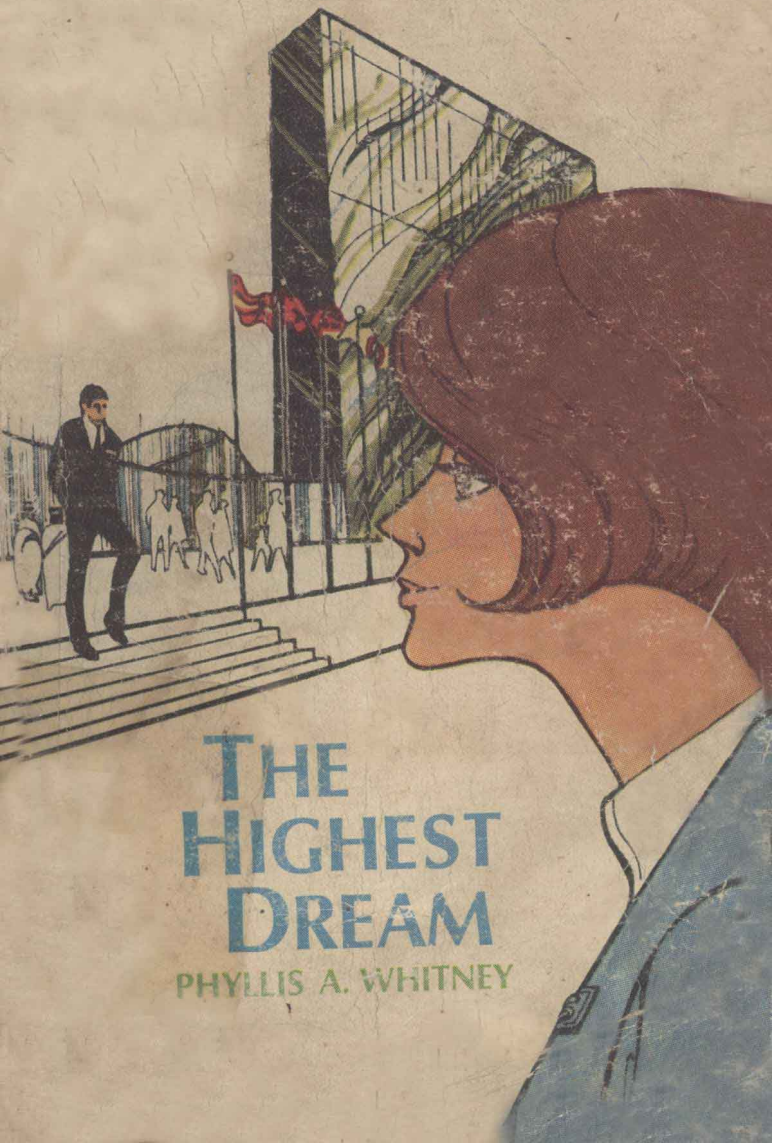


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THE HIGHEST DREAM

PHYLLIS A. WHITNEY

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By **PHYLLIS A. WHITNEY**

*"Let us no more be true to boasted race or clan,
But to our highest dream, the brotherhood of man."*

—THOMAS CURTIS CLARK

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My thanks to ABE and SYLVIA BURACK
who suggested this book; and to
JANET, SUSAN and ELLEN BURACK,
who suggested three lively sisters

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I. Guided Tour

THE TAXI, FOLLOWING FORTY-SECOND STREET TOWARD THE east side of New York, paused for a red light, and Lisa Somers tried to peer ahead through the windshield. A hot summer breeze, blowing dust and grit through the windows, stirred brown bangs over her forehead and she patted at them absently.

Her interest in the scene ahead was real enough, yet when she spoke it was in an effort to distract her mother from an uncomfortable topic of conversation.

"Shouldn't the buildings be in sight by now, Mother?"

Mrs. Somers smiled, looking young in spite of graying hair. Her eyes were as blue as Lisa's, though her resemblance to her daughter ended there. Lisa looked a great deal more like her famous father.

"The buildings of the United Nations won't blow away before we get there," Mrs. Somers said. "Those big apartment buildings hide them from view. But as I was saying, Lisa, your father doesn't want to rush you into a decision. After all, you've another year to go in college. But it would mean a lot to him if you were planning to come into his office at home in Washington. If only you could develop some interest in radio work from the news end."

Lisa settled back in the cab. Radio, radio! With her father a well-known commentator and writer on world affairs, she had grown up in an atmosphere of radio publicity that sometimes threatened to engulf her own life completely. She had no wish to hurt or disappoint her parents, but there ought to be some way in which she could have a life of her own that would have nothing to do with radio. If she didn't find the answer soon, the very momentum of her father's work would catch her up, bear her along on its furious current. Even her mother, usually so understanding, did not fully realize how she felt about this.

