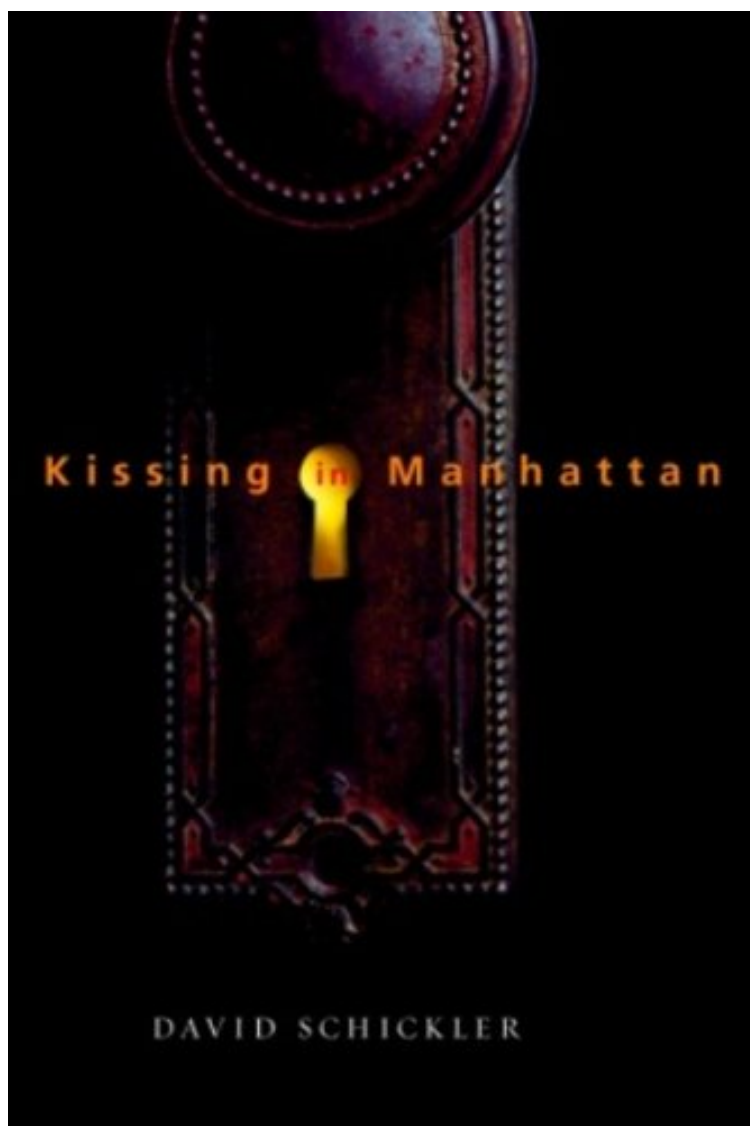


[Ebook free] File size: 45.Mb

Kissing in Manhattan



Par David Schickler
**Download PDF | ePub | DOC |
audiobook | ebooks*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #596612 dans eBooksPubli le: 2002-08-27Sorti le: 2002-08-27Format: Ebook Kindle

[Ebook free] Kissing in Manhattan

Par David Schickler : Kissing in Manhattan before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kissing in Manhattan:

 [Download](#)

 [Read Online](#)

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurHilarious, sexy, and deeply tender, Kissing in Manhattan was one of the most celebrated debuts in recent years. Acclaimed author David Schicklers collection of linked stories follows a troupe of love-hungry urbanites through a charmed metropolis and into the Preemption--a mythic Manhattan apartment building. The Preemption sets the stage for a romantic fantasy as exuberant, dark, and dazzling as the city it occupies. Behind closed doors, the paths of an improbable cast of tenants--a seductive perfume heiress; a crabby, misunderstood actor; a preternaturally sharp-sighted priest--tangle and cross, while a perilous love triangle builds around three characters: James Branch, a shy young accountant with an unusual love for the Preemptions antique elevator, and a strange destiny... Patrick Rigg, a Wall Street lothario who soothes his pain by seducing beautiful women, carrying a gun, and attending the nightly sermons of a

foreboding priest... Rally McWilliams, a fetching, hopeful young writer who roams the city at night, searching for the soulmate she believes in but can't find...Charged with joy and a deadly sense of humor, *Kissing in Manhattan* is a daring new writer's vision of a world where men and women, good and evil, love and sex, meet, battle, and embrace on every street corner. From the Trade Paperback edition. Excerpt

