

Dodging the Potholes



John C. Nash

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Part of the Thursday Afternoon series.

J. C. Nash

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January 1964.

Clara died.

Annie was pretty good at figuring out how life worked, but Mum had always helped to give her a compass. Martin was a good father, but he would now have to figure out how to be both parents to his daughter, as well as find a new life for himself.

Ottawa was known for potholes, and not all of them were in the streets.

Preamble

Dodging the Potholes is a work of fiction. However, some of the characters who appear were – in fact still are to me – real. I have tried, within the bounds of the writer’s freedom to tell a story, to use historical events, situations, and context. Also there are anecdotes borrowed from other areas of life and mixed in. However, in some cases, I was unable to determine the historical detail of how things were done, or what was feasible and likely. In such cases, I have had to make a best guess, but am open to learning the actual story and context.

I would appreciate hearing of any errors in the historical context, and can be contacted via by email at *nashjc_at_ncf.ca*.

John Nash, Ottawa, 2015

January 24, 1964 – Anna

Friday

Today wasn't a regular winter day. It was raining. Perhaps that replaced the tears. Mum was dead. I'd missed her passing yesterday. She'd told me I had to keep up my classes, and told Dad he had to keep up his job – he's a research scientist in the telecommunications part of the Defence Research Board in the west end of Ottawa – and I was at the University - second year physics. I got home last night after class, and Dad said the hospital called to say she'd died.

We just stood there for a few minutes.

"What do we have to do?" I asked.

"The hospital said the funeral home would take care of things. I'd already talked to McGarry, so I phoned and left a message there. They'll pick up Mum's body."

"Mum said she'd already picked out her coffin. I found that a bit ... uncomfortable." I said.

"I think she wanted to save us having to think about that. McGarry put on his best face when she insisted on the cheapest one."

"It sort of makes me want to laugh and cry at the same time."

"It's OK to cry." Dad said so quietly I thought he already was in tears, but I think they were, like mine, all on the inside.

"I know. But somehow ... I don't know. It's not there right now.

It's not that I don't feel anything. Almost that there's too much feeling." I said.

That was yesterday. This morning Dad and I had bumped around the house, wondering what to do. There was both a lot to do and nothing to do. The funeral wasn't until Monday. McGarry would take care of things – and charge a pretty penny for it, of course.

We'd phoned everyone we should, even the people in Belgium in the early hours of this morning so it would be breakfast-time there. Actually "the people in Belgium" were Joop and Wil in Gent. They would let other family and friends know, though there was also a list of addresses, in fact a set of envelopes that Mum – Clara – had already prepared, right down to stamps.

I'd felt a surge of anger – she was too organized. You shouldn't prepare so carefully for your own death. And I know it's selfish of me, but she'd left us.

As if she had a choice.

The anger subsided as quickly as it came.

Finally, around lunchtime, we decided to go to work or school. We'd been going nuts at home, and we were starting to get cabin fever. So finally we decided to treat the day as if it were a normal one, whatever that is.

April 1, 1964 – Anna

Wednesday

It's my birthday. I'm 20 – 2 decades. Anna Louisa Joos, a.k.a. Annje a.k.a. Annie Tremblay. Orphan Annie – the Germans shot my father in early September 1944, or was it the end of August. Then their mine blew me into a bush and Mum into the ditch with Martin, and killed his two RAF buddies in the truck. That's what Mum told me. And Martin came back in 1947 and became my Dad. This morning there was a card and a box of chocolates – Black Magic – on the breakfast table.

So maybe I'm not such an orphan. But Mum died this year, and I miss her. Today especially, but my eyes are dry. I don't seem to be able to cry, even though something tells me I should be bawling. Or having a sort of tantrum. What was it Mum called it in Flemish – *huilbui*.

And I can't afford to contemplate my navel. It's just about exam time and I want to do well. It's sort of my memorial to Mum. I've got to do well and get good marks and a good scholarship to grad. school for a Ph. D.

There were some nice boneless pork chops in the fridge. When Dad got home we fried them with some onions, and they went nicely with some mashed potatoes and some green beans. At this time of year, the beans came out of the freezer, but they were OK. And Dad had bought a nice cherry pie from a local bakery, to which we added a scoop of ice cream. Not fancy, but it suited me for today. Maybe next year I'll feel more like a party.

I had some study to do, but we took a bit of time to have some tea later in the evening. I didn't feel really sad. Nor happy. Kind of numb and marking time, emotionally at least. Maybe it was the same for Dad.

April 1, 1964 – Martin

Wednesday

Annie's 20 today. I bought a card of the "Happy Birthday Daughter" type. Rather soppy message, but I do actually feel the sentiments so tritely expressed. And a box of chocolates. Hope she won't say they'll make her fat.

We've both been rather quiet. I think we're each watching the other for fear of ... I'm not sure what. Afraid to express our grief at Clara's death too openly.

Around the time Clara died we had quite a few friends and neighbours solicitous of our health and well-being. The fridge got rather full of dishes. Casseroles especially. By the end of February, things tapered off. It was rather a relief.

I suppose I should be, or at least appear to be, more emotional. I had one man tell me he would find himself breaking down in tears at unexpected moments after his wife died. But in his case she'd had a sudden brain aneurysm and died in the shower. He'd wondered why the water kept running. Rather a shock.

We had plenty of time – well a couple of months when it was inevitable – to get adjusted to Clara's dying before it actually happened. Not an easy time. Poor Clara had found a lump in her left breast about January 1963. The doctors acted quickly with surgery and radiation. Both are pretty ghastly in what they do to the human body. Then in December it became clear that they might as well not have bothered, and then it was more or less a time of waiting.

In a sense our lives have been on hold for the better part of a year. We did things, particularly things Clara wanted to do. But there was always the nagging sense of finality.

I'm not sure how Blue – guess I should use Annie rather than the nickname, or even Anna now she's grown up – is managing. Part of my forced composure is, I'm sure, as a way of providing her with some emotional support. If she knew how emptied-out I feel. Well, perhaps not as void as those first few days after Clara died.

Annie came down for tea this evening. She opened up her chocolates. We had the TV on. It didn't really matter what the program was. Nice just to sit and sip the tea and have a chocolate. Let life continue in small steps.

April 29, 1964 – Anna

“Hi, anyone home?” I called out.

“I’m just in.” Dad answered. He was the only ‘anyone’ possible, and the thought gave me an odd feeling. I took off my shoes and came into the dining room where Dad was going through some mail.

“Hi Dad, have a good day?”

“Not bad, how was your exam?”

“I think I did OK. There were a couple of questions that baffled me, but the other kids seemed not to get any answer for those, and I did manage something. I’m pretty sure I passed OK, but I’ll have to wait to see how well.”

“Good. I’m glad you don’t get rattled and go to pieces like some of the students I had in that course I guest-taught last year at Carleton. It’s not good when there’s nothing, but it’s easier to grade than the bullshit.”

“Dad! You should be careful about using that word, even if it is appropriate. This town is pretty straight-laced. And you don’t want to get your ears pinned back by Aunt Penny.”

Aunt Penny had married a United Church minister.

“Yes. Your Mum would have chewed me out for that too.”

“She’s been gone three months.” I felt cold and sad.

“Sorry I mentioned her like that.” Dad said quietly.

“No. I think we should let her be in our thoughts and conversation. I know it hurts a bit, but I don’t want to leave her out or let her be forgotten.”

“Thank you for that. It’s how I feel too. Now I think today was your last exam. Are you going out to celebrate?”

“No. Most of the other kids have Math 202 that I did specially last summer. And I don’t feel much like celebrating.”

“And with studies and exams you didn’t get much of a birthday. Maybe Saturday I’ll take you for dinner at the Chateau or the Green Valley if you’d like that.”

“Yes. We’ve not gone out since well, before Mum died.”

There was a pause after I spoke.

“What would you like tonight. We could do some macaroni or there are some frozen fish sticks.” Dad asked.

“Lets do the fish with some potatoes. And we have some frozen peas in the freezer too.”

“OK. I’ll start the potatoes if you do the rest.”

“I’ll just wash up then be right there,” I replied.

Dad moved to the kitchen and took some potatoes from the bin under the counter and began to peel and wash them. By the time he had them in a pot in cold water, I’d got the fish on a cookie tray and set out a pot with a small amount of water for the peas. I said

“I’ll wait until the potatoes are nearly ready to get the peas on, but the fish takes 10 minutes or so once the oven is up to temperature.”

Dad took two small stemmed glasses from one of the cupboards and went into the living room to the buffet where he got out a bottle before returning to the kitchen. He poured two small measures of dry sherry into the glasses.

“To completing your second year of physics.”

“Thanks. But you know I’ve still a year to go before I’m legally allowed to drink.”

“Yes. But we’ll pretend you’re European and in Europe. After all you were born there. We used to call you Annje not Annie, but the locals here had a bit of trouble with that.

Anyway, I don’t want you drinking where you’ll get into trouble. In a crowd of students you’ll be asked for your ID, but with older folk like me you’ll pass for over 21, and I want you to know what things are like so you can choose wisely and show good manners, and not get drunk either! If you travel, it’s good to fit in, but also keep your head.”

“You worry about me too much.”

“I’ll not deny that. Sometimes lately I’m very conscious that I’m probably too watchful. Tell me if I get to be a nuisance.”

“Dad. You’ve rarely been that. I sometimes wonder what well Luc I can’t call him my ‘real’ Dad, ‘cause you’re that, but you know what I mean. I wonder what he’d have been like. I think that being a farmer, he’d possibly have the shotgun out for any interested boy coming round.”

“It’s hard to know. Even your Mum had difficulties sorting out how she felt about him.”

“Yes. She talked about him to me once or twice. It always sounded like he was just there, as the main help on the farm when her parents died and so they got together more or less out of companionship. And that he’d been an orphan. But she did say she

loved him, though the way she talked about you, I know it was very different. She used to sort-of light up when she talked about you.”

“We met under unusual circumstances.” Dad seemed a bit embarrassed by how I’d talked about Mum.

“I don’t remember, of course, but she told me there was a mine and you and she ended up in a ditch, and I was up in a bush.”

“We should almost go back to Ninove and make sure that bush is commemorated. If it hadn’t caught you, you’d probably have had quite a flight into the field and a nasty – likely fatal – coming to earth.”

“I guess I’m glad it caught me. And that you were there. Mum had a funny way of both being sad and laughing when she talked about it. I know she thought it hilarious how – or rather where – you were injured.”

“A bit of wooden seat in my bum. Yes, it was kind of embarrassing to have a strange woman telling you to drop your pants so she could clean up the hole left when it was pulled out.”

“Surely Mum wasn’t strange?” I teased, but Dad more or less ignored this.

“Later not, but we’d just met, and not under very favourable conditions. Remember my two buddies Jack and Jim in the front of the truck were blown to bits more or less.”

“Yes. That could not have been easy to look at.” I felt a bit queasy thinking about it.

“On the other hand, I’d never have met your mother, nor you, but for that mine.”

“You don’t know that, Dad.”

“Well, let’s say it would be highly unlikely. And we didn’t even share a language. My French was pretty good, but it was a mix of English grammar school stuff and Canadian street French. Your Mum spoke school French from Belgium, and was reasonably good with it, but she didn’t get a lot of practise in rural Flanders, and the local sentiments were generally not friendly to speaking French.”

“So you had to muddle through?”