Mother had always made Dad's work her own. The needs of Dad's professional life ordered her existence. It didn't make sense to her that Lisa should feel what amounted to antagonism toward radio work.

"There's no need to hurry your thinking," Mrs. Somers said gently as Lisa didn't answer. "Look—you can see a bit of the Secretariat Building now."

Again Lisa leaned forward to look. A tall section of blue-green glass windows, metal-trimmed, rose before them thirty-nine stories into the air. This was the building that looked a little odd when you glimpsed it from a distance, being so tall and seemingly thin. But Lisa had seen so many pictures of it that it was like a friend.

It was lucky for her that Mother had stepped in to help Dad by doing this UN errand for him at a time when he couldn't leave home. Reid Somers was working on a new book about the United Nations and he had needed special information that could be obtained only through personal interviews. Mother often helped out

when she was needed; and since Lisa was on vacation, she had been able to come along.

When the cab turned north along a wide street, Mrs. Somers leaned forward to stop the driver.

"Here, if you please. We'd like to walk toward the entrance." The cab drew up to the curb, and Lisa stepped into a warm breeze while her mother paid the fare. Stretching to the left, below the great oblong of glass windows that was the Secretariat, was a low building with a dome rising in the center. The windowless, flat side of the building made a white backdrop for a curving line of staffs whose colorful flags whipped sharply in the wind. These, Lisa knew, were the flags of the Member nations, and beyond them, rising higher than any other on this international ground, flew the blue flag, with its white emblem of world and olive wreath, that was the symbol of the United Nations.

Lisa drew a quick breath. No one could look at those flags without feeling a prickle of excitement. They stood for so many hopes of the world. It was good to see the flag of the United States of America flying in its alphabetical place, one with the others.

They walked on, looking up at the flags, holding on to their hats in the breeze. As they approached the visitors' entrance, Mrs. Somers glanced at the watch on her wrist.

"I mustn't be late for my first appointment. You won't mind my leaving you, Lisa? You'll be busy—there's so much to see on the tour. And we'll meet later and have dinner in town."

Lisa remembered a broadcast that her father had done months ago in which he'd told of the way the UN

played host to the world with tours conducted by trained guides. He had made the tour sound so interesting that both Lisa and her younger brother Ted had wanted to take it ever since. But now Ted was away in camp, so the opportunity was hers.

They climbed the few steps at the visitors' entrance and crossed a great cement plaza that stretched to the bank of the East River. On their left, set in the center of a widespread lawn, was the dramatic statue of a woman on horseback, silhouetted black against the summer sky. "A gift from Yugoslavia," Mrs. Somers said, "representing Peace." On the right, doors were set in an imposing façade of marble and glass that shone in the sunlight.

Inside, Lisa wanted to stop and look around at the cantilevered balconies, the great expanse of lobby, but her mother was moving toward the information desk. When Mrs. Somers had stated her business and procured her pass into restricted areas, she took Lisa to the ticket desk where the guided tours were arranged.

"You'll be in good hands here." She smiled at a uniformed girl behind the desk. "And I'll meet you in two hours or less downstairs in the public lobby."

She touched Lisa's arm lightly and walked away, trim and youthful in her navy shantung suit.

Lisa looked admiringly after her for a moment. Katherine Somers was headed for the offices of the great on a responsible errand, yet she looked as serene as if she were making a neighborhood call. Her "unruffled quality," Dad called it, and Lisa knew how much it meant to her father in his busy, hectic, far from unruffled life.

Lisa sighed and was not sure whether the sound was

one of envy or relief. She often wished she were a less easily ruffled person. Yet sometimes she had the odd sensation of wanting to escape both her mother's calm and her father's all-too-public existence. But "escape" to what? She had no answer to that question.

One of the girls at the tour desk glanced at her and Lisa stepped up to pay her student's rate of fifty cents. A second girl stamped it with a number, gave her a small tin button for her lapel, which bore the words *Guided Tour*, and waved her toward benches where visitors were waiting to be taken through the buildings. Tours left every few minutes and hers would be called soon.

Lisa took a seat near a wall of glass windows that ended the lobby. Several people waited on nearby benches, but for the moment she paid no attention to them, lost in her own thoughts. Not that her problems were such serious ones. Perhaps that was part of the trouble. It would be satisfying to bite into something really tough and prove that she could handle it by herself, with no one to think for her and smooth her way.

