

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 delves deeper into the developing relationship between Phoebe and Matt as they face the pressures of graduate school, especially the stress of completing their dissertations. For two months, they sit together in the graduate computer lab, both silently absorbed in their respective work. Their focus is suddenly interrupted when the power goes out, plunging the lab into darkness. This unexpected event brings them closer, as Phoebe becomes worried about potentially losing her work. Matt's calm demeanor in this moment is a stark contrast to Phoebe's anxiety, as he reassures her that everything will be fine. Despite her initial panic, Phoebe is comforted by Matt's presence, which hints at the growing connection between them as they share this moment of vulnerability.

As the power is restored, Phoebe breathes a sigh of relief when she discovers that her work was not lost. The tension between them lightens as they engage in a playful conversation about historical figures and their attractiveness, a discussion that sparks laughter and brings them closer. They begin to bond over their shared experiences, especially their families' failure to understand the depth of their academic pursuits. Phoebe reflects on her father's concerns about her focusing too much on her studies and not enough on her social life. This resonates with Matt, as he too has felt misunderstood by those around him, creating a sense of mutual understanding. Their exchange allows them to connect on a deeper level, as they find common ground in their experiences and their desire to be understood.

However, as the chapter progresses, Phoebe is hit with the reality of her situation. After a tense moment, she realizes that her dissertation work has been lost, prompting her to panic. The looming deadlines and pressure to complete her work start to overwhelm her. In contrast, Matt remains calm and collected, showing no signs of stress as he navigates through the same challenges. Phoebe admires Matt's ability to

stay grounded, while she feels less confident in her standing within the department. Despite her self-doubt, she finds comfort in their budding connection, understanding that their shared time together is worth more than the stress of her work. This moment reveals the complexities of their relationship, as Phoebe begins to lean on Matt for emotional support, finding solace in his unwavering presence.

Throughout the summer, Phoebe and Matt's relationship continues to blossom as they both finish their dissertations. They take breaks from their academic struggles to engage in fun activities, such as bowling and drives along the Mississippi River. These shared moments of joy help them unwind and deepen their connection, as they navigate the challenges of post-graduate life. Phoebe, in particular, finds herself drawn to the themes of love and indifference in *Mrs. Dalloway*, which mirrors some of her own internal struggles. As she reads, she reflects on her growing feelings for Matt and her own internal conflict about their relationship. Despite the uncertainty of the future, she feels a deep emotional connection with him, which contrasts with the isolation she has often felt in the past.

The arrival of the fall semester introduces new challenges for both Phoebe and Matt. Phoebe takes on an adjunct position, which adds pressure to her already full plate, while Matt begins a new job that shifts his focus. This change in their lives forces Phoebe to confront her own dreams and desires, particularly her longing for a tenure-track position in Wisconsin. As she faces this crossroads, she wishes for Matt to take charge and make decisions for their future together. She feels conflicted, as the weight of decision-making falls heavily on her, despite her desire for a partnership where both contribute equally. This internal struggle reveals Phoebe's vulnerability, as she grapples with the fear of being alone in her professional and personal decisions.

The chapter concludes on a hopeful note, with Phoebe and Matt sharing a quiet yet significant moment during a solar eclipse. In this fleeting moment of connection, Matt casually suggests that they get married, offering a sense of comfort and assurance for Phoebe. The proposal, though casual, represents the natural growth of their relationship and the deep bond they have formed. Phoebe feels both surprised and

relieved by this suggestion, as it signifies a shift toward commitment in their relationship. The solar eclipse symbolizes a new beginning for them, as they embrace the possibility of a shared future. In this moment of clarity, Phoebe realizes that despite the uncertainties and challenges ahead, their love provides a sense of stability and hope, a feeling that had been missing from her life for so long.