“Yes, and we managed OK. There was some food in the truck – lorry as the Brits called it. And some wine and beer the CO wanted brought up to the new aerodrome – and I was not yet 21 but of drinking age over there. We had a bit of a feast of boiled potatoes and carrots with a hash of onions fried with spam. I supplied the

spam and wine, and a can of peaches for dessert which I think was a great treat for Clara. She supplied the potatoes and carrots and onions.”

“And you got help the next day?”

“Yes, an army truck came along from the Brussels direction in the morning a bit after breakfast. I remember we used the rather ghastly instant coffee I had in my rations – in fact we made two cups, but your Mum had milk from the cows, which made it taste at least tolerable.

When the truck came it stopped just in front of where we found another mine, probably rather luckily, and I got a lift to my unit at Melsbroek which is now Brussels Airport. Actually, your father – Luc – probably was killed because he saw the Germans planting the mines.”

I mulled over what he said, then realized there were some gaps in the story.

“So you were there overnight?”

“Yes.”

“The farmhouse was probably big enough that Mum could put you up easily.”

“No it was pretty small, at least the living part of it. Just a bedroom and a big kitchen, with a sort of mud room with a cold-water sink and a toilet cubicle, though that was a flush toilet. I remember thinking that a Canadian farm at that time would use a privy.”

“So where did you sleep?” I asked before I thought about the potential awkwardness. Dad looked a little nonplussed.

“Well, it’s a bit embarrassing, and I don’t want you to think badly of your Mum, but she shared the double bed with me.”

“Ooh. Naughty!” Oops. I shouldn’t have said that.

“Perhaps I should plead the Fifth, but likely we would not be here today if things hadn’t happened as they did. I think both she and I were in shock from the explosion and the emotional turmoil of Luc being shot, Jack and Jim killed and all that was going on. And I was only twenty – the same age you are now – and Clara a year older. We were not much more than kids, and times had been very bleak and nasty.”

“Are you saying you – well – made love?”

Dad took a slow sip of his sherry before talking.

“I remember waking to the sound of guns – anti-aircraft – and Merlins, the motors used in Spitfires, Lancasters and other planes. This was almost certainly a Lanc because there were multiple engines and only a few Halifaxes had Merlins. Anyway, there was an awful crump noise and the engines ceased. Poor bastards. Must have been a pocket of Germans we hadn’t cleaned out, as I doubt our guys would not have recognized the sound of a Lanc.

So we were awake, and somehow ended up in each other’s arms, and then loneliness or desperation or relief at being alive took over, at least at first.”

“ ‘At first’? ” God! I should learn to engage my brain before opening my mouth.

“Oh dear. Well, let’s say we weren’t saintly that night, though for that memory, your Mum deserves to be canonized. It was really special, and kept me going for the next year or so.”

“Dad. Mum never said anything directly about it, but between the lines of what she did say about you and that time, I suspect it affected her the same way.”

“Yes, I think so too. Sometimes you are really, really lucky and find that special person, even if the indications are otherwise.”

“Time to put in the peas.”

We changed the subject after that. After dinner, we made tea and took some biscuits – we never quite picked up the term cookies at home – and sat quietly in front of the TV, each with a book.

May 2, 1964 – Martin

I took Annie to the Green Valley Restaurant near the Experimental Farm tonight. I’d phoned for a reservation for 6:30 and we got a table near a window in the circular area of the dining room.

Annie asked earlier if I’d mind if she wore a suit of Clara’s. It had a navy blue skirt and jacket that she combined with a white blouse. They were roughly the same size, but she said Clara had smaller feet, so she had to find a pair of shoes that would go with the suit. Fortunately, she had a pair of mid-height heels in black. I probably wouldn’t have noticed if she were wearing sneakers if she hadn’t asked if they looked OK with the suit.

The middle-aged waitress asked us if we’d like a cocktail or aperitif while we looked at the menu. I said,

“I’d like a dry sherry, please, if you have one.”

“I believe we have either Dry Sack or Tio Pepe, sir.” she replied.

“Either of those, but the Tio Pepe by preference. Annie, will you join me?”

“Please.” Annie looked a little panicked. I think she wondered if the waitress would ask about her age, but I had judged correctly, and especially dressed as she was tonight, the restaurant would not embarrass us.

“I think I’ll have the roast beef. With just the two of us, it’s a lot of work to roast at home, so I’m unlikely to get it there.” I volunteered.

“For me the salmon.” Annie said.

Once we’d ordered, I said

“So on Monday you start work as a research assistant for the summer?”

“Yes, I’m glad I got the job, but the pay is not great.”

“I think we can afford it.”

“But I’d like to be self-supporting.”

“Something you got from Mum – she was fiercely independent.”

“I think it was having to be on her own with me right after the war. She once mentioned that she had a man interested in her until she realized he really wanted a free housekeeper for him and his two kids.”

“Mum – Grandma – complained more than once that both Clara and Penny were very definite that they wanted to be able to look after themselves financially and not be dependent on a man. They were both widowed in the War.”

“But both remarried.” Annie countered.

“When we came back – well I came back, you and Mum came – to Canada, Penny and Joe were just going out together, and Joe was pretty poor. He was really a volunteer social worker getting a small and very irregular and uncertain stipend from the United Church. But fortunately he got a church and made a very good job of it.”

“And Aunt Penny’s first husband – Desmond’s father – was killed and is buried in Holland, right? That picture you keep on the dresser is Mum at his grave, I think.”

“Yes, that was when Mum and I managed to meet up again. She helped me get to the cemetery in Uden. My Dutch was pretty good

for an RAF airman, but really only for food and transport stuff, so it was definitely a help to have someone who could catch the nuances.”

“What happened to me when you went there? I’m not in the snapshots.”

“You stayed with François and Maria at the neighbouring farm to your Mum’s place.”

“I remember bits and pieces about the farm, and I sort of recall two different places where there were cows.”

“Yes, you certainly loved cows. We said you were Koe-crazy. You probably remember both Clara’s farm and that of François.”

“So you went off with Mum and left me!” Annie actually stuck out her tongue at me, but pulled it back quickly, perhaps realizing other diners might see.

“We went for a day trip to Brussels, then 2 days and 1 night to Oss and Uden to find and see David’s grave. We stayed in the almost unpronounceable ’s-Hertogenbosch or Den Bosch.”

“And no chaperone?” Annie was, I hope, teasing.

“I think you’re enjoying this! No, no chaperone, and your Mum surprised me in Den Bosch by taking just one room, though I think it was the only one left with a toilet and shower. Rooms with their own facilities were fairly rare, and even now are not quite the norm in modest hotels.”

“So you were able to ... er ... sleep together again?” It was clear Annie wanted to know about how we came to get married. But she looked uncomfortable. Was it the subject? Or fear of embarrassing me? Or even of bringing sadness with the memories. Actually, while there was a tinge of sadness, or rather wistfulness, the memories were good ones. Soothing ones. I replied,

“Actually, ‘sleep’ was the operative word. It was Clara’s time of the month. I remember it rather shocked me – well more surprised me – that she was quite matter-of-fact about it.”

“She was a farm wife, remember.”

“Yes, that, and Flemish.”

“Must have been hard for you, Dad. I’ve overheard boys in my class talking. When we’re not in the restaurant, I’ll ask you what they meant by their expressions.”

“Yes, it may be that the details should be postponed to a more private moment,” I agreed, then continued,

“I’ve actually wondered where and when your boyfriends would

show up. You went out with that fellow Bill who was something in the Student Council, and odd dates with some others, but nobody I recall in particular.”

“Bill was what the students call a ‘campus man’,” Annie said, almost with distaste.

“I’ve heard the term, and guess it means someone who enjoys his time without working too hard.”

“Yes. He kept pestering me to cut classes and spend time with him. Actually to sleep with him. But I couldn’t see much for me in that. He was mostly in love with himself.”

“But you are the only girl in a class of 6 honours students in physics. That’s a good ratio.” I observed.

“I know, but if I get close to one of the boys, then it’s difficult to work with any of the others. And if I then break up with one ..., well, more trouble. And as you know, I like science and want a career. I don’t want to get my Mrs. before my B.Sc..”

“I hadn’t quite seen it that way, but you have a good point. It’s not a good idea to be too friendly with your colleagues for the reasons you give. Unfortunately, most women in science have to choose between their career and having a married life, sometimes even a social life and someone to love and love them.”

“That may change soon with this new pill that’s in the news,” Annie noted.

“Possibly. If it truly is as good as it sounds, it will have profound consequences in society.”

“But it’s still illegal to prescribe in many places. I think it’s legal to use here, but not for family planning. I’ve read something somewhere about that. The student newspaper, *The Fulcrum*, even had had some discussion that the powers that be at the University felt was on or over the line. But maybe that’s to be expected with Fr. Guindon as Rector.”

The Rector of the University of Ottawa was a politically-astute Oblate priest.

“Here come our soups. What are you going to be doing for your summer job?” It was time to change the subject.

“There’s a couple of profs and a couple of graduate students in the department working on semiconductor lasers. I think I’m going to be doing the gopher work for them.”

“If you are observant, you should be able to learn some useful

skills for doing research that will help you later. I was able to make a little extra money while I was a student because I could get things to work using left-over equipment. I'd also learned a bit in the RAF how to get things working from cannibalized parts. And later it helped me doing my Ph. D. at Toronto."

"I hope I can do the same. But girls aren't expected to be good at that stuff. They seem to want me to be decorative." Annie looked a bit distressed about this.

"Which you are! Though I appreciate that too many of the men – and the fields we are in are mostly male – cannot value a woman for her scientific or practical ability."

As the salads arrived, we talked more about some of the scientific developments of the day, especially some of the space exploration.

"Are you interested in space research?" I asked.

"Somewhat, though I suspect that it is going to be so fashionable that it will be a bit of a foot-race to get a good position."

"Yes, I like to follow it, but so much overlaps the military side. That applies to my own work too. I'd rather not have to be so concerned about sharing information."

"I think I'd like to work in something that is of current interest, but perhaps not so much in the headlines." Annie said. Very astute.

"Good thinking. By the way, if we can get to Washington sometime in the not so distant future, the Smithsonian has opened up on the Mall. Apparently some interesting scientific and technical stuff, as well as historical things."

Later that evening after we came home, we settled into chairs in the living room.

"Shall we have the TV on?" I asked.

"Actually I'd like to ask something a bit awkward, Dad."

"OK. What is it?"

"Well, I suppose if Mum were still here, I could ask her. I've thought of asking Aunt Penny, but I'm not sure how she'd react. Talking to you the other day and tonight, I think you may be able to answer me better."

"I'm still wondering what you want to know."

I felt a bit awkward, but Annie had asked. She clearly had something bothering her, and Clara could no longer be there.

"You mentioned that you and Mum were ... um ... together ... in the War and then later. But Mum didn't get pregnant. Did you

do something so that didn't happen? There were a couple of girls in the last year of school who went all the way and got pregnant. They seemed to just disappear, and I haven't seen either of them since. I heard one is living in Calgary, and the other is with her aunt in Halifax, but no mention of the babies. It's all kind of worrying. And on top of it, everyone seems to blame the girl for being 'loose' or 'immoral'. But I've been around boys enough to know that they are at least half of the problem. And it doesn't seem very sensible to make them get married and drop out of school. They'll need good jobs to raise the baby."

She stopped here, out of breath and flushed.

Yes. Awkward. Well, a serious question deserves a proper answer. I took a deep breath.

"I'm going to find this difficult, as my gut feeling is to say 'No! You mustn't do that.' The idea of you having sex with a boy makes me intensely angry and upset. But then I've already admitted some of my own past, and then I'm even more upset about the obvious double standard. I well ...