Checkers and Donna didn't want to meet Checkers. It didn't seem right. "Checkers?" said Donna. "What kind of a name for a man is Checkers?" "He's strange," admitted Lee. Lee and Donna sold Manhattan real estate. They were in their early thirties. They shared an office on Bleeker Street. "Checkers." Donna tried it on her tongue. "Checkers, Checkers." "He's attractive," said Lee. "Checkers is a name for a dog. Or a henchman."

Donna stared at her computer screen. Listed on it were SoHo prices. "He's strange but attractive," said Lee. "A henchman in a movie." Donna wore a suit and important shoes. "Not a nemesis. Not suave like that. Just a henchman." "This isn't a movie," said Lee. "This is real life." "How do you know this Checkers?" asked Donna. It was ten minutes till five on a Thursday. Donna and Lee's office was on the twenty-first floor. It had a bay window facing south, and just before five every evening, Donna and Lee stood at this window and looked at the sunlight on the rivers. Lee, who was a lesbian, loved the East River best. Donna loved the Hudson. "I don't remember." Lee shrugged. "He's just one of those men you meet." They looked at New York, which they routinely broke into pieces and shuffled around and sold. "Checkers what?" said Donna. "What?" said Lee. "Checkers what. What comes after Checkers? I mean, Checkers is his first name, right?" Lee was frustrated. She had long, graceful fingers, but beady eyes. "Look, I don't know him. All I know is, his name has nothing to do with the game of checkers. He was very clear about that." "Hmm." "He's attractive," insisted Lee. "He's in need of a woman." Donna laughed. "I'll bet he is." Lee frowned. She was single, just like Donna. "That's how he said it. He used those exact words. Checkers said, 'Lee, I'm in need of a woman.' That's how Checkers talks." Donna's hair was cut short. It tapered to a point at the nape of her neck, and there was a fine scoop of air between her shoulder blades that had been there since she was sixteen. "When did he say this? That he needed a woman, I mean." Lee sighed. "Last night. At a bar. Checkers said what he said, and I told him about you." Donna and Lee, combined, were worth three and a half million dollars. "What bar?" asked Donna. "Flat Michael's," said Lee. Flat Michael's was a restaurant bar in the East Village where poetry wasn't allowed. "Why me?" asked Donna. "Why tell this Checkers about me?" Lee sighed again. Donna was one of those women you told men about. Her hair was the color of a medieval peasant girl's. She was not in the habit of licking her lips, but her chest was full and her waist was slender. "This Checkers," said Donna. "Why's he so attractive?" "He just is," said Lee. Donna closed her eyes. She imagined a man who was a spy, or an idiot. She pondered the potential hairiness of the knuckles of a man named Checkers. "All right," she said. "I'll meet him." "Great," said Lee. "He'll be at Flat Michael's at eight tomorrow night. He'll be waiting at a table for you." "It's all set up? He's not going to call me or anything?" Lee smirked, shook her head.

