

## *Bookshelves*

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If I have any advice at all on how to associate with people worth knowing, it is to take your candidates to a library. Observe them among the bookshelves before making any major commitments. Here's why:

- 1) Libraries are manmade reserves of quiet. You will learn if he can stop talking long enough to listen and how well he whispers about his day.
- 2) They're also palaces of academia, so take note as you watch his ideas bloom across a table. If they are too haphazard for your tastes, move on.
  - 2a) On a related note, learning is often accompanied by frustration. See if he is capable of helping you through yours.
- 3) Finally, library sessions tend to last longer than expected. If he cannot handle a curveball in his curfew, he most certainly cannot deal with one in more important matters.

I learned these lessons firsthand last fall. Right now, he and I are knee-deep in college decisions and spring sunshine, awash in financial aid offers and a warming climate. It is an exciting process, but prior to this point, it was stressful and cold and we had to study Calculus. We made a home for ourselves in Helm Library, just above the coffee shop, at a table for six. The remaining four seats were always empty, but I don't think either of us noticed the void.

If you can enjoy someone's company in the silence, if your loneliness can be cured just as well by the scratch of their pencil against a notebook as it is by their conversation, keep them. In my

case, I know that I have a trustworthy source of solemn embraces and eloquent instruction, a man capable of being both the bookshelves and the books. He treats my successes and my failures with equal amounts of empathy, rejoicing with me at my peaks and expressing sorrow in my valleys. He is a teacher when I don't understand and a student when I do. That's the sort of friend worth fighting for. The strangest thing is that the more sensitive pieces of him, the introverted facets of a person that cannot be ignored, would not be known to me without our late night library excursions. I don't think I would really know him without them.

So take my advice. Look for your lifetime companions inside of libraries. If you find someone worth investing in, you'll know it. And if you don't, perhaps it's time to skip a chapter, or to close a book altogether, but rest assured that there are millions of stories in this world. One of them will make sense to you—so much sense that you swear it's yours, as if it was a paperback stolen from your childhood room and not returned to you until now—and you'll walk away with only the choicest of acquaintances: a soft-spoken, sophisticated, "library" sort of person. Then someday in the future, you'll think back to the fall that you found them, and you'll be grateful for every evening you spent searching among the bookshelves.