I'll do my best to tell you what I know and what I think. And I'll try not to impose too much 'Dad' into the discussion, as you need straight talk and not pontification. Let's make some tea or coffee and take it a bit at a time."

We decided on tea, and settled down with a mug each in the easy chairs either side of the fireplace. I had installed an electric fake-log fire and turned it on, mainly for the appearance. And to delay the inevitable.

"Where would you like me to start?" I asked.

"Were you just lucky Mum didn't get pregnant when you, well, you know?"

"In '44 at the time of the mine, I think we were so caught up in the explosion, the danger, the death going on all round us – Luc, Jim and Jack, the poor bastards in the Lanc – that we just wanted a moment or two of escape. But later I learned that both of us did worry a bit and were relieved that there were no consequences. But Clara was breast-feeding you at the time, which reduces the chance, of course."

"But what about when you came in 1947. You didn't HAVE to get married did you?" Annie asked.

"No," I laughed. "There's no adopted half brother or sister for

you. By 1947, we were both back to middle-class respectability, at least on the surface. I wondered whether Clara would want to share a bed again, and the possibility was very attractive. My friend Jane, who you've seen letters from, guessed pretty quickly that I wanted Clara in bed again when I talked about going to Belgium for a visit and as good as told me to go get some condoms."

"But how do you do that?" Annie exclaimed. "Only a couple of years ago that pharmacist – was he called Fine? – was convicted for selling condoms in Toronto."

"Yes, here in Canada they are 'only for prevention of disease'. I think that's stupid and hypocritical. In England, you just went to the barber. They'd even ask after your haircut if you 'need anything for the weekend'."

"Wow. Not like here." Annie was clearly surprised. I waited a few seconds, then went on.

"No. You can get them if you ask at the pharmacy, but I'd bet some money that as a young woman you'd be given a very nasty look if you asked, and probably refused the goods. If I think about it dispassionately, I don't understand it. Clearly young people who think enough to take precautions are not the ones who are getting into trouble. But I'm not a good spokesman for the apparent majority. On the other hand, as I've said, I get upset thinking about you and boys."

"But if I were able to get some, wouldn't any boy I might be interested in think I was – well – immoral if I had some?" Annie seemed to have as many conflicting thoughts as I did.

I probably was running more on my scientific presentation manner than true feelings when I continued.

"As I said, I'm not a good spokesman. From a purely intellectual point of view, my feeling is that once you decide what you want to do, and the decision is joint between man and woman, then you should make sure you do it in a way that does not cause a lot of trouble and pain. If a man, I won't say boy, looks down on you because you are practical, then he deserves to be frustrated. My emotional response concerning you in particular is a bit different. To go back to Mum and I, however ...

As it turned out, your Mum had an infection when you were born, and the doctors figure she could not conceive, though it could have been me as well, we didn't check. When we thought we were

ready for another child, we stopped using the rubbers, but no baby came.”

“Sorry,” Annie said, almost so quietly I couldn’t hardly hear.

“I don’t think either of us felt particularly hurt by that, though some people would have been, and in fact are.” I answered truthfully, though I know many other men would have felt otherwise.

“You mentioned a boy being ‘frustrated’. Is that what boys mean by ‘blue balls’?” Annie blurted out.

“Oh. That’s what you were referring to at the restaurant! Yes. It’s supposed to be what happens if a man gets all excited but doesn’t get to ... er ... ejaculate. Supposedly all the excitement builds up and makes his testicles ache.”

“You sound like you don’t believe it?”

“Maybe I was fortunate enough to be with a woman who liked sex. I don’t know if I’d say ‘making love’. For me, and I think for your Mum, ‘making love’ was sharing our days, doing things together, which might include sex, and I think sex was a very important part of what we shared, but it was a part of the picture, not the only element, of what made us love each other.”

There were tears running down Annie’s face, and I felt some on my own cheek.

“You shouldn’t have to cry about that Dad. It’s really a beautiful way to explain how much you were to each other. And I rather prefer your ‘making love’ definition to the euphemism it’s become for sexual intercourse.”

“Yes, we kind of fitted together so well. I never would have imagined.” I didn’t specify what I’d imagined, but it had not been a widow with a child, with neither speaking the other’s language. After a few seconds of silence, Annie said,

“You and Mum set me a good example. Tough on the boys. Do you think you’ll find someone new?”

“I’m not yet 40, a bit young to give up on living.” This came from the head, but I still had some work to do to convince my heart.

“You’ll have to go to the English barber again.” Annie teased.

“Well, after our conversation, I’m wondering if I’d better see about getting some condoms in the house in case either of us need them.”

Really I was thinking more of Annie. Suddenly she was grown up, and getting into “trouble” would be too much. For me as well.

“Would you really do that Dad?” Annie nearly spilled her tea.

I answered cautiously.

“Well, from what I’ve said, you know I don’t want to encourage you. But better that you avoid an unwanted pregnancy – or worse. And having told you what I did about your Mum and I, you know that I cannot claim to believe in all the hokum about abstinence.”

“I suspect even for a man it’s uncomfortable to get them at the drug store.” Annie was, as usual, on the mark. I replied.

“When we came back to Canada we got some by mail order from an outfit near Toronto that was set up by a guy called Kaufman. I think it was called the Parents’ Information Bureau. I’ll see if that is still possible, else get some at a pharmacy, and let you know where they are and how they are used.”

Annie was quiet for a while. We sipped our tea. Then she said.

“Mum never said a lot about it, but I got the feeling that she enjoyed sex.”

“Yes. I think most men and women do. But there’s a lot of people out there who think they have to tell others how to live their lives, and they often try to pretend women in particular should not enjoy their bodies. Somerset Maugham wrote a really biting story”

“Rain,” Annie jumped in.

“Yes. That’s the one. Clearly I don’t have to explain. Anyway, the best you can do is be your own person. It’s never easy. I nearly ended up with a very bossy English woman with a title.”

“Really. That’s news.”

“It wasn’t much of an affair. She was an upper-crust but impoverished student and the sister of a man who was at Wadham with me. Her snooty friends had all ‘tried it’ and I think she wanted to catch up. I was conveniently there. Then she wanted me to marry her and fit into her social scene. Thought my research work was silly. As you may guess, we didn’t last long. Then I had a chance to return to Belgium and, well, you know the rest.”

“Not the juicy details!” Annie was clearly more curious than I was going to allow. However, it seemed that she wanted to ask about something else. After biting her lip, she said,

“When I asked about ‘blue balls’, I didn’t mention that the boys were kind of looking in my direction. I think they feel it’s especially funny because Blue is my nickname.”

“Almost certainly a double-entendre?” I replied.

“Yes. I didn’t like the leering. In class or lab I just want to be a colleague.”

A related concern prompted me to say,

“By the way, when I mentioned pregnancy or worse, I can tell you that in 1944 one of the RAF pilots in my squadron got married in Brussels and most of the other pilots went along. The CO was livid when our MO – sorry Medical Officer – reported that almost all of them had the clap, that is, gonorrhoea. One of the bridesmaids had decided to try out all the pilots.”

“Ooh. Quite a busy lady. Do you think she enjoyed it?” Annie asked.

“No idea. I wasn’t there, being one of what they called the ‘erks’. But some of the so-called pillars of our current society were among the men who enjoyed women with such appetites. I dislike the hypocrisy. And for the record I also dislike the sex without friendship that the Brussels Bridesmaid story presents. By the way, the MO was Jim Sinclair.”

“Oh, yeah. You’ve mentioned he was with you in 247 Squadron. Sleeping with all those men – though she can’t have found a bed even – does sound awfully matter-of-fact. I don’t think I’d ever want that, though I can see an honest good time with a friend, even if you don’t plan to spend your life with him.” Annie had the practicality of her mother, that was certain. But many of her peers would not understand.

“I wouldn’t broadcast that sentiment. Our society is very unforgiving and judgmental.”

“I know.” Well, she knew how the wind blew.

“To return to some of the time when Mum and I got married, do you remember any of that?” I asked.

“Little bits. I remember getting ink on me and Mum was so upset. You were very calm. I realize now how it could have been really nasty.”

“Actually I was far from calm, but being angry with you would have made things worse. And you had not done it out of naughtiness.”

“I remember a bit of riding on your back. I think in a market.”

“That would be St Albans. We went there and you had your first banana there. I think it was Mum’s first banana too.”

“I’m not sure if I remember the banana or have recreated the memory from you and Mum telling me. I have a few memories of the ship and arriving in Halifax. And a bit on the train.”

“Seeing the moose – Kanadeze-Koe?” I asked.

“Again, maybe from you and Mum telling me. I’m not sure I really remember. But I do have one thing that I think is a memory or perhaps a dream.”

“What’s that.”

“We were in the train and I woke up and I was on my own, I think in a lower bunk. Then I heard some movement above and Mum moaning and I got frightened until I heard her say in Flemish ‘Goed, zo goed’ several times. I realize now you both were doing what married folks should, but at the time it was very confusing.”

“We’d not had too much chance. Your Mum said she worried the rubber companies might go bankrupt.”

“I like her way of putting it. She could be a great comic sometimes.”

“Yes. A very special sense of humour.”

“I’ll turn in. Thanks for this Dad.”

“Thanks Annie – it’s a help to share the recollections.”

I meant that. It made me sad and happy at the same time. I wondered if the painful bit would go away eventually. But perhaps then I’d also forget the good bits.

May 8, 1964 – Martin

Almost a week later, I attended a 1-day workshop on microwave frequency spectroscopy. My work on antennas and telecommunications transmissions by radio and microwave methods was impacted by what in wartime was called “atmospherics”, but was largely a matter of absorption of the energy of transmissions by water and other materials in the atmosphere. The seminar was hosted by the University of Ottawa, but the National Research Council, especially Gerhard Herzberg’s group, had done the main organizing. The workshop was specifically for “new researchers”, of which there were 4 speakers. It was nice that I could walk along the canal to the venue, as the morning was pleasant. I easily found the meeting room – a theatre in one of the oldest University buildings which was on Wilbrod Street. There was a large lobby to one side of the

theatre entrance that served for coffee breaks. Somehow there was an epidioscope and a slide projector and a portable blackboard in the theatre, which clearly served more usually for dramatics.

As usual, only a couple of the talks were of interest, and it was fortunate that they were in the morning, so I could approach and talk to the speakers. One was a 30-something Scottish woman named Margaret MacKay, pronounced Mac-Eye. She was clearly intensely shy, and her presentation was awkward and dull, but the material was very much relevant to some work I was doing, and I wanted to introduce myself. I find it much more likely one will get a quick answer if one writes to someone with a known face. The ulterior motive – to be able to ask someone to referee a paper.

Lunch was provided as a sandwich buffet in the lobby, but the sunshine was promising, so I approached Margaret and asked

“Can I suggest taking our sandwiches across the road to the green area? I’d like to ask you more about your work.”

Margaret mumbled some sort of agreement and we stepped outside, then threaded our way across the street since there was some traffic, and entered the area in front of an imposing building called Tabaret Hall that was the centre of the university. As there were no benches, we chose to sit on one side of the massive steps of the building. These faced the greenery. Others were lunching in the sunshine, even though the temperature was still on the cool side.

“Have you been long at McMaster?” I asked, even though I already knew she had only been there less than a year.

Margaret paused. She seemed to need time to gather her thoughts or her courage. Yes, an intensely shy person. And she had thick glasses, an overly simple hairdo, and very conservative skirt and sweater. Her bust filled the sweater nicely. First time I’d noticed something like that since ... Clara died. But Margaret was responding.