"Checkers said he knew you'd say yes." Donna snorted. "He's awfully presumptuous." "He's Checkers," shrugged Lee. "I don't know if I'd like such a presumptuous man." "Try," said Lee. Donna had grown up in Manhattan. As a girl she took ballet classes at Ms. Vivian's, on the Upper East Side. Ms. Vivian watched Donna's body carefully, to see whether Donna had a vocation for ballet. Ms. Vivian was an expert on the matter of young women's arches, calves, breasts, and demeanors. Fable had it that Ms. Vivian possessed gypsy blood, that she could read in a girl's limbs and attitudes that girl's destiny. Jezebel Hutch, for instance, grew up with Donna and took ballet at Ms. Vivian's for seven years, until the day Ms. Vivian tapped Jezebel's shoulder and said: "You are an astronaut." Jezebel giggled. She was twelve. "What?" Ms. Vivian was stone faced. "You are an astronaut. You will fly to the moon in the machines that men make. You will be noble, but you will not dance." Jezebel's face collapsed. "But" Ms. Vivian pointed to the door. "Farewell," she said. Jezebel left, weeping, in the arms of her mother, Jennifer Hutch. Jennifer called Ms. Vivian a freakish bitch. The next day, though, she started Jezebel on Einstein and calculus. As for Donna, she lasted at Ms. Vivian's till she was sixteen. In fact, it was just two days after her sixteenth birthday that Ms. Vivian summoned Donna to the office. "You belong to a man," said Ms. Vivian. Donna held her breath. She'd kissed an ugly boy named Harold three months earlier. Harold was from Queens. "Your body is destined to belong to a man. That is your vocation." Donna's eyes teared up. "Harold's just a friend, Ms. Vivian." Ms. Vivian gazed at the wall. "You will not dance." "He didn't even get up my shirt," blubbered Donna. "Farewell," said Ms. Vivian. Donna believed that she'd proved her teacher wrong. As an NYU undergraduate she'd slept with two men one was timid, the other Libyan but neither of them had ever come close to owning Donna's soul. In her twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh years, when she was founding her business with Lee, Donna lived with a man named Charles, who smoked pipes and worked at the Strand. Charles was sweet, but he had