Here she was moving comfortably through college, with a year to go and no future decided. She had a strong suspicion that when she graduated, even if she didn't go into his office, her father would quietly pull strings, doors would open, and she'd find herself working at some job—probably in radio or television—a job that paid well and might be interesting, but which would have been settled without requiring her to lift a finger. Sometimes she wished she were more like her brother Ted. Ted, now in his first year in high school, already knew that the field of science was for him. No

one would settle anything about his life except Ted himself.

A microphone clicked on and a girl's voice spoke through the lobby, breaking into her thoughts. "May I have your attention, please? Tour Seven is leaving from the glass doors. Please assemble at the glass doors. Tour Seven is leaving."

Lisa glanced at her ticket and saw the "7" stamped upon it. She joined the group of some fifteen people who gathered near the doors on one side of the lobby, all rather sheepishly avoiding one another's eyes. At the doors which read *Push* and *Poussez* they gave up their tickets and filed through into an empty corridor where two guides waited, one a Negro girl.

Following through at the end of the group, Lisa found herself near a girl of about her own age.

"Have you visited the UN before?" she asked. "This is my first trip."

The girl was plumpish, with straggly, straw-colored hair. She gave Lisa the quickly suspicious look of the city-bred, cautious about talking to a stranger. But Lisa's appearance must have reassured her, because she stopped chewing her gum and answered, "I gotta boy friend who works at the coat check desk downstairs. Lotsa times I come here on my day off." She shrugged. "It's a place to go. Ssh—she's gonna introduce the guide."

The little group shuffled its feet and waited, its attention focused on the two guides in their attractive light blue uniforms. Each had her last name and first initial embroidered on the left pocket of her suit in a darker blue, and around the left shoulder was coiled a decora-

tive cord of dark blue, ending in silver tips. The guides wore no caps and their hair was neatly groomed.

The girl who addressed the group now had a faint accent and from the name on her pocket, Lisa guessed that she must be Greek. "I'd like to introduce your guide, Miss Judith Johnson. Please ask her anything you want to know. I hope you will enjoy your tour."

The pretty colored girl smiled at them and said, "Will you follow me, please?"

She turned down the corridor and led them to a glass-enclosed area where a plaster model of the United Nations buildings had been set up. With a pointer she indicated each of the three buildings—General Assembly, the one with the dome, where they had entered; the low Conference Building, where the council chambers were; and the tall office building, the Secretariat. Then, when she had explained about the gift of a check from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to purchase this land, and had told them of a few other matters, she asked for questions. Everyone stared at the floor or the ceiling in self-conscious silence, so she said, "This way, please," and they all streamed into a long corridor that led toward the Secretariat.

The plumpish girl was still at Lisa's side. "Golly," she mourned, "I wish I could fit into clothes the way those guides do. Look at the figure!"

It wasn't just that the guide's figure was trim; it was her posture too—the set of her shoulders and the way she held her head. There was no speck of lint on the blue suit, no trace of dust on her neat black pumps. She wore pearl button earrings and a white nylon

blouse, and her black hair was set in a neat coil around the back of her head. She walked briskly and the tour hurried after her somewhat helter-skelter. Its members had begun to look at one another now, still doubtfully, but at least as if they belonged in the same group.

The plump girl had apparently decided to give Lisa a private tour. She pointed out the Peace Bell, sent by Japan, before Miss Johnson did, and later in the Secretariat lobby informed Lisa that the green marble was from Italy and the white outside from Vermont. Whenever she looked in the direction of the guide, her rapt expression betrayed wistful admiration. Here, if Lisa had ever seen it, was envy and heroine worship.

"I do believe you'd like to be a guide yourself," she said as they moved toward an escalator that would take them upstairs. The girl flushed and began to chew her gum rapidly. She stepped onto the moving stairway behind Lisa and looked up at the guide ahead of them.

"Sure! Who wouldn't? But can you see me squeezing into one of those uniforms? Or hear me talking like that? You gotta have a good education for this job. And you gotta be smart too. Wait'll you hear the speeches that girl'll give when we get to the council rooms. The guides know everything."

Lisa smiled. "I think you do very well yourself," she whispered. "You've been giving me a sort of private tour right along. You've even told me some things the guide left out."

The girl brightened as they stepped off the escalator. "All tours are different. Some guides like to talk about one thing, some another. I've heard so many of 'em I can put 'em all together."

There was no more talking for a while as Miss Johnson opened a door and ushered them into the visitors' gallery of a handsome council chamber with rayon tapestry walls in blue and gold. Above the distant horseshoe-shaped table on the floor was a symbolic mural. There was no meeting taking place and Miss Johnson explained that the horseshoe table was used because it had no head; all who sat at such a table were equal. She pointed out the row of glass windows set halfway up the side walls, behind which interpreters sat. On the arm of every seat was a pair of earphones with a dial. While a speech was being made on the floor, a turn of the dial enabled the listener to hear it translated into any one of the official languages—Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish.

