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Your commentary should be focused on *modal auxiliaries*.

It feels like some kind of trick. It can't be done!

M.R. saw: to the north and east of Tompkins County was Cortland County—beyond Cortland, Madison—then Herkimer, so curiously elongated among other, chunkier counties; beyond Herkimer, in the Adirondacks, the largest and least populated county in New York State, Beechum.

At the northwestern edge of Beechum County, the city of Carthage.

How many miles was it? How far could she drive, on a whim? It looked like less than two hundred miles, to the southernmost curve of the Black Snake River in Beechum County. Which computed to about three hours if she drove at sixty miles an hour. Of course, she wouldn't have to drive as far as Carthage; she could simply drive, with no particular destination, see how far she got after two hours—then turn, and drive back.

How quickly her heart was beating!

M.R. calculated: it was just 1:08 P.M. She'd been waiting for her hotel room for nearly twenty minutes. Surely in another few minutes, the desk clerk would summon her, and she could check into the room?

The reception began at 5:30 P.M.—but no one would be on time. And then, at about 6 P.M., everyone would arrive at once, the room would be crammed with people, no one would notice if M.R. arrived late. Dinner was more essential of course since M.R. was seated at the speakers' table—that wasn't until 7 P.M. And of course, the *keynote address* at 8 P.M.....

There was time—or was there? Her brain balked at calculations like a faulty machine.

"Absurd. No. Just stop."

The spell was broken by the cell phone ringing at M.R.'s elbow. The first stirring notes of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

M.R. saw that the caller ID was UNIVERSITY—meaning the president's office. Of course, they were waiting to hear from her there.

"Yes, I've arrived. Everything is fine. In a few minutes I'll be checked in. And Carlos is on his way back home."

It was a fact: Carlos had departed. M.R. had thanked him and dismissed him. Late in the afternoon of the third day of the conference Carlos would return, to drive M.R. back to the University.

Of course, M.R. had suggested that Carlos stay the night—this night—at the hotel—at the University's expense—to avoid the strain of driving a second

five-hour stretch in a single day. But Carlos politely demurred: Carlos didn't seem to care much for this well-intentioned suggestion.

It was a relief Carlos had left, M.R. thought. The driver had lingered in the lobby for a while as if uncertain whether to leave his distinguished passenger before she'd actually been summoned to her hotel room; he'd insisted upon carrying her suitcase into the hotel for her—this lightweight roller-suitcase M.R. could handle for herself and in fact preferred to handle herself, for she rested her heavy handbag on it as she rolled it along; but Carlos couldn't bear the possibility of being observed—by other drivers?—in the mildest dereliction of his duty.

"Ma'am? Should I wait with you?"

"Carlos, thank you! But no. Of course not."

"But if you need ..."

"Carlos, really! The hotel has my reservation, obviously. It will be just another few minutes, I'm sure."

Still he'd hesitated. M.R. couldn't determine if it was professional courtesy or whether this dignified gentleman in his early sixties was truly concerned for her—perhaps it was both; he told her please call him on her cell phone if she needed anything, he would return to Ithaca as quickly as possible. But finally he'd left.

M.R. thought *Of course. His life is elsewhere. His life is not driving a car for me.*

Questioned afterward Carlos Lopes would say *I asked her if I should stay—her room wasn't ready yet in the hotel—she said no, I should leave—she was working in a room off the lobby—I said maybe she would need me like if they didn't have a room for her and I could drive her to some other hotel and she laughed and said no Carlos! That is very kind of you but no—of course there will be a room.*

As the desk clerk would say *Her room was ready for her at about 1:15 P.M. She was gracious about waiting, she said it was no trouble. But then a few minutes later she called the front desk—I spoke with her—she asked about a car rental recommendation. Sometime after that she must have left the hotel. Nobody would've seen her, the lobby was so crowded.*