chronic dandruff and a tendency to handcuff Donna to major kitchen appliances during sexual intercourse. Bored with these conditions, Donna left Charles. She'd been single since, except for the occasional stray dog that never lasted. By thirty Donna felt mostly pity for men. Their eyes always seemed starved or dead. They earned money, yet felt it necessary to bungee-jump or climb Tibetan mountains. Their biceps and laughter were ungodly strong, but, as far as Donna could see, men never used the full force of these strengths against women. This was cowardice, Donna felt. She wanted a man who would crush himself into her psychically, sexually, utterly, daily and never apologize. By thirty Donna was convinced no man could impress her. She tried a fling with a woman named Maxine. The experience was disastrous, in part because Maxine owned thirteen cats and treated Donna as a fourteenth. Maxine wanted Donna to cuddle against her, or to lash out at her and move off indifferently into the night. Donna broke Maxine off in two weeks. No one, it seemed, man or woman, could muster the power it would take to claim Donna. Frustrated by this, Donna would strip naked sometimes, late at night, and stand on her bed and dance. But her dancing wasn't ballet anymore. It wasn't about grace and structure. It was like this: Donna would let her hair, arms, and breasts sway and flail. She'd kick, stamp, and groan, and her thighs would sweat. Sometimes, she would grab whatever smart outfit she'd worn that day and rend the silk or cotton to shreds. At the peak of these tantrums, as she shrieked and thrashed, Donna expected Ms. Vivian's words to come true. She expected a man a cloven-footed man, perhaps with the head of a goat to throw open her bedroom door and roar and mount her. She'd fight this man with her claws, her intelligence, her body. She would beg freedom, demand independence, but the man would work himself into her without mercy, and Donna would gasp and gasp, and, finally, smile. On Friday night Donna took the F train to Flat Michael's. Lee always took cabs, but Donna feared automobiles. Having grown up in the city, she'd never gotten her driver's license. This was a source of embarrassment for Donna, but even deeper was her suspicion that cars were chariots of doom. In the movies they housed corpses in their trunks or blew up at a bullet. All over the island, doormen were always packing women into taxis and grinning like conspirators. Where were these women going? Donna wondered. The subway was safer. It was like a good dance floor, crowded but anonymous. If you were on your way to meet a man named Checkers, it gave you time to consider your perfume and your mood. Donna was wearing a black shift and black pumps. "You look sexy," an old man told Donna. The old man was sitting with an old woman, probably his wife. The wife read a newspaper and ignored the old man. "Oh my God," said Donna. "You resemble, in my opinion, a girl from a blue-jeans advertisement." The old man smiled meekly. Donna pointed at the newspaper the wife held. "Oh my God, I know that woman." The wife glanced at Donna, glanced at the paper. On the front page was a picture taken at Cape Canaveral. The picture showed four men and one woman, all in puffy space gear. The old man cleared his throat. "Not a cigarette advertisement, you understand. Blue jeans." "That's Jezebel Hutch," declared Donna. "She's from Germantown. I grew up with her." The wife stared at the picture. "Jezebel's an astronaut," whispered Donna. "She did it." The old man cleared his throat again, louder. "Goddammit," he declared, "there's nothing sexy about cigarettes." When Donna arrived at Flat Michael's, there was only one man sitting alone, at a window table. The window looked out over East Fourth Street. The table had a candle on it. "Are you Checkers?" Donna held out her hand. "I'm Donna." Checkers stood. He smiled, shook Donna's hand, took her coat, sat her down. "I thought you'd be black," he said, sitting himself down again. Checkers was thirty-three. He had blue eyes and brown hair that came down, thin and casual, to his shoulders. He was six feet tall. He wore a black Irish fisherman's sweater, white painter pants, and sandals. He held a glass of dark draft beer. "Excuse me?" said Donna. "I thought you'd be black," said Checkers. "Donna. Donna. It sounds African-American." Checkers shrugged. "I just thought you'd be a Negress." Donna stared at the man. "Don't worry about it," said Checkers. "You look great." Donna took a breath. "Didn't Lee tell you anything about me?" "She told me your name would be Donna and that you'd look great. She's right." Donna looked Checkers over. He was holding his beer and watching Donna like a man who was content to hold a beer and watch a woman. Not depraved, Donna thought, just content. "You're in need of a drink," said Checkers. "Sure," said Donna. "Sure, all right." "Our waiter's from Ecuador." Checkers flagged the bar. "His name's Juan." A short, stout man came out from behind the bar and trundled over. He had light brown skin and eyes and a beaming smile. "Yes, ma'am," said Juan. He touched Donna's shoulder. "For you, a drink, exactly." Juan had a thick accent. "A drink, for pleasure. Right?" Donna ordered vodka with ice and lemon. Juan brought it, set it down before Donna. "Pleasure," said Juan. "Right?" He vanished. "It's busy in here," said Donna, looking around. Donna had never eaten at Flat Michael's. She'd had a drink once in the lounge, where there were no televisions, a wooden bar, and chairs. Everything about Flat Michael's was simple. The owners brewed their own beer, and

