong on all over the world,
093 right this minute. Oh, what do I care what's going on all over the
094 world? Why can't that telephone ring? Why can't it, why can't it?
095 Couldn't you ring? Ah, please, couldn't you? You damned, ugly,
096 shiny thing. It would hurt you to ring, wouldn't it? Oh, that would
097 hurt you. Damn you, I'll pull your filthy roots out of the wall, I'll
098 smash your smug black face in little bits. Damn you to hell.
099

104 No, no, no. I must stop. I must think about something else. This is
105 what I'll do. I'll put the clock in the other room. Then I can't look
106 at it. If I do have to look at it, then I'll have to walk into the
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108 bedroom, and that will be something to do. Maybe, before I look at
109 it again, he will call me. I'll be so sweet to him, if he calls me. If he
110 says he can't see me tonight, I'll say, "Why, that's all right, dear.
111 Why, of course it's all right." I'll be the way I was when I first met
112 him. Then maybe he'll like me again. I was always sweet, at first.
113 Oh, it's so easy to be sweet to people before you love them.
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115 I think he must still like me a little. He couldn't have called me
116 "darling" twice today, if he didn't still like me a little. It isn't all
117 gone, if he still likes me a little; even if it's only a little, little bit.
118 You see, God, if You would just let him telephone me, I wouldn't
119 have to ask You anything more. I would be sweet to him, I would
120 be gay, I would be just the way I used to be, and then he would love
121 me again. And then I would never have to ask You for anything
122 more. Don't You see, God? So won't You please let him telephone
123 me? Won't You please, please, please?
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125 Are You punishing me, God, because I've been bad? Are You angry
126 with me because I did that? Oh, but, God, there are so many bad
127 people –You could not be hard only to me. And it wasn't very bad;
128 it couldn't have been bad. We didn't hurt anybody, God. Things are
129 only bad when they hurt people. We didn't hurt one single soul;
130 You know that. You know it wasn't bad, don't You, God? So won't
131 You let him telephone me now?
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133 If he doesn't telephone me, I'll know God is angry with me. I'll
134 count five hundred by fives, and if he hasn't called me then, I will
135 know God isn't going to help me, ever again. That will be the sign.
136 Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty,
137 forty-five, fifty, fifty-five. . . It was bad. I knew it was bad. All
138 right, God, send me to hell. You think You're frightening me with
139 Your hell, don't You? You think. Your hell is worse than mine.
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141 I mustn't. I mustn't do this. Suppose he's a little late calling me up
142 –that's nothing to get hysterical about. Maybe he isn't going to
143 call—maybe he's coming straight up here without telephoning. He'll
144 be cross if he sees I have been crying. They don't like you to cry. He
145 doesn't cry. I wish to God I could make him cry. I wish I could
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162 make him cry and tread the floor and feel his heart heavy and big
163 and festering in him. I wish I could hurt him like hell.
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165 He doesn't wish that about me. I don't think he even knows how he
166 makes me feel. I wish he could know, without my telling him. They
167 don't like you to tell them they've made you cry. They don't like you
168 to tell them you're unhappy because of them. If you do, they think
169 you're possessive and exacting. And then they hate you. They hate
170 you whenever you say anything you really think. You always have to
171 keep playing little games. Oh, I thought we didn't have to; I
172 thought this was so big I could say whatever I meant. I guess you
173 can't, ever. I guess there isn't ever anything big enough for that. Oh,
174 if he would just telephone, I wouldn't tell him I had been sad about
175 him. They hate sad people. I would be so sweet and so gay, he
176 couldn't help but like me. If he would only telephone. If he would
177 only telephone.
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185 Maybe that's what he is doing. Maybe he is coming on here
186 without calling me up. Maybe he's on his way now. Something
187 might have happened to him. No, nothing could ever happen to
188 him. I can't picture anything happening to him. I never picture him
189 run over. I never see him lying still and long and dead. I wish he
190 were dead. That's a terrible wish. That's a lovely wish. If he were
191 dead, he would be mine. If he were dead, I would never think of
192 now and the last few weeks. I would remember only the lovely
193 times. It would be all beautiful. I wish he were dead. I wish he
194 were dead, dead, dead.
195