“Only this academic year. I was a post-doc for 2 years in Oxford after I got my doctorate from Edinburgh University in ’61.”

“I did my undergrad work in Oxford – broken up by the War, however. Then I did my Ph. D. in Toronto. Now I’m with Defence Research Telecommunications Establishment in the west end of Ottawa, but most of my work is unclassified.”

“But you don’t sound English?” Margaret responded more quickly.

“No, born here, but my folks were in the diplomatic service, and

we went to London in '38 and got stuck there. I ended up joining the RAF, in fact."

I was eating, so Margaret's pause seemed less obvious.

"I remember the war, though I was quite young when it started. We lived in Perth, so we didn't see the bombing that affected so much of the rest of Britain. Most of the soldiers we saw were Polish – they had one of their main headquarters at Moncreith House. But of course, I was just a schoolgirl even at the end."

"I'm sure you remember the rationing and the grim news, though."

"A bit, but mainly when the War ended."

"Yes, it was tougher after, in '46 and '47, and possibly later. We came back in late '47 and I started my doctoral work in Toronto."

"It must have seemed a paradise here by comparison."

"We – I'd married a Flemish woman who had an infant daughter – had a fairly easy time of it, though accommodation was awkward. Here in Ottawa, there were no apartments for rent at all in the newspapers. In Toronto we were lucky that we were told a shop-owner was retiring, and was possibly going to rent the upstairs separately from the shop. Turned out his wife was from the same town as Clara. Bit of luck."

"So your wife is a war bride?"

"Not quite. I was riding in a lorry south of Ninove where she had a farm. She was walking along the road with Annie, our daughter. Her husband had been shot by the Germans a week before. As we drove by, a mine went off under the lorry and my two comrades in the front were killed. Clara was in the ditch, Annie up in a bush, and I was eating mud also in the ditch, with a piece of wooden seat in my bum. I'll skip the details, but we wrote back and forth and when I went to see her in '47, we seemed to fit."

"I'm glad it worked out for you."

"Unfortunately, Clara passed away from breast cancer early this year."

Margaret looked stricken.

"I'm so sorry."

"You had no way of knowing. And Annie and I have decided not to avoid mentioning Clara if she fits in our conversations. Even if it's a bit awkward, we'd rather we keep the memories alive.

Tell me how you are getting on in Hamilton."

Margaret seemed relieved at the change of subject.

"I only arrived in late August and had to rush around to find a flat ... er ... apartment. Fortunately there was a furnished 1-bedroom one about a mile from my office. Then I had to find winter clothing and get started with my new job. I had two courses right away, but they were not too demanding, thank God. Still, apart from two days in London Ontario at Christmas to visit some relatives of my father, this is my first real chance to look about."

"Did you get a chance to play tourist then?"

"Not yet. I came by train last night. I hope to do some walking tonight, and as it's Friday, I'm paying an extra night at the Lord Elgin where they booked me – it's verrry nice" (Martin observed the Scots burr here) "– and going home Sunday."

"As I wanted to ask you some things about your work, perhaps I can offer to be guide and we can fit in some science while you see a bit of the city. If you'd like, come join Annie and I for dinner. I think she is inviting a friend then going to a movie, but if the weather's nice, we could go up to the Hog's Back Falls."

With some effort, Margaret said "I'd like that." It was clear she was not used to being invited out. And I wasn't sure quite why I'd invited her. We hadn't done any entertaining since

Well. Maybe it was time to restart the motor of ordinary life. We couldn't hibernate emotionally forever. I said,

"I'll phone around 5 and come by to pick you up. I live in Ottawa South, so I walked here, but you should have a bit of a breather after the day of seminars. I'm guessing seminars demand a lot of nervous energy."

A pause.

"My shyness has been a burden. Others seem to find it so easy."

"Practice. And confidence. You had good material, but seemed almost afraid to tell the audience about it. I hope that doesn't sound critical. I know it can be very difficult to get in front of a room full of scientists. One of my RAF buddies said it was worse than being strafed by a Focke-Wulf 190."

Margaret laughed.

"Perhaps it does feel that bad."

We talked a bit about the spectroscopy she was doing, but soon had to return for the afternoon talks. I left after the first of these and walked home. I'd had enough of the workshop, even though it was quite well-done.

Annie had left a note that dinner was macaroni baked in the oven. I followed the instructions. The note ended “DON’T EMBARRASS FRED”.

At a little before 5, I phoned the Elgin and asked for Dr. MacKay’s room. Margaret answered as if she were waiting with hand on the telephone. I suggested she wait for me by the main door in 10-15 minutes.

I only had to go down Bank Street to Slater, so I figured the macaroni would be safe in the oven, but I turned it down to low just in case. Then I left a note for Annie that we would be 4 for dinner and put a bottle of white wine in the fridge. There was already a red on the counter, should that be the choice.

Margaret was waiting for me. I opened the door for her, then returned to the driver’s side, got in, and moved carefully into the traffic on Elgin Street. I returned to Bank on Laurier. There was still construction of the new freeway to deal with, and the mess would continue for the better part of another two years, so everything moved rather slowly and we could talk.

“Did you get a chance to put your feet up?” Martin asked.

“Actually I decided to soak in the tub. It was just what I needed.”

“A good idea. Here we are at Bank Street, but we’re turning away from the Bank of Canada.”

“A lot of the street names are similar to those back home. I mean back in Scotland, like those with the names of kings and earls. Though some are different and more local.”

“You’re still having trouble deciding where home is?” Martin asked.

A pause.

“I think it will take time. I’ve been so busy, I’ve not had chance to get to know many people.”

“And you didn’t bring anyone with you?” I hope I wasn’t prying.

“No. It’s difficult being a woman in science. You have to work harder.”

“Annie and I have been having that conversation. She’s working for the summer as an assistant with some people doing research on semiconductor lasers.”

I turned off Bank Street and shortly stopped at the house. I didn’t bother to put the car away. The house previously belonged to my grandparents Tremblay. Clara and I bought it from them

when they moved to a retirement home in the mid-1950s, where sadly they died quite soon after, within a few months of each other.

I came round to let Margaret out of the car, but she was already on the side-walk before I got there, so I said,

“Follow me. I’ll get the front door open.”

May 8, 1964 – Anna

I’d completed my first week of work. A lot of it was trying to figure out what to do. However, I made a point of asking if there were any pivotal papers I should read so I had the vocabulary, and one of the profs. gave me 4 reprints, and pointed out that one was a review and might be the best to read first. So once they’d found me a sort of desk and chair, I set to reading and making notes, though they had me be the runner to the machine shop to take over drawings and bring back parts. And I got to ask lots of questions of the grad. students and the two post-docs. I think they were getting a bit tired of me asking, but I do want to get the most out of this.

Today Dad was going to a 1-day workshop on microwave frequency spectroscopy. This evening I was going to a movie with Fred, who’s a friend rather than a boyfriend.

Before I left for work I prepared a salad but without the dressing and put it in the fridge. I left a note on the kitchen table that dinner was macaroni baked in the oven – it was in the ’fridge ready to put in the oven at 275 for about 30 minutes. And that there was a salad – no dressing yet – also ready. I added in block letters ‘DON’T EMBARRASS FRED’.

I probably didn’t need to add the last, but one never knew if Dad would get awkward.

Fred Pinter was a student friend. He’d escaped Hungary with his family in ’56. He was graduating this year – I think he was two or maybe three years older than me. He was planning to go on to graduate school. At the end of my first year – that’s last year – there had been an informal softball game among the students and the batter had hit a foul ball over the backstop. Rather than walk around the backstop to get the ball, Fred had deftly swung up and over the chain link in a smooth climb of only a few movements, followed by a quick roll across the top and a drop the other side.

Someone said “Smooth move, Fred”, to which he shot back the reply “That’s how I got out of Hungary.”

I’d have to ask him sometime if that were really true. Anyway, I’d got home just in time to welcome him. My bus was a bit delayed, and he was right on time. In fact coming up the street as I was arriving.

When I got in, there was a note from Dad saying he had invited a colleague for dinner and gone to get her. He’d clearly put the macaroni in the oven. Fred had asked to use the bathroom and I’d pointed him to the powder room when Dad came back.

“Annie! Are you home.”

“Here Dad. In the kitchen.”

“Margaret, come on in. Would you like some slippers. We have a selection, as you see. I’ll hang your raincoat here.”

“Those will do”, she said, pointing to some fluffy ones with rabbit faces. “It’s very different from Scotland. Everyone here takes off their shoes.”

“In winter it’s to keep the slush and salt from ruining the carpets and floors.”

“Yeess. That makes sense, and I’ve taken to doing the same. It just takes some getting used to.”

Margaret was very Scottish by her accent and by her woollen clothes, with a sweater under which she seemed to be trying to conceal a pair of medium sized melons. Oh. I shouldn’t be nasty. Well she does seem to be big in the bust, and I’ll try to be nice to her. Can’t be easy having such a lot in front.

“Here’s Annie. Annie, I’d like to introduce a colleague from McMaster University, Margaret MacKay.”

“Hi. Should I call you Dr. MacKay.”

“No. Never! Please call me Margaret.”

“Is Fred here yet?” Dad asked.

“In the bathroom.”

As if to underline this, a toilet flushed, there was the sound of running water and Fred came out of the powder room that was in the passage way.

“Dad, I think you’ve met Fred Pinter. Fred, this is Dr. Margaret MacKay, who we’re to call Margaret. She’s a colleague of Dad’s.”

“How do you do, Margaret?” said Fred.

Margaret was probably rather shy, but she seemed OK with Fred and I, and said

“Nice to meet you Fred. And you too Annie. I think your Dad said you were born in Belgium. Did they call you Annie there?”

“No. Annje, diminutive for Ann. Flemish / Dutch, but here folk found it odd, so we changed the j to i. Or you can call me Blue, which is my nickname.”

“Blue?” she queried.

“Well Bluenose. When Dad and Mum were getting married – Mum was a widow, and I was three – I found Dad’s fountain pen and was drawing with it, but got the ink on my nice outfit for the wedding and on me, including my nose. We couldn’t get it all out for a while. So Dad called me Bluenose, which sort of fitted when we arrived in Halifax a couple of months later, and well, it stuck, but also got shortened.”

“I never knew that before,” said Fred.

Dad motioned us to the dining room – really one end of the combined living-dining room that made up a long space and the major part of the ground floor.

“At least Blue doesn’t refer to getting frostbite.” Margaret commented, then continued, “I worried about that when I got the offer from McMaster. But actually I found that I was warmer in Hamilton than I ever was in Scotland. Where should I sit?”

“Take the end nearest the front so Annie and I can be near the kitchen. You there Fred. Clara found that too. She said that despite the winter, Canada was a very comfortable country.

I can offer some wine. However, Fred has his family car and I’m going to drive us up to Hog’s Back after dinner, so it’s water or lemonade or some sort of cola for us. Ladies, would you like some wine?”

“Lemonade please,” said Margaret.

“Me too.” said Annie.

“Just water, thanks,” Fred responded.

Dad looked after drinks. He must have known I’d choose lemonade, but he took water himself. I brought in the salad and then the macaroni casserole.

“I’m afraid it’s only macaroni and a salad,” I said.

