



**For Whom The Bill Calls**  
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## For Whom the Bill Calls

### By Holden Wilde

Cultivated in killing fields of the post-socialist business landscape, Danilo chiseled his communication skills, surviving among well-mannered gangsters, friendly security agents, and caring politicians where a dual personality was a lucky encounter. To stay free, or at least alive, one had to develop a sixth sense for the true intentions of counterparty. Danilo thought he was ready for anything and, after selling his cigarette trading business for few cool million dollars, was excited to settle in amongst Manhattan's high lifers... until he met an entirely different sort of human species, the island's single women.

"A gentleman is only a gentleman when he behaves like a gentleman," says an old lady in a Victorian play and that phrase has been burned into Danilo's brain since childhood. He is desperately trying to act as one with Lori. He wasn't hungry and suggested a drink, but she asked for a dinner. He wanted to grab something quick, but Lori picked the candle-light setting at an exclusive Italian restaurant. He offered to pick the wine, but she in return asked a waiter to recommend "his best pick." "Do you like it here?" she asks. "Lori, this is a fabulous place, thank you so much for inviting me." He is trying not to worry about the eventual bill, but that embarrassing thought keeps crawling back.

Danilo had his first proper date when he was seventeen years old. Nikka was four years older, had a smoking curvy body, and a keen sense of fashion. After first few dates, Danilo was still confused what she was doing with poor, pimpled him, and invited her to the most expensive restaurant in his small East European city. He could never forget that night: innocence kept chasing charm which made circles around elegance. He blew about ten years worth of his "milk money" savings and the thought of expecting something in return besides the privileged joy of Nikka's company never crossed his mind. Somewhere amongst growing up in a patriarchal society, the harmony of French novels, and the classical upbringing in his intelligencia family, paying for a lady's dinner became an axiom.

...looking at Lori, Danilo is wondering where his mercantilism was coming from. It is their second date. Lori looks stunning in an impeccable but soft way. She is bright and successful. He is sensing a character

depth beneath her slender surface and is intrigued by what may happen between them. Their first date was as good as it gets, meeting at a trendy club then, after a couple hours of dirty dancing interrupted by passionate makeout sessions, topping it off with a wild night at her place. They seem to share common interests and Danilo liked her friends, so it all looks quite promising... but a waiter brings over a bottle of "the best" wine and, for some inexplicable reason, Danilo sees dollar signs in each of his cordial eyes...

Danilo was actually amused by his first dining experiences. He had his very first Manhattan date with a fellow European. Zinaida, an ex-model, suggested to meet for sushi and Danilo asked her to recommend the best place in the city. They settled in nicely: quiet music, cozy seats, pale colors, charming omakase. After the first few sakes, Zinaida got more comfortable and asked a few questions about Danilo's background, then more questions, and then some more. When she got to whether he had cooperated with mafia, Danilo took a pause as concealed insecurities from doing business in the Wild East suddenly flooded his blood system. We had just met... Why did she care? Was it just bad manners or something else? He knew how to handle such questions from a male, but with a lady such an approach would be rude, so he just said, "No."

"How do you define manners?" Danilo asked his mom when he was eight. "It is a behavior which keeps everybody else comfortable." Going on dates in Manhattan has been a bizarre test of this definition. The women look classy, they would speak eloquently, but what they said would not match that shell. His initial amusement quickly shifted to annoyance and then to contentment. Danilo learned how to tolerate incessant questions, how to ignore intrusive feedback, and even how to nod politely when the conversation became a monologue about their own amazing qualities. He stopped expecting a "thank you" note after the evening together and internalized that "have dinner with me" means that a lady is hungry and wants him to pay for a nice meal.

...smiling apologetically as Lori is asking him why he is not eating, Danilo is trying to compare this date to the dinner he had couple days earlier. Melani was young, probably too young, but Danilo felt like trying something different that night. They were dining in his favorite place in the Meatpacking District and she jumped into extensive observations about his friends, "Stupid... poorly dressed... ignorant... man-whores..."

Being a judgmental and superficial character himself, Danilo understood where she was coming from, but those were his close friends...so, Danilo came to their defense, "Darling, thank you for sharing your observations, they actually all liked you very much. How is your work going?" Melani looked at him with a patronizing smile. "Yes, I am direct! And I am not going to change! That is why you are not married yet. You are attracted to hot, smart, and successful women who are comfortable speaking their mind, and you just can't handle it." He felt sad about another wasted evening and money but gathered all his willpower and responded, "You are right. I need to work on that."

Danilo has adapted. He developed a few rules on how to minimize the likely regret: no dinners on a first date, no dinners on a second date unless they've slept together already, no dinners on a third date unless the first two dates were impeccable. His math friend, a single banker, even came up with a formula for how to decide how much to spend on a romantic dinner: rate male and female's appearance on a 10-point scale; for every point in her favor, a man shall spend \$100 on a meal for 2. A man should add another \$200 if sex happened a night before with no prior dinner and add \$100 if provided with clear signals that sex that night is very likely. Danilo's female friends often complain, "I wanted to pay for dinner, I insisted, but he absolutely refused. What was I supposed to do?" "Dear, if you wanted to pay, you would have paid, end of story," he always responds.

...their waiter comes back with coffee and Lori chats him up about changes in the menu. After he leaves, she asks Danilo why he didn't participate in the conversation. "It is my first time here, so I couldn't add much value," he explains. "Well, you should have still said something. You need to be more social." Another apologetic smile, and Danilo promises to absolutely chime in next time. The bill arrives a few minutes later and he pays cash. "Lori, I had an amazing time, the food and wine were delish. Thank you for bringing me here!"

He will not be dining with Lori again, but his quest for finding a lady worth covering a dinner bill for continues.

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