201 This is silly. It's silly to go wishing people were dead just because
202 they don't call you up the very minute they said they would. Maybe
203 the clock's fast; I don't know whether it's right. Maybe he's hardly
204 late at all. Anything could have made him a little late. Maybe he
205 had to stay at his office. Maybe he went home, to call me up from
206 there, and somebody came in. He doesn't like to telephone me in
207 front of people. Maybe he's worried, just a little, little bit, about
208 keeping me waiting. He might even hope that I would call him up.
209 I could do that. I could telephone him.
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216 I mustn't. I mustn't, I mustn't. Oh, God, please don't let me
217 telephone him. Please keep me from doing that. I know, God, just
218 as well as You do, that if he were worried about me, he'd telephone
219 no matter where he was or how many people there were around
220 him. Please make me know that, God. I don't ask YOU to make it
221 easy for me—You can't do that, for all that You could make a world.
222 Only let me know it, God. Don't let me go on hoping. Don't let me
223 say comforting things to myself. Please don't let me hope, dear
224 God. Please don't.

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230 I won't telephone him. I'll never telephone him again as long as I
231 live. He'll rot in hell, before I'll call him up. You don't have to give
232 me strength, God; I have it myself. If he wanted me, he could get
233 me. He knows where I am. He knows I'm waiting here. He's so
234 sure of me, so sure. I wonder why they hate you, as soon as they are
235 sure of you. I should think it would be so sweet to be sure.

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240 It would be so easy to telephone him. Then I'd know. Maybe it
241 wouldn't be a foolish thing to do. Maybe he wouldn't mind. Maybe
242 he'd like it. Maybe he has been trying to get me. Sometimes people
243 try and try to get you on the telephone, and they say the number
244 doesn't answer. I'm not just saying that to help myself; that really
245 happens. You know that really happens, God. Oh, God, keep me
246 away from that telephone. Keep me away. Let me still have just a
247 little bit of pride. I think I'm going to need it, God. I think it will
248 be all I'll have.

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253 Oh, what does pride matter, when I can't stand it if I don't talk to
254 him? Pride like that is such a silly, shabby little thing. The real
255 pride, the big pride, is in having no pride. I'm not saying that just
256 because I want to call him. I am not. That's true, I know that's true.
257 I will be big. I will be beyond little prides.

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260 Please, God, keep me from, telephoning him. Please, God.

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263 I don't see what pride has to do with it. This is such a little thing,
264 for me to be bringing in pride, for me to be making such a fuss
265 about. I may have misunderstood him. Maybe he said for me to call
266 him up, at five. "Call me at five, darling." He could have said that,
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270 perfectly well. It's so possible that I didn't hear him right. "Call me
271 at five, darling." I'm almost sure that's what he said. God, don't let
272 me talk this way to myself. Make me know, please make me know.
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275 I'll think about something else. I'll just sit quietly. If I could sit still.
276 If I could sit still. Maybe I could read. Oh, all the books are about
277 people who love each other, truly and sweetly. What do they want
278 to write about that for? Don't they know it isn't true? Don't they
279 know it's a lie, it's a God damned lie? What do they have to tell
280 about that for, when they know how it hurts? Damn them, damn
281 them, damn them.
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286 I won't. I'll be quiet. This is nothing to get excited about. Look.
287 Suppose he were someone I didn't know very well. Suppose he were
288 another girl. Then I'd just telephone and say, "Well, for goodness'
289 sake, what happened to you?" That's what I'd do, and I'd never even
290 think about it. Why can't I be casual and natural, just because I love
291 him? I can be. Honestly, I can be. I'll call him up, and be so easy
292 and pleasant. You see if I won't, God. Oh, don't let me call him.
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297 Don't, don't, don't.
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299 God, aren't You really going to let him call me? Are You sure, God?
300 Couldn't You please relent? Couldn't You? I don't even ask You to
301 let him telephone me this minute, God; only let him do it in a little
302 while. I'll count five hundred by fives. I'll do it so slowly and so
303 fairly. If he hasn't telephoned then, I'll call him. I will. Oh, please,
304 dear God, dear kind God, my blessed Father in Heaven, let him
305 call before then. Please, God. Please. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty,
306 twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five.
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