“It’ll still be a great pleasure for me,” Margaret replied, “I arrived last Autumn just in time for classes and have been so busy that I’ve

not had time to get to know people. Apart from Christmas with relatives in London Ontario, I've only had dinner in a Canadian household twice, once with my department head and once with a woman in the Sociology Department who was also new this year. We planned to do it more often but only managed once at each other's apartments because of the rush of work and the difficulty getting around, since neither of us have cars. I'm hoping that will change a bit in the coming months."

"It will. The first year is the worst." Dad soothed.

"Where about are you from?" I asked.

"I was born and grew up in Perth." Margaret answered.

"Not the one just west of here? We've been there a couple of times, but I think you mean the one in Scotland."

"Yes. The original. The Scots reused the name several times. I think twice in Canada, at least once in Australia, and probably a few others too. Then I went to university in Edinburgh for both my undergraduate and doctoral degrees. Then a post-doc in Oxford."

"Dad was there. Which college?"

"I was assigned to St. Anne's, though as a post-doc, I really didn't get much into the life of the place. I was mostly at the Physical Chemistry laboratory."

"What do you do outside of your work?" I wondered if I was monopolizing the conversation, but Dad and Fred seemed happy eating.

"I like to walk and I do a bit of photography. When I can put together a bit of money, I hope to set up a darkroom."

"What camera or cameras do you like?" Dad asked.

"I've an Asahi Pentax S3."

"Very nice." Dad enthused.

"It's a bit heavy, but takes good photos. They seem to have used steel rather than aluminium in the case. Are you an enthusiast?"

"In an amateur way. I picked up an early-model Leica at the end of the War – I don't smoke and had a lot of cigarettes to trade – and still use it, but I don't do any darkroom work. Recently I've thought of getting something newer. However, I think I'd like something very light and pocketable so I have it with me when the moment arises. The Leica is not bad that way, but I've seen one or two small cameras recently like the Olympus Pen, though I'd prefer not to use a half-frame. I've been thinking a lot recently about a

Pax M4 that a friend said he liked. If I can find one, I'll buy it for myself."

"Birthday, birthday." I chanted.

"Are you two watching the time," Dad asked. "You don't want to miss your film."

Fred answered, finally getting a word in,

"Yes. It's just gone 6. We've a bit of time yet. We're going to see *Tom Jones* at the Elgin. It starts around 7. But we do have to park somewhere."

"Will you have dessert now?"

I jumped in before Fred. "No, I think we'll have an ice cream or pie after the show. There's the Party Palace we can go to."

"Maybe we'll go there too, since Margaret is in the Lord Elgin. But don't wait around for us in case we see something else."

Fred helped me clear plates, and we called out goodbye. It was kind of good to see Dad taking an interest in a woman, but also a bit ... intrusive. I guess I felt I was the chatelaine now. But, if I'm honest, good for him, as long as he's not just mesmerized by her tits. I'm being nasty again.

Evening, May 8, 1964 – Martin

"Shall we go to Hog's Back and get dessert and coffee or tea later?" I asked Margaret.

"Yes, I'd like that."

We put on shoes and coat or jacket. When we got to Hog's Back, I realized why Margaret had such a large handbag as she pulled out the Pentax.

"That's why you have such a large purse!"

"In part. And I do want a picture of these Falls. They're what I like about Canada – the wild side of nature."

"Except these are man-made."

"Really!" Margaret looked shocked. Most people do when they learn the wild-looking falls are artificial.

"Yes, they are the result of damming the Rideau to provide water for running the locks. The dam broke apart three times during construction because the Royal Engineers hadn't experience of cold-weather construction and engineering. The base was not frozen, while the top was solid, and the water washed away the foundation."

"It's still pretty." Margaret noted.

"That it is."

We spent a half hour walking about and Margaret took a number of shots of the Falls. Back in the car, I drove back towards town and parked on Cooper Street. We walked to the Party Palace and had coffee and shared apple pie and ice cream. It was strange to share a dish again. I hadn't since ... Oh. Must stop doing that. And it was nice to actually do something simple and social again. I said,

"Margaret. I've enjoyed this evening very much. I imagine tomorrow you'd like to walk about Parliament Hill and the locks and take some pictures. But perhaps later in the day you'd phone and I can give you a little tour around Rockcliffe or other places where you really need a car, and we could go for dinner somewhere, possibly the Eastview Hotel."

I don't know what got into me. My mouth seemed to run on.

Again the pause.

"That would be nice. I ... I'd like to."

"I'll write my number on my card. Here it is."

"Still using a fountain pen?"

"Yes. This is a slightly newer one than Blue used to get her nickname."

"I'd better get some rest so I can do my sightseeing tomorrow."

"Shall we walk up to the Elgin or shall we take the car?"

"By the time we get to the car I can be in the hotel. You don't have to walk me there."

"I think the neighbourhood is safe, but it's better to be safe than sorry."

Evening, May 8, 1964 – Anna

Sometime a bit after 10 Fred dropped me off.

"How was the movie?" Dad asked.

"Very well done. I actually got the book second-hand a week ago in that bookstore over by 5th Avenue. They sure bounced around in different beds back in the 1700s."

"People are largely the same in all eras."

"How was your evening?"

"Pleasant. Margaret got some photos of the Falls, then we went to the Party Palace and had pie and coffee."

"Margaret was interesting, but a bit awkward," I observed.

"Yes. Very shy. Her presentation was almost painful. However, she loosened up a bit with you and Fred."

"I'm not going to be judging her work like the audience of the workshop."

"True. Nor am I."

"But she doesn't know that. And she might think you're interested in her front. Don't tell me you didn't notice. I caught Fred ogling her a couple of times and managed to embarrass him later by asking him if he thought she'd stuffed her bra. He tried to pretend he hadn't been looking."

"So you've been teasing poor Fred, as well as me."

"Not too much. I really like him, and if I weren't so determined to get my education, I might allow myself to get more interested. For now it'll have to be casual dates and a nice friendship."

And I don't mean harm by teasing about Margaret. I think under the rather severe facade she's quite nice looking. And I agree she's shy. Do you think you'll see her again?"

"I've invited her to phone me when she finishes sightseeing and offered a tour of Rockcliffe and suggested dinner in the Eastview Hotel. Hope you don't mind fending for yourself."

"No. I'm planning to meet up with Jane and Marcia for a serious tongue wag over at Jane's house. We're going to sleep over like we did as kids."

"Then I won't feel bad. Well, think I'll turn in. 'Night."

"Night Dad. And I'm glad you brought Margaret back tonight. It's good to see you starting to live again."

"Yes. But a bit scary too. I'm a fish out of water."

"I didn't notice. Well, I did – but you're not supposed to know."

"Annie. This may seem a bit off the wall, but Margaret has never been to Niagara, and doesn't have a car. If we continue to get along tomorrow, do you think I'd be out of line to suggest I take the long weekend in Hamilton so we can drive to Niagara. I only met her today, but somehow the idea has been going around in my head."

"Dad. As a daughter I suppose I'm expected to be hostile and protective. Like you said you feel about me and boys. But Mum's cancer and dying were hard for both of us, but especially for you. A weekend getaway may be just what you need. You'd better get your precautions though!"

“Hmm. I’m thinking I told you too much.”

“Night Dad.”

“Night Annie.”

May 9, 1964 – Anna

In the morning I got up quite early and started the dishes. I heard Dad in the shower. Then he came down.

“Blue. I meant to do those dishes.”

“Ah. No fuss. I sometimes like doing dishes. Kind of therapeutic.”

“What do you have to do today? You mentioned the sleep over tonight.”

“Yes. I think I’m going to spend some time clearing up my room and putting away papers and stuff. Either this morning or afternoon I may go shopping. I’ve not done that for so long and it would be good to just poke around the shops.”

“Do you need some money? I only gave you a card and a box of chocolates for your birthday. Maybe \$20 would help.”

“Dad! You don’t have to.”

“Well, all right.” He started to put his wallet away.

“No! I’ll take it!”

Dad laughed and gave me not one but two 20s, which I put in the apron pocket after drying my hands on the apron front.

“Have you had breakfast.” he asked.

“Yep. You were still asleep.”

“It is Saturday.”

“I was awake early. Decided to get up.”

Dad put two slices of bread in the toaster and filled the electric kettle. He unplugged it when it boiled and made some instant coffee, collected his toast and put some butter on one piece, then some Marmite he had received from Jane in England. On the other slice he put some strawberry jam.

“Ugh. How can you eat that stuff Dad?” I was referring to the Marmite. Dad understood.

“Acquired taste. Comes from growing up in England.”

“Well, I’ll get ready and go. What are you going to do?”

“Tidy the yard for a bit, then look over some of Mum’s things. I’ll arrange them into piles or boxes in case you want anything.

Anything sentimental we'll keep, but sell or give away stuff of use or value that isn't important to us, and toss the rest. But I'll let you check the piles first."

"Thanks. I'll do that tomorrow afternoon when I get back from Jane's."

It was a nice day. Not hot but still comfortable. I wore a light jacket over my skirt and blouse. Nice not to need stockings. I decided to go to Bank Street and walk down to Sparks then over to Rideau, following my nose. I'd look out for the Pax M4 camera Dad mentioned. He'd be 40 in August. That was a big one. He deserved something nice.

There were a couple of camera shops on Bank and I went in both. In the first shop, the clerk looked at me like I had three heads when I asked about a Pax M4, but in the second, the quite young man behind the counter was very helpful.

"The Pax M4 is a quite nice, very compact 35 mm camera. It does a full frame, has a rangefinder but no exposure meter built in. You have to either guess or use a light meter. Unfortunately, the company got sued by Leica who had a similarly named camera, and they are out of business, with the last one made in 1962 I think. However, we do sometimes get one offered to us, and I could take your name and phone number. We may even have one in our other shop."

I wasn't quite sure he wasn't interested in something else besides selling me a camera. But he wasn't being pushy, and I did want a surprise for Dad.

"Perhaps I could phone you. It's to be a surprise for my father, so I don't want him to find out in advance."

The salesman gave me a card from the store and put his name on it. Well, it was a possibility for Dad's present. I hope my pay from the University will come through quickly. My bank balance isn't too healthy just now.

I did a lot of window shopping, and treated myself to a malted milk in Woolworths on Rideau at Sussex. That thick chocolaty semi-liquid that required a lot of suction. Suddenly the image of a traditional diner came into my head as the taste registered. Why that image? Oh. I know. The first malted milk I'd had was in a diner in Halifax when we arrived in Canada. I'd forgotten that. It was a first for Mum too. Along with a cheeseburger.

I had to pretend I'd something in my eye. Tears could come any time one got a reminder like this.

I finished the malt and went in Ogilvies. There were some quite nice panties on sale at a good price. I don't go for the fancy lace – we actually have some real stuff from Belgium that Mum got as samples to try to market here in her Best of Belgium effort. But what I found were plain but nice and I bought a couple of pairs. I'd a couple of pairs that should soon be retired before the elastic was completely gone.

Then I took the bus home. There was Mum's stuff to sort.

* * *

Marcia's been a sort of Best Girlfriend since, well, grade school. She's always been bigger than me. Not fat, but tall and big boned. Loud. Brash. But loyal and fierce. She wants to be a Phys. Ed. teacher. Plays on the U of O volleyball and basketball teams. Given a chance she'd be on the football team. If I'm honest, she'd be in the shower with the men too. A person of large appetites.

If Marcia hadn't been in grade school with me, Jane Simpson would be my best friend. The three of us met in grade 7. Where Marcia is big and solid, Jane is thin and willowy, though she's not flat-chested. In fact, after phys-ed one day, Marcia said "It's just not fair. I have to practically get a mechanical engineer to design a bra so I can play sports, and Jane here could prance around naked and her tits would be tidy."