the taps on the draft handles read simply: Lager, Pilsner, Stout. The owners also fetched their wines from a vineyard of undisclosed origin, and their liquors from unknown stills. The racks behind the bar held unadorned bottles labeled Vodka, Gin, Rye, or Chardonnay, Chianti, Port. As a rule customers never quibbled over these libations. If you demanded a brand-name sherry or a particular year of a champagne, you were asked to leave. The dining room was no different. The tables were wooden, with one white, lighted candle on each. The chairs were wooden, too, and the menu had just ten items each night. These items were listed on a giant chalkboard, with no prices or side dishes assigned. On this particular night the menu was: Trout, Tongue, Eel, Veal, Moussaka, Shoots, Lamb, Brains, Noodles, and Snake. "It is busy," confirmed Checkers. Checkers and Donna were right. Flat Michael's was busy. The dining room was filled with patrons, who, unlike the restaurant itself, were a menagerie of details. There was a couple seated two tables from Checkers and Donna, a man and woman, the man in a fedora, the woman in silk. This man and woman one ate Lamb, one ate Snake were discussing their marriage in audible tones, arguing fine points of sympathy and sexuality. Meanwhile, four skinheads with razored hair were hunched over another table, feasting on Brains and Schnapps. There was a regular customer, a young accountant named James Branch, dining alone at a table far from the bar. He had sleepy blue eyes and straight teeth, and, as was his habit, he was talking to himself quietly, whispering the name of his entree as he waited for it to arrive. "Moussaka," whispered James. "Moussaka." As he sat and whispered, James Branch was also admiring a pair of opal earrings that lay in his palm. Finally, at a corner table, sat a woman in a purple, wispy dress. She ate only Noodles and drank only water, but she possessed a terrible beauty. Her face was pale and sorrowful, and her throat looked as if it ached. Her ankles, naked and fragile, seemed about to crumble into dust. Among all these were Checkers and Donna, meeting for the first time. "Trout," said Checkers, when Juan came for their order. "Veal," said Donna. "Pleasure," said Juan, and off he went. Checkers took a draught of beer. "I've never had the veal here," he said. "I hope you like it." Donna smiled, her first of the night. Try, she thought to herself. "I hope so too," she said. "I wouldn't want you to be bereaved," said Checkers. "Excuse me?" Checkers jutted his chin toward the strangers, the other patrons. "Manhattan's full of people," said Checkers. "People who have one meal they don't like and become immediately bereaved." "Bereaved," said Donna. "Never mind Manhattan. People all over the world." Checkers licked his lips. "The world is full of people who have one meal they don't like and become immediately bereaved." Donna thought about this. She was smart. "Disappointed, maybe," she said. "Oh, no," said Checkers quickly. "They're bereaved. Absolutely." "Hmm," said Donna. Checkers searched Donna's face. "People take food very seriously. It's amazing. You have clever-looking ears." Donna had been sipping her vodka. She sputtered. "Excuse me?" Checkers frowned. "Stop saying, 'Excuse me,' whenever I bring up something new. It's just that your ears are clever-looking, is all. Like an elf's, or an otter's." Donna digested this information. Her date felt she looked like an otter. "Oh, you know what I mean, for Christ's sake. Don't you?" "Well." Donna forced a smile. After all, Checkers looked good in his sweater. Also, his legs were long. "Well, do you like elves and otters?" Checkers stared at her. "You're going the traditional flirting route." "Excuse me?" "Excuse you?" said Checkers. "Excuse you? Excuse you?" "Sorry," said Donna. Then she wished she hadn't said it. "The traditional flirting route," said Checkers. "You know, I say you have clever-looking ears like an elf's or an otter's, and you feel compelled to ask whether I like elves and otters. As if elves and otters were necessarily cute, implying that you're cute too. Well, otters I'll give you, but there've been some nasty elves in stories I've read, you know? Freaky elves, with fucked-up-looking feet. Never mind all that, though. I mean, I already told you you look great. What more can I say?" Donna's eyebrows were officially raised. "I have a feeling you're going to say a lot more." Checkers laughed. "I knew you were clever." Donna learned some things. Checkers had been born in Germany to military American parents. He'd grown up in Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, San Diego, and Wheeling, West Virginia. He was double jointed, he worked as a headhunter, he drove a souped-up Plymouth Duster. "In Manhattan?" asked Donna. Checkers blinked. His eyes had spent time on Donna's neck and breasts, which Donna felt was a good sign. On the other hand, he had a vicious scar down his left jawline that looked like it had been carved by a knife. "You assume," said Checkers, "that a souped-up Plymouth Duster would be more at home in the yard of some West Virginia hick?" Donna cleared her throat. "I don't know." "What you also don't know," said Checkers, "is that my souped-up Plymouth Duster purrs like a kitten. It's got eight cylinders, comfortable upholstery, and just last week, a very mature female client of mine said what a refreshment my souped-up Plymouth Duster was among the cabs and limos of this metropolis. That's the word my client used. Refreshment." "I don't like cars," said Donna. "I don't drive a car. I drive a mature, souped-up refreshment." Donna wondered who this female client was. Checkers leaned back in his chair. His Trout and

Donna's Veal hadn't materialized. "I'll bet you're a certain kind of girl," said Checkers. "We all are," said Donna. "I'll bet you're the kind of girl who, if you were walking down a street and a guy pulled up in some macho car and said, 'Hey, sexy mama,' you wouldn't even smile." "I probably wouldn't," she said. "I'll bet if the guy got crude and said maybe you and him could get some together, you still wouldn't smile at him.