"You remember, this is the one place where the veto can be used," Miss Johnson went on, and then asked for questions.

Almost without thinking Lisa raised her hand. "But isn't there a way now of getting around the veto?"

Miss Johnson smiled at her. It was a friendly smile that seemed to recognize her as an individual who had asked a good question. She explained that in the event of an armed threat to peace, an issue could be transferred to the General Assembly. Of course the Assembly could only recommend action, while the Security Council could order action.

There were one or two other questions and then they filed out of the room. On the way Lisa's blond friend glanced at her in awe.

"You know something—*you* could be a guide. How'd you ever think to ask that? You'd fit into the uniform

too. And you're pretty enough." Her sigh was plainly wistful.

Lisa gave the girl a startled look. "Me—a guide? Why, I don't even live in New York City. My home's in Washington."

"If I was your size, and smart too, I'd move," the girl said impatiently and Lisa held back a chuckle. She almost envied an ability to yearn so much for a particular something—even when it was unattainable.

The tour went on, pausing before the long mural in the corridor outside the council rooms, then into the Trusteeship Council, and finally the Economic and Social Council. Here Lisa's attention quickened and she felt especially at home. There was to be a great deal in her father's book about ECOSOC and all the good it had done around the world. This was perhaps one of the most thrilling phases of United Nations work. She could tell by the way the guide spoke that she too felt the same way.

"I wonder if you realize," Miss Johnson said, "that one-half the population of the world is hungry, diseased, cannot read or write, and earns less than two hundred dollars a year? If *you* were an average citizen of the world, you could expect to die before you were forty. You could expect to be ill at least half your life, and hungry a good part of the time."

She had their arrested attention now as she went on to speak about UNICEF, the Children's Fund.

"If all the glasses of milk the Fund has given to the children of the world were placed side by side, they would go around the earth five times," she said quietly.

Somehow the picture of those little glasses of milk

marching five abreast around the earth to nourish hungry children was a moving one. The little group was suddenly hushed and Lisa could feel her throat constrict. This poised girl in the blue uniform had her heart in what she was doing, and because she felt so strongly, she had touched her listeners to emotion. As they followed her out of the room Lisa watched her more closely than before, wondering how it would feel to be in her place.

The great auditorium of the General Assembly came last, and Lisa slipped into a seat feeling as awed as though she had stepped into a cathedral. The dome of the room rose above them with its multitude of wooden battens arching overhead. Below was a platform and a pink marble desk where the Secretary-General and the President of the Assembly sat when a meeting was in session. High above the desk, a focus of the entire room, was the familiar emblem of blue and white—the crest of the United Nations.

This was a room to experience, as much as it was a room to see. There was a spirit here that came from ideas, rather than things. How satisfying it must be to take even the smallest part in all this represented.

Lisa was thoughtful when they filed out of the auditorium; she hardly heard the chatter of the blond girl, puffing along at her side. Had a window been opened on her own problem? Was this a scheme of things into which she might somehow fit?

The tour took elevators to the basement and there Miss Johnson thanked them and said good-bye. But when she started away, Lisa followed and spoke her name. The girl turned, waiting.

"Is—is it very difficult to become a guide?" Lisa asked.

Miss Johnson smiled. "I suppose it isn't altogether easy. There are a great many applicants. But it's not a career job, you know. They want us to stay not less than one year, or more than two, though perhaps it can be a stepping stone to something else."

"Maybe that's what I really want," Lisa said wonderingly. "A stepping stone. But if there are so many girls applying. . . ."

"Lots of them never make the grade because they lack the background," Miss Johnson said. "And of course only a limited number of American girls can be used—the guides must come from many countries. But if you have what is required, there's always a chance."

Lisa thanked her and went toward the stairs. She had forgotten her companion on the tour and when she looked around she saw her over at the checking desk, talking to a man behind the counter. The girl waved and Lisa waved back and started upstairs. Her watch told her that she still had nearly an hour before she must meet her mother. She thought of the Meditation Room, about which the guide had told them during the tour. It was not visited by groups, but was always open to anyone who wanted a quiet place to think or pray.

Lisa climbed stairs banked with green plants and walked toward a bronze plaque set into the wall, honoring Count Bernadotte who had given his life in the United Nations cause. Nearby was the entrance to the Meditation Room.

She stepped into a curtained anteroom that carried a sign: SILENCE. Inside the small, beige-curtained enclosure were a few rows of simple wooden chairs. Only