Marcia wasn't being unfriendly as she said this, just stating what is more or less obvious. Me, I'm in the middle as usual. I need a bra for sports, but other times I could probably do without if it weren't socially unacceptable, especially with clothes that are not too thin.

Jane is studying fine arts. She can paint and draw up a storm. She has these eyes that can look right through you from time to time. Kind of freeze you while she develops her artistic photo.

That night at Jane's house, I'd sort of hoped to recreate the atmosphere of the sleepover we'd had when we were 14 or 15. But we'd grown and moved on. Still, we had fun. Made a supper of hot dogs and salad. After supper we got into our PJs and set up sleeping bags in Jane's room. She had a record player in her room, and we took turns choosing records. Marcia started with some Beatles stuff.

OK – I like it well enough, but the side she chose was kind of noisy. We had to turn it down so we could talk.

As with most girl parties, the conversation was about boys. Sex really. Marcia said,

“We’ll we’re all into our 3rd decade.” Actually, I’m the youngest, Jane’s a month older, and Marcia lost out on presents because her birthday is a week before Christmas. “Who’s still a virgin?”

Trust Marcia. I pushed back “That question probably means you’re not.”

“I’m the one who asks the questions!” Marcia replied with fake archness.

“I lost my virginity a couple of years ago.” Jane said quietly. “There was this nice man at that art camp I went to in the Laurentians. He was one of the guest instructors.

He was quite direct, but also very courteous. He didn’t try to wheedle and try to trick me into bed. Instead he came to me one day while I was sketching beside the lake and said ‘Jane. You are a fantastically beautiful girl. I’d like to paint you nude and I’d like to make love to you.’ So I pointed out to him that a nude of me could be embarrassing, and a baby even more so. He was equally direct, saying he would paint me wearing a mask – he titled the painting ‘bandita’ – and that he had no wish to risk a pregnancy and had some rubbers.

I liked his directness, and he was good looking and also a good painter, so we arranged where we could be private and he did the sketches he needed and then he made love to me, and I rather enjoyed it. But since then, I’ve not been out with any boys or men who I felt much like sleeping with.”

As Jane talked, it was almost like she were narrating the story of some other person.

“What about you, Annie?” Marcia was probing.

“Not much to tell. I’ve lots of men in my classes, but going with just one of them would be asking for trouble, since he’d be special in one way if you stayed friends, and special in another if you broke up. Neither case is good for me. And outside of class, with all the work that entails, I’ve had Mum’s illness and such.”

“Yeah. That’s a real shame. Are you OK now?” This was Jane.

“Mostly. There’s moments. For Dad too. Actually Mum’s death has made us closer, but sometimes I think we’re afraid for each

other.”

“Maybe we’d better interrogate Marcia to keep you from sad moments.” Jane was not going to let Marcia off the hook for starting this conversation.

“Oh, not a lot to tell. A couple of years ago when I went to the Bahamas with my parents for Christmas there was this boy from Montreal with his parents. We got along and one night the parents were at dinner and we went down to the beach to watch the moon on the waves. I got to watch the second moon moving up and down, if you know what I mean. He said he’d pull out, and I think he did – at least I didn’t get pregnant.”

“That’s why you were so happy when you got your monthlies in January that year!” I said.

“You better believe it. Kept me celibate for at least 18 months.”

“And?” Jane wasn’t going to let go of the bone.

“Oh. That guy Bill who was interested in Annie. His antics made me laugh, and he slipped a condom into my hand one night and asked if I knew what to do with it. For a lark I decided to go along with the game, but we ended up in his tiny student council office doing it on his desk. I think he lasted all of 3 seconds.”

We laughed, but really it wasn’t funny for Marcia. It was clear Jane had found the better experience. And for both of them, their partners so far had led to a dead end.

The Beatles record was ending. Jane’s turn. We didn’t see the record cover, but soon heard this lush, flowing music, clearly classical.

“What’s that, Jane. It’s nice.”

“Music for the love scene from *Romeo and Juliet* by Berlioz. I like it.”

Our conversation about men changed to generalities.

Would you prefer good looks or money?

Great lover or handsome escort?

Terrific sex or super friend?

I didn’t think that one should put up with such choices, but I played along with the game which went back and forth for the better part of an hour, sometimes with very ribald comments, mostly from Marcia, but occasionally Jane could get in a zinger.

Jane had got a copy of ‘*Sex and the Single Girl*’ last September, and Marcia and I had borrowed it during last Autumn. We talked a

bit about it. All of us agreed that women should be as free as men to have sex without having to get married. The laws on contraception really worked against that being an easy option just yet.

Marcia noticed Jane's sketch portfolio and asked if she could look. I was putting on a record – Baez I think – when Marcia whistled and held up a sketch of a nude young man with the genitals drawn in detail.

“Cute guy.” Marcia noted.

“He was good looking. All the girls in the life drawing class were taken with him. Right after I drew that, one of the other girls took her sweater off and her blouse rode up and the model got an erection. Everyone got kind of awkward.”

“I should switch to arts.” Marcia said.

Conversation bounced around these topics, but eventually we were just listening to the music. I got up and used the bathroom and brushed my teeth. When I came back, the others followed one after the other and we turned off the light.

May 9, 1964 – Martin

I woke later than usual, nearly 8:30. I'd been dreaming a most erotic dream of Margaret and found I had a raging erection. It had been a while since I had such dreams.

I heard Annie in the kitchen doing the dishes. I'd meant to do those before she got to them. Too late. I got up and went to the bathroom, showered and dressed.

I had breakfast, and gave Annie \$40 as a late birthday present. We discussed our plans for the day, then she was off shopping.

After breakfast, I cleared away, making sure all the dishes were done. Then I spent an hour clearing the worst of the weeds and long grass around the yard. I didn't have Clara's interest or ability, and the yard was very plain this year. However, maybe better that than try to mimic her garden. I considered what simplifications might be possible. Maybe I could hire someone to look after the yard if it were made very Spartan.

It was about 10:45 when I came inside and washed up. On a whim, I walked over to the pharmacy on Bank Street. At the back, I noted there was a male pharmacist and just one customer. I waited until the customer had turned to leave, then approached.

“Do you have any condoms?”

“Yes sir. What type?”

“Do you have the lubricated ones with reservoir.”

“The Trojan Ens. Yes sir. How many?”

“Two boxes please.”

The pharmacist put them in a paper bag. Obviously standard procedure. I paid, feeling rather surreptitious, but happy to have found what I was looking for. Then I went to the supermarket – usually I did this in the car, but it was nice to walk today – and got some odds and ends I thought we might find useful. When I got home I started some laundry, then began to sort some of Clara’s things. I’d been procrastinating. We’d more or less left her clothes in the closet. It was time to clear them up and move on.

May 10, 1964 – Anna

I got home mid-morning Sunday. Dad was vacuuming and dusting, so I said hello and started some laundry. At some point I came into the kitchen and found Dad had made me a sandwich, but he’d finished his and was writing cheques to pay bills in the dining room. I left him to it, knowing how easily one could make errors if distracted.

I ate my sandwich and went back to the laundry. While folding and putting away things, I got side-tracked sorting out my underwear and socks and stockings. I came down to the kitchen for a drink of milk, and Dad was just putting away the bills in the concertina file he used for each year’s expenses. It lived in the master bedroom in a small filing cabinet.

“I’m going to put these away.” Dad said. “Do you want to come up and go through some of Mum’s things.” He sounded tentative. Perhaps the reminders would be painful for one or both of us.

Dad had already done some sorting yesterday, and there were some piles and boxes for me to look through. But I was curious how he’d got along with Margaret.

“How was your evening Dad?”

“Pleasant. Margaret phoned about 2:30. We drove over to Hull, up to Chelsea, back across to this side, then through Rockcliffe, looked out over the Ottawa River, then round to the Eastview for dinner. We stopped lots for her to take photos, and I got one or two as well.”

“Anything special for dinner?”

“I had a nice wiener-schnitzel. Margaret had a filet mignon. We had the baked Alaska for dessert. That was new to her.”

“Did you decide to ask her about the long weekend?”

“Yes. Margaret seemed a bit embarrassed by the idea, but clearly wanted to take up the offer. She’s said she can put me up. I’m not sure if either of us is quite ready for that, and I think the moment after she asked she almost withdrew the suggestion, but it beats a hotel. I’d better make sure the car has an oil change and tune up before I go. Will you be all right here?”

“Yes. I’m not a child. I’ll probably go out with Fred at least once, and there’ll be some sort of gathering of some of my high school class over by Dow’s Lake. The tulips are still out, and worth a look. Plenty to do. And I have my bike and Mum’s too if mine needs fixing.

And I think I’d also like some quiet time to do more sorting out of this stuff. You know – labelling, putting in a scrapbook or album. And I’ve not had a chance to just read a book for pleasure for so long.”

“Don’t get too maudlin.”

“No, I’ll be fine.” I said.

“What do you think about these clothes of Mum’s?” Dad asked, pointing to one group.

“I’ve put aside the grey silk suit Mum wore at the wedding in Belgium. And the blue suit is more or less mine now since I wore it to dinner at the Green Valley. Ooh. Here’s the dress Mum’s wearing at David’s grave. It’s linen. Pity to throw it out.”

“Will it fit you?”

“Probably, but I’ll try it on.”

I started taking off my skirt and blouse.

“Sure you should do that in front of me. You’re a young woman now.”

“I’m wearing a full slip as well as bra and panties. Much more than a bathing suit.”

“I suppose so. I don’t want to cause awkwardness.”

The dress looked great on me. Dad looked at me quizzically.

“You’re a little smaller in the hips.”

“Yes, but I think that a wider belt will fix that, or I can take it in a little. Definitely a keeper.”

“You don’t feel bad wearing Mum’s stuff.”

“No. I’d like to have some of her things. Each time I wear them, I’ll have a reminder of her. It’s not a painful reminder but ... well ... calming, comforting.”

“If you feel that way, let’s see what else there is.”

“Well, I won’t take any of her undies, except maybe a couple of the nicer slips. She was, as you say, bigger in the hips. I’m a tiny bit bigger in the bust which you must know from doing the laundry – we’re the same around but I need a bigger ... er ... cup.”

From his expression, he probably hadn’t actually noticed explicitly. Did men not read labels? Well, I did the laundry about 2 times in 3.

“Yes. I put the ‘smalls’ as the Brits call them in that box for disposal, as well as all socks and stockings except those that are new or are real silk.”

“Can I take out a couple that Mum made from the parachute material? Not to wear, just to keep.”

“Sure. I also found a couple of pomanders in Mum’s undies drawer. They need to be emptied and refilled with smelly stuff. Do you want them?”

“I like the floral one. The other one I don’t think I want. Ah. There’s the slips. I think this white one with the real lace I would wear. Oh. A black one.”

“That’s to go with the dress we bought from Jane before we came to Canada. It’s there in that zipper bag on its hanger.”

“Really?”

I undid the zip.

“Oh. It’s the one Mum wore for your wedding here in Ottawa. It’s lovely! Can I try it on?”

“Yes. But take the slip and change in your own room. If it fits and you like it, you’ll need to buy a black bra and panty set. And some black stockings. Though I think Mum didn’t wear a bra with it because of the low back.”

“Naughty!”

“Only if you say so.”

I only had on slippers, but the woman in the mirror looked pretty good. It was lovely, and very sexy.

“All I need now is a formal event. Ooh. I’m itching to find an occasion to wear it. My friends will be so jealous. When was it

made?” I asked.