You'd be too sophisticated for him." "Right again." Checkers slapped the table. He looked angry.

"Goddammit," he said loudly. Donna was surprised. She thought they'd been talking. "Goddammit," said Checkers. "Who the hell do you women think you are?" Donna frowned. "You think men are subtle? You think we're all just happy as clams to go the traditional flirting route? Take a girl out to dinner and make conversation? Jesus!" The diva and the skinheads turned toward Checkers. "Don't you understand?"

Checkers's eyes were locked on Donna's. "Don't you understand how perfect it is when a guy says, 'Hey, sexy mama,' to a girl because that's all he can say?" Donna stared at Checkers. His face, which had been so easy with smiles, was grave. Donna didn't know what to say. She considered leaving, but Juan appeared, bearing a tray. "Pleasure," he explained. "Dinner." "How'd you get that scar on your jaw?" Checkers ate his Trout quickly, efficiently. He worked his utensils like a surgeon. "In a knife fight," he said, "with a West Virginia hick." "Knife fight, thought Donna. I am absolutely not going home with this guy." "And your name?" she asked. "How'd you get that?" Checkers looked at his watch. "Not bad. You went sixty-seven minutes without asking." "I'm sorry," said Donna. "It's an unusual name, though." There was music in Flat Michael's

dining room. It was a bass guitar track, with no other instrumentation. "My name is Checkers," said

Checkers. "It has nothing to do with the game of checkers. It's the name my parents put on my birth certificate." "Did they ever explain why?" said Donna. "It's what they wanted to call me. It's something I can't control." Donna ate her Veal. "There are other things I can control, though," said Checkers. "Like what?" "Like I want to be happy. I don't want to be bereaved. I want a woman." "Unbelievable, thought Donna. "That's why

I wanted to meet you," explained Checkers. "Lee said you were a beautiful woman. 'Great,' I told Lee. 'A

beautiful woman is what I'm looking for.' You know?" "Is this how you talk to everybody?" asked Donna. "Oh, come on. I could go the traditional flirting route, but for Christ's sake, look at yourself. Look at your lips and your cheekbones." "Checkers," said Donna. "Please." "Look at the tiny down whiskers around the edges of your mouth." Donna blushed. Women weren't supposed to have whiskers. "They're almost

invisible," said Checkers. "They look very ... I don't know. Gentle." "They do," said one of the skinheads. Donna ducked her head. She put down her utensils. "Please stop," she whispered. "Stop talking about ... my face." Checkers lowered his head so his eyes met Donna's. "Say something, then. With a mouth like yours you could say all sorts of beautiful things." Donna kept her head lowered. "I have to go to the rest room," she said. In the rest room Donna imagined the kind of women that Checkers had had. She imagined

waitresses, mermaids, philosophy majors. She wondered if his mouth tasted like smoke. "Try," she told herself in the mirror. "You're thirty-two years old. Come on." When she was nineteen, Donna had dated a man in his late twenties, a man with a passion for skydiving. Donna had loved him deeply. She hadn't

understood his battles with gravity or his country music. Still, she devoted herself to him, and he gave her irises on the first of each month. Donna thought he was the man of Ms. Vivian's prophecy, the man to whom she would belong. But that man died on her died horribly, in a skydiving accident. He crushed himself into the ground instead of Donna. "Come on," Donna told the mirror. "He likes your lips," she whispered. "Come on, girl." When Donna got back to the table, she'd missed something. Checkers was laughing. He was talking

with the waiter, Juan, and laughing like an animal. "What?" said Donna. "Listen," panted Checkers. He was out of breath from laughing. "Say it, Juan." "Knock on boot," said Juan. Checkers erupted again. "Exactly," said Juan. "Knock on boot." Checkers wiped a tear from his eye. "Knock on wood. He's trying to say, 'Knock on wood,' Donna." "Yes," said Juan. "Knock on boot." "He can't pronounce wood," tittered Checkers. "He

keeps saying boot. It's his accent." Donna took her seat. She tried to focus on Checkers, her date, tried to smile at him. But Checkers was focusing on Juan. "Try it slow, Juan," said Checkers. "Concentrate." "Yes," agreed Juan. "Wwwood." Checkers looked gleefully at Juan. "Wwwood. Wwwwood." "Boot," said Juan. "All right, Checkers," said Donna. She meant, That's enough. "Wwwwood," said Checkers. "Boot," said

Juan. Checkers lost it. He slapped at the table. His laughter came in yelps. Donna could see his diaphragm working. People were watching. "Stop it," pleaded Donna. She was frightened. Laughter, like cars, could frighten her. "Oh my God," howled Checkers. "Stop." Donna's voice rose. You're ruining it, she thought.

Stop. Juan grinned at the two of them, oblivious, ready for more. "Oh my God," begged Checkers, waving Juan off. "Oh God." Juan left. "He didn't know." Checkers exhaled, got control. "Wood and boot. He couldn't hear the difference." "That was cruel of you," said Donna. "Laughing at him." Checkers collected himself. He

drained his beer, his second. The plates were gone. "You had to be there when it started," said Checkers. Donna hadn't been there. She looked on him with wrath. Checkers tried to explain. "It was just one of those things," he said. There was no dessert. The candle burned at half mast. "What are you thinking?" asked Checkers. "Nothing." Donna finished her vodka. She thought about what it was like to lie beneath a man, his weight on her weight. She thought about Charles, with his books and handcuffs. She thought of her sky diver, the way he'd tugged on his shirts. "You're thinking I do strange things," said Checkers. "You're thinking I'm strange." Donna nodded. "You aren't planning on seeing me again." Donna shook her head. "Why? Because I laughed at Juan?" The married couple, the skinheads, and the diva were gone. The bass music was fading. Only the young accountant remained, still staring at the opal earrings in his palm. Outside, on East Fourth Street, it was close to November. "It's not just that," said Donna. "Well, why, then? Do you want me to be bereaved? Do you want to be bereaved?" Donna sighed with an ancient despair. Men are doors, she thought. They close in my face. "I just ... don't think I'm good at talking to you." "So what?" Checkers seemed astounded. "I'm good at talking to you. I can do the talking." "I'm sorry," said Donna. "I just want to go home." Checkers gazed at Donna. Flat Michael's was emptying out. "I'm a headhunter," said Checkers quietly. "I spend all day matching people up with their lives. Don't you think?" "I can't explain it," said Donna. She almost shuddered. "I want to go home." Out on the street it was cold. Leaves and trash blew around. Checkers and Donna walked together, not speaking. "You don't have to walk with me," said Donna. Checkers looked at the sky. He was thinking about what happened when he was alone in his apartment at night, sleeping. He knew he curled around himself at some point, because that's how he woke every morning: curled up tight, hibernating. "There's a subway stop." Donna pointed. "My car's near the next one," said Checkers. "Broadway-Lafayette. Come on. Just five more blocks of your life. Then I'm vamoose." They kept walking. A ragged white cat watched them from an eave. Something smelled like rubber. Slouched in a doorway was a lanky, black-eyed street vagrant tuning a guitar. "The holidays are coming," said Checkers. "I guess so." Donna watched her pumps clapping the sidewalk. The subway station loomed. "Well," said Donna. "Thanks for dinner." Checkers nodded east. "I'm parked around the corner." They could see their breath. Donna stuck out her hand. "Nice meeting you." "Sixty seconds," said Checkers. "Just stand where you're standing for sixty seconds." Donna detested how she felt. "Checkers," she said. "The night is over." Checkers was already trotting away. "Sixty seconds," he shouted back. He disappeared around the corner. Forget it, thought Donna. She moved toward the subway. Then she stopped. There's nothing to try, she told herself. She didn't move, though. She stayed standing still and looked up at the stars, which were dull blobs of gas. Jezebel's up there, thought Donna. Jezebel, with her perfect calves, is floating around like an imbecile. I'm an imbecile, too, thought Donna, shivering. An imbecile with no coat. "Screw it," said Donna. She walked to the top of the subway stairs. A car braked. A horn honked. "Whoa, baby," shouted a voice. Donna turned. A midnight-blue Plymouth Duster was pulled up to the curb twenty feet from her. The passenger window was rolled down, and through it Donna could see Checkers behind the steering wheel, staring out at her. "Hey, sexy mama," shouted Checkers. "I'm not coming with you," said Donna. Checkers rolled down the driver-side window. He leaned out, waved at some pedestrians. "Hey." Checkers jabbed a thumb toward Donna. "Anyone else see this package over here? She spoken for, or what?" "Cut it out, Checkers." Donna's arms were folded on her chest. "I know it's you. I get it." "Is she the bomb?" hollered Checkers. "Is she the word? Is she the motion?" Two cars were stuck behind the Duster, unable to pass. One was a cab, the other a Honda. "Move that thing," yelled the cabbie. "Checkers," said Donna. Checkers turned his attention back to Donna. He widened his eyes at her, raised his eyebrows, honked his horn. He revved his engine, whooped like a schoolboy. He slid himself over to the passenger window. "Say there, fine thing." Checkers hung his tongue like a dog. "You got the eyes and you got the thighs. Know what I'm sayin', love chicken?" Donna scowled. She gave Checkers the finger. "Move that fucking thing," yelled the cabbie. He laid on his horn. Checkers licked his pinky, made a summoning motion. "Come over here, woman," he growled. "Come over here and get nasty with old Checkers." Donna rolled her eyes. She tossed her hair. There were goose bumps on her neck. "Come on now," said Checkers. "You've got cars behind you," warned Donna. There was a rush and rumbling in the earth. A train was pulling in. Checkers thumped his chest. "Come get in the love machine," he told Donna. "Papa Checkers'll make you a woman." "You're sick in the head," said Donna. The driver of the Honda was out of his car. He was an angry man in a bow tie. "What's the story?" he demanded. "Papa Checkers will screw you cross-eyed," yelled Checkers. Donna gasped. She was thirty-two, in a tight dress, with goose bumps and good lipstick. She sold real estate, loved children, voted. "Come on, now," said Checkers quietly, holding his hand out to Donna. "You're all about obeying