“Before the First War. 1912 or ’13 I think. You could write to Jane and ask.”

“I’ll change back and hang it in my closet. Not going to let this go to the Sally Ann.”

When I came back, we quickly went over the things Dad suggested be sent to charity or to the dump. I didn’t have any problems with his decisions on those items.

“What about Mum’s jewelry and accessories?” I asked.

“Anything of value I put in the safety deposit box at the bank. I should get you on the signing list. You’ll need to come along too. Remind me to do that really soon. It has your birth certificate and adoption documents. And should anything happen to me ...”

“I don’t like to think of that.” I jumped in, almost in a panic.

“Nor I. Oh. Here’s copies of most of those documents. Mum wisely got the duplicates. You’d better have them and look after them carefully.”

“Hmm. Anna Louisa Joos. Not Annie Tremblay. Seems like two different people.”

“Not to me.”

“Thanks. Sometimes I can’t quite believe where I came from. Lets look at Mum’s combs and barrettes.”

When I opened a small drawer in the dresser, I realized the items I was looking for were already in a pair of shallow boxes on the floor and that I was staring at two boxes of something labelled ‘prophylactics’. Oh. Condoms. There was a long pause.

“Well. Now you know where they are.” Dad noted.

“Yes. Should I ask how they work?”

“There are instructions on a leaflet.” I was kind of curious. In fact, I was already opening one box and pulled out the leaflet to read it. Dad was quiet.

“It’s awfully clinical. You might lose interest if you had to read the instructions while trying to use one of them.” I said.

Dad laughed.

“Maybe you should take the instructions and try one of them on a banana. But I’ll let you do that on your own in private.”

“Yes. I’ll try that later. I’m very curious, but it’s a bit off-putting to read that one is supposed to ‘retract the foreskin’. How’s a girl supposed to know what that is?”

“If the fellow has one, and most in North America don’t, I think he’ll have a pretty good idea.”

“I suppose so. Not quite the violins and fade to black that Hollywood suggests.”

Dad laughed again.

“I think people forget that they should be aware of and enjoy their feelings but not let them dominate or control the situation. That’s not always easy to do. Unfortunately, we seem to have two extreme views of sex now – the Hollywood fantasy and the nasty mechanics of prostitution.”

“I’ll put these away. I know where they are if I need them.” I said.

“Back to the accessories. Do you see anything you want?” Dad asked.

I saw a few items I wanted. “This, and ... this. That’s it. The rest can go to charity or more likely the dump.”

“The everyday jewellery?” Dad suggested.

We took this out. I said

“Let’s make sure we keep the stuff Mum wore.”

When I started selecting items, I found only about half of what was in Mum’s collection was stuff I’d seen her wear. I said,

“The rest are pretty much things people gave her that she didn’t wear. You already put the nice stuff in the bank. I think we can sell the rest in a garage sale or give it to charity.”

“OK. Well, we’ve done the sweaters and slacks and you took the couple of sweaters you wanted. The slacks don’t quite fit you.” Dad said. “And you’ve selected that fancy dress and we’re keeping the two tailored suits, one of which you wore to the Green Valley. There’s still a few dresses and blouses and skirts. Any you want?”

I answered “I think all the dresses but this one here are not really current or they wouldn’t suit me. This pinafore skirt I can use, and let me take these ... ” I selected several skirts that I could wear or else modify.

I looked at the blouses and tops that were left, but most were out of fashion except for the simple blouses.

“I guess these six blouses. The rest I wouldn’t wear.”

“You already selected some tops with the sweaters there. Won’t need a new Fall wardrobe.”

“Daddy! Women always need more clothes.”

“How about coats or jackets.”

“Can I have the parka you got when you came in 1947? I know you still have yours. It’s not fashionable, but it is warm.”

“Of course.”

“And her leather fliers jacket. We can’t let that go.”

“Shoes or boots?”

“I’m one size bigger. Call me Bigfoot. Pity. There’s a couple of pairs I might like. Maybe Joan would fit them, but I don’t know her size for sure.” Joan was my cousin – Aunt Penny’s 14 year old daughter.

“Put them in a box and we’ll take them down when we go. Penny wanted us for the long weekend, but that’s not possible now. I talked to her on the phone the other night. I’ve arranged for the weekend after next, that is, the one after the long weekend. Put anything for their family in that box.”

“Where are Mum’s letters and stuff? ”

“They’re in the two tin boxes on the shelf. I’ve already put the photo albums downstairs in the living room on the bookshelf. You are welcome to go through them and put in slips of paper where you want copies. I probably can find the negatives in the box on the shelf there marked ‘Negatives’. I did date the envelopes and hopefully they aren’t mixed up.”

“Yes. I’ll do that. It takes a lot of time.” I said.

“And emotional energy,” Dad responded.

“That too.”

“If you go through Mum’s letters, please don’t throw anything away until I’ve taken a look.”

“Course not, Dad. I was planning to take some medium sized envelopes and sort things by date and add notes of who they’re from. I don’t read Flemish, of course, though I suspect if it was read properly, I might remember what it means.”

“Let’s take the stuff for garbage down right now, then organize the Sally Ann stuff.”

May 15, 1964 – Martin

Friday morning.

I left Ottawa early, shortly after 6 a.m. Highway 7 was quiet. Perth, Tweed, Belleville, where I stopped for gas and a coffee, then

the 401. I wanted to avoid the long-weekend traffic as much as possible, and I was pleased to be in north Toronto well before noon. I pulled off the 401 near Yonge Street and found a diner for some lunch and then gas on Sheppard. By 2:45 I was in Hamilton parked in front of the house where Margaret had the upstairs apartment.

"Hi Margaret," I said as she opened the door to the staircase that led to the apartment. The staircase ended in a small landing, off which were four doors. A tiny living room on the left at the front, likely a bedroom on the right, with kitchen and bathroom at the left and right rear, between which was a passage to what seemed to be a door to the outside. This turned out to be a fire escape. Along this passage there was a set of hooks on which coats and scarves were arrayed.

"Glad to see you, Martin. Did you have a good drive?"

"Not bad. But it's quite long. Not all the multi-lane highways are finished. I'm glad to be here," I said as I put down my suitcase and small backpack.

"Would you like a cup of tea or a cold drink?"

"Tea would be fine, but first the bathroom."

"Through there." Margaret pointed. "I'll put on the kettle."

When I finished in the bathroom, I joined Margaret in the kitchen, where there was a modest arborite table with two chairs. I sat in the one farthest from the stove. There was a window looking out on a garden.

"Not a bad apartment," I commented.

"I was lucky to get it. Apparently someone was going to come to take up a job here, like me, but got into some sort of accident."

Margaret put a cup of tea in front of me as well as a plate of shortbread.

"Ooh. Shortbread. One of my vices I'm afraid," I said.

I noticed Margaret was fidgety, and there was a pause before she replied.

"I suppose it's part of being Scottish, though I learned rather late how to bake it because of the rationing of sugar and butter. But I like it too."

"Have you particular things you'd like to do while I'm here and you have automobile transport and driver available? Besides Niagara Falls of course."

Again there was a pause.

“Umm. ... I hadn’t given it much thought. There is a party Monday at the house of one of my colleagues to open up his swimming pool. I said I would come, even though I don’t like bathing, but I ... uh ... didn’t mention you. I ...”

She trailed off.

“You’re not quite sure how to introduce me?”

A very long pause.

“I suppose so.”

“Do we need to talk about sex?” Might as well get to the point, I thought.

“Yes!” There was almost a rush of air as Margaret exhaled.

“Are you uncomfortable that I’m staying with you? I could go to a hotel.”

“I like being with you. But I’m not used to having someone – a man – stay overnight. We only met a week ago. We got on so well, it seemed natural to accept your suggestion. But, well, to put it bluntly, I’ve no experience.”

“You’ve not had boyfriends?”

“No. ‘Men don’t make passes at girls who wear glasses’ is the phrase, isn’t it? I’ve been out a few times over the years with boys, but I’m shy and awkward, so it was all very formal. On top of that, I’ve overheard some unkind things about myself and had a few unpleasant incidents.”

“Like?”

“Well, about my breasts, and how they’d like to grab them. Sometimes bumping into me, supposedly by accident but almost certainly not. Once I had a group of young men surround me as I was walking home in Edinburgh – it gets dark early there in winter – and if a policeman had not come by I hate to think what would have happened.”

“Margaret, I can’t speak for other men. I am here because for the first time since Clara died I feel I want to have some company, in fact, the company of a woman. But I’m not interested in just any woman. I know I need conversation and company and friendship as a base. And I’ll be very blunt – I find you attractive as a person and a woman. I’m not a saint, and from my experience with Clara, gentle manhandling of breasts is a mutually enjoyable activity. If – and I stress if – you are interested in sex, or perhaps just a cuddle or so, then I will be very interested. But I only want to do things

with you – sexual or otherwise – that we both want to share.”

Margaret blushed. I continued.

“To be even more direct, Annie and I were talking about the problems of relationships and sex, along with the dangers of pregnancy and disease. We talked about contraception, and after some deliberation – I trust Annie to be thoughtful about her behaviour – I got some condoms, because it is less awkward for a man to get them. So I have some in the suitcase, where they can stay until and unless they are needed.”

Again a pause. A long pause.

“I feel relieved ... but quite confused.”

“We don’t know each other very well yet. That’s one reason for my being here. And Clara’s death is very recent. I know that some of me is trying to escape thinking about that, and it isn’t really fair to you to be a distraction rather than the main attraction.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. Now I’m more muddled.”

“Do you enjoy it when we are together?”

“Yes. Very much, But it’s a bit new to me.”

“I like it too, but of course I am used to sharing my life with a woman – if you include Blue, then two women. Let’s just play it by ear, but keep talking to make sure we get the most out of our time together.”

“All right. Do you want to eat soon? I’ve made a stew, but it can be warmed up again.”

“Maybe we should go for a walk. I don’t know Hamilton. It’s well before 4 pm. Oh. If we do go to the party on Monday, I’ll need a bathing suit, so perhaps we should go where there are shops.

By the way. I don’t want you out of pocket because I came for a visit. I’ve enough money for the weekend, and even some traveller’s cheques left over from over a year ago in Europe. They’re in Canadian dollars anyway, so I keep them for emergencies.”

“Martin! I have a job. And you’re my guest.”

“OK. Just letting you know how I feel about that. And if there’s something I want to do that costs a bit more than usual, I should pay. Now, I do need a bathing suit for Monday if we’re to swim.”

“Maybe I need a bathing suit too. The one I have I got when I was a teenager – I don’t swim much – and it really isn’t comfortable.”

“I’m tempted to ask why, but that will likely embarrass you.”

“Ten minutes ago, you would have. Somehow less so now. The

suit I have is a traditional black one piece of knitted material. Because I'm big on top, it tends to pull at the crutch."

Martin noticed she used "crutch" rather than "crotch". Another trans-Atlantic difference.

"Maybe a two-piece would be better for you?"

"I hadn't thought of that. They're rather daring, aren't they?"

"In your case, a modest two-piece would, I think, be more comfortable and, um, less distracting for the men at the pool."

Margaret giggled.

"I think you may be right. Let me get my handbag and we'll go. It's a little far to downtown, but I've some bus tickets."

We took the bus and got off near Eatons, where we separated to shop for bathing suits, agreeing to meet in 20 minutes at one of the exits. I found some boxer trunks, then spent a bit of time in the hardware area browsing the tools before going to the exit. Margaret came along in a couple of minutes, looking pleased. We started walking down the street, looking in the shop windows.