Papa, aren't you? Get on over here right now, little girl."The man in the bow tie stuck his face in the Duster's driver-side window."What's the story?" he bellowed at Checkers. Checkers didn't flinch. His hand was still out, reaching toward the woman."Now," he whispered, and Donna smiled.

From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Forget mere sex and the city... *Kissing in Manhattan* features die-hard romantic strivers in a surreal turn-of-the-millennium New York ruled by the spirit of improbable happy endings. The *New York Times Book* Schickler has a wild, out-of-left-field dramatic imagination that's really fresh. The way his characters take you, as well as one another, by surprise is terrific fun. *New York magazine* Like figures in a strange, spiky, urban frieze, the characters of Schickler's striking debut novel-in-stories pose, strut and cross paths in a darkly romantic, surreal Manhattan. ... Schickler is a fabulist for the 21st century, a skewed Scheherazade. *Publishers Weekly* One of the most charming and memorable debuts this year is *Kissing in Manhattan*.... Tenderness and darkness are around every corner ... There are Gothic overtones, bits of magical realism, moments of true eroticism with hints of danger.... This tender, lovely book and these love-starved and hopeful individuals linger like a reader's dream. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* With these wonderfully haunting, strange, and hilarious stories, David Schickler has established himself as a major new voice in American fiction. Ron Hansen, author of *Mariette in Ecstasy* and *Hitler's Niece* Schickler's playfully alive voice is uniquely his own: sprightly, exact, Herculean in all the fundamentals. What talent! From beginning to end, here you have some of the most pleasurable storytelling of this or any year. Darin Straus, author of *Chang and Eng* From the Hardcover edition.