"You found something that fits?" I asked.

"Yes. And it's not an "itsy bitsy, teeny weeny" one, and it has stripes rather than polka dots. And it's red and white, not yellow." She was enjoying herself and now a lot more at ease.

"I'm glad for you, though perhaps I'd have enjoyed the itsy-bitsy type," I said.

Margaret coloured.

"Oh, I'm just teasing. Look. There's a shop called Curly's Hat and Cap shop. I love hats. People don't wear them as much as they used to."

We went in the small shop, which had shelves bursting with hats. A man in his 50s came out and asked if he could help us.

"I'm always looking for a good cap." I said. "Do you have any with ear flaps for winter?"

"Here you are sir. This one hides the flaps when you don't need them. There are several fabrics. We make them ourselves. I think that one will fit you."

The man had a good eye. It fitted nicely and looked attractive. I could tell by Margaret's appreciative look. Then I pulled out the ear flaps that were concealed under the rim and put it back on. Margaret laughed.

"You wouldn't laugh at minus 20." I said.

“No, of course not. It just looks funny on a bright day like today.”

I bought the cap, and we walked slowly back towards Margaret’s apartment. I saw a pharmacy.

“Do we need any suntan lotion?”

“Yes. With my Scottish skin, I turn red in five minutes.”

We went in and bought a bottle of Coppertone. I figured we could share it.

“I wonder how much UV this actually stops.” I mused.

“That might make an interesting spectroscopic study. I don’t do UV, but there might be equipment somewhere about, and it would be pretty easy to test by spreading it on slides.” Margaret said.

“Maybe we’ll look into it. Could be fun and useful for some of those popular science lectures. Most universities run them at Christmas, and they sometimes rope new profs. into giving them.”

“I was approached last December, but begged off on the basis of too much to do as a newcomer. Really I was afraid to be in front of an audience. And I had no idea what to talk about. Sun cream would be a good topic, and I might not feel so shy in front of ordinary people with something to talk about that they use in their own lives.”

We arrived back at the apartment, almost faster than I’d expected. I asked

“Shall I get my sleeping bag out of the car?”

“Oh yes. Though I can provide linen and a blanket if you’d prefer.”

“No problem. Save you laundry. Though a pillow would be nice.”

“I have one spare – I’m still getting settled. The place was furnished, and has a double bed I’m still finding too big for me, but I did get two pillows for it.”

I closed the car and we went in and up the stairs.

“I’ll get the stew on. Hope you like carrots and onions and things like that.”

“I’m pretty much an omnivore. There are things I don’t much like, but almost nothing I can’t eat. How about you?”

“There’s not much I don’t eat either. But I think my experience is not all that wide. I’ve seen some things in the supermarket here that I don’t recognize, and wonder what they are. I’ve been trying to get up courage to try avocado pears.” Margaret admitted.

“Sometimes best to find someone who knows how they are to be eaten. You wouldn’t want to come home with a dourian.”

“What’s that?”

“A fruit in Malaysia or Indonesia. It is supposedly divine if you can get past the smell. They apparently have signs on buses and trains prohibiting them on the vehicles.”

“My landlord would not be happy.”

“Do you want some wine? I’ve brought two whites, but they are not chilled.”

“We could put one in the freezer for a while.”

This we did, and I opened it as Margaret served up the stew, which was remarkably good.

“Very nice. Is there a recipe, or does it fall under the rubric “traditional” .”

“More the latter. I simply dredge meat in flour and brown it in a bit of butter.”

“That’s the secret – butter.” I interjected.

“Maybe. But then lots of onions and then plenty of other vegetables, plus a little garlic, and a few herbs, preferably fresh, though here I use the bottled ones.”

“Tell me about your family, and I’ll tell you about mine.” I said.

“Not a lot to tell. My father was a schoolmaster, and before she married my mother taught as well. I’m the baby of the family. My mother is in her late sixties already and my father died in ’55 at age 75. I’ve an older sister Jean and brother Jock. Jean was 11 and Jock 9 when I was born.”

Martin told his history and how he came to be in England during the War. He mentioned his parents – they were currently in Washington on what would likely be Robert’s last posting.

“Martin, will tapioca pudding and tinned apricots be all right for dessert.”

“Fine. Haven’t had tapioca for a while. A lot of people don’t like it, but I do.”

“So do I. Though kids at school called it frog spawn. Sometimes I think they did it to try to get the other kids to leave it so they got extra.”

We ate dessert in silence, but it was not awkward. I topped up the wine glasses. While Margaret was clearing dishes, I noticed a small record player and a few records. Seeing a Joan Baez LP, I

asked.

“May I put on a record?”

“Certainly. I assume you know how.”

“Think I can work it out.”

I put on the record.

“Do you want tea or coffee?” Margaret asked.

“I think the wine will do me. I’ve about half a glass left.”

“So have I.”

For a while we sat once more in silence, listening to Baez’ unadorned songs. When one side finished, Margaret turned it over and restarted the player. We didn’t say anything, but the simple companionship felt fine.

At around 8, I began to feel sleepy.

“Margaret, it’s been a long day for me. Perhaps I should turn in. Tomorrow we can try for Niagara if it’s fine, else stay local and see the Botanical Gardens and some other places nearby.”

“That sounds nice. Let’s get you set up on the settee. I’ll probably read in bed for a while. And I too can use an early night.”

“I remember how it’s a settee in England, I mean Britain, but a sofa here. Or even a Chesterfield.”

“That’s something I’m just beginning to be conscious about. There are so many little differences.”

I unrolled the sleeping bag and Margaret got me a pillow.

“Do you want first bathroom?” I said.

“All right. Won’t be a minute.”

I got out my pyjamas and wash-bag. Since I’d stopped shaving at the end of the War, there was less clutter, but I wanted the toothbrush and paste. I also took out my spare pants and laid them over the back of the sofa so they wouldn’t get too wrinkled. Margaret called out

“All yours. The blue towel and flannel are for you.”

I took my pyjamas and wash-bag into the bathroom. After I used the toilet and washed my hands, I ran the wash-cloth – Margaret had called it a flannel in the English, no British fashion – over my face, then undressed and put on pyjama bottoms. As I started brushing my teeth there was a mighty crash and a cry of surprise. I quickly spit out and wiped my mouth, then ran out of the bathroom and called

“Margaret, are you all right?” to the closed door of her – well the only – bedroom.

“No, but Oh it’s so embarrassing. Don’t come in. Oh do come in, but don’t look!”

“OK. Coming in, but I’ll have to watch where I’m going.”

As I came in the bedroom, I saw the reason for the fuss. Margaret had undressed and likely was taking her nightgown off a hanger in the closet when the bar holding all her clothes on clothes hangers had collapsed at one end. Some clothes were on the floor of the closet, but Margaret had managed to grab the bar and hold it up. Unfortunately, this was before she had managed to find any covering. I had a fine view of her completely naked, and noted her breasts were superb. She had strong legs and a luxuriant bush of pubic hair a few shades darker than the straw-coloured head hair.

“Let me grab the bar and you find your nightie.” I offered, taking the bar even though it meant I had to brush against her in the limited space.

Margaret dived into the pile of clothes in the closet to retrieve the nightgown and jumped away, turning her back to me as she put it on. Then she sat on the bed, put her head in her hands and started weeping.

“Margaret, can you postpone the wailing until we have the situation under control. I don’t think I can play Atlas to your wardrobe for very long. Our Canadian closets aren’t up to the weight of good Scottish woollens.”

Indeed, a lot of Margaret’s clothes were sturdy skirts and tunics.

“Oh. I’m such a dolt. What shall we do?”

“I think start by taking several of these hangers at time and lay the clothes on the bed. When we’ve got them all off the bar, we’ll sort out what we can do.”

Margaret quickly removed 4-5 hangers at a time and soon the bar was free. I lifted it off its rest – it was simply a metal pipe in two wooden rails. At one end the rail had a hole drilled big enough for the pipe. At the other the hole had been extended to a U shape so the pipe could be taken out. But at that end, the bottom of the U had failed. Either the wood would have to be glued, or more likely replaced.

We picked up the clothes from the floor, then stood back to survey the scene.

"Unless you have some wood screws and a drill of some sort, I don't think this can be fixed tonight." I volunteered.

"I'll call the landlord in the morning, but I think he said he was going away for the long weekend."

"It's not a big deal to fix, and quicker than waiting for someone to come. I think I saw a hardware store. They'll be open in the morning. Do you have any tools?"

"A screwdriver and a pair of pliers. More at the lab of course."

"I've a few in the car, but nothing to drill with. We'll work out what we need and get things shipshape before we take off for Niagara. Once we have the necessities, it will only take 15 minutes."

"But what about tonight? I can't leave everything on the bed." Margaret looked like she was about to cry again. Instinctively, I put my arm around her shoulder.

"We'll need to put them somewhere else, and I didn't see any other closet space. The living room has only the sofa and a small chair – I was going to put my clothes there. They are still in the bathroom on the floor. But I don't think we should put all your clothes on the floor."

I paused. The bed was big enough for us both, and I knew I wouldn't make a nuisance of myself. Well, I didn't think I would. Never liked being pushy.

"Margaret. Would you be upset at sharing the double bed? We could put the clothes on the sofa until we fix the rail in the morning."

Margaret tensed under my arm.

"I ... I'm not sure."

"Then let's clear the kitchen table and chairs and put everything there."

"But that would be such a nuisance in the morning when we want breakfast. Oh. I'm twenty-nine. I'm old enough to do what I like. We'll share the bed!"

I was a bit taken aback by the vehemence of her response, but turned to the bed and started gathering clothes and carrying them to the living room across the landing. Margaret did the same. We lay them carefully over the sofa, though I rescued my pants first, and brought them and my bags across to the bedroom where I put my things in a corner away from the door. Then I went back to the bathroom, brushed my teeth again because I'd only just started before, and put on my pyjama jacket. I'd not felt undressed. Some-

how I was already comfortable around Margaret, even though she was so nervous.

I saw Margaret's facecloth, and realizing her face was tear-stained, rinsed it in warm water and carried it across to the bedroom.

Margaret looked up as I came in. She was putting my pillow that she had taken from the sofa on the empty space on the bed that was furthest from the door. This would be the left side when sitting in the bed. I realized that with Clara, we always took those sides too. I had to jerk myself back to the present.

"Here, let me wipe the tear-streaks away." I took her glasses off and gently passed the facecloth over her cheeks, then on a whim lifted her chin and gave her a small kiss on the lips.

"Oh." She flustered.

"Let me put this back in the bathroom," I deliberately ignored her momentary upset. When I came back, I asked

"You'd like me on that side?"

"Yes please. I might need to get up in the night." I noticed that the side she was on also had a lamp, which was not on.

"You'd better put on the lamp before we switch off the main light. And I'd better find my flashlight – torch to Brits – in case I need to pee in the night." I reached into my backpack and found the item in question and put it on the floor beside the bed. It happened to be the one I'd used in Clara's cottage near Ninove in '44. That memory gave me a bit of a jolt. Still, I took off my slippers, and swung into bed. Margaret was still standing beside the bed, looking lost.

"Better take off your specs, turn out the light, and get in the sack." I said gently.

"Yes. It just seems odd, that's all. And you kissed me."

"Is there any reason I shouldn't?"

"No. It felt nice. It felt right. But ... Oh. I'm being such a silly cow."

She put her glasses on the small table that held the lamp, turned off the switch for the central light that was above it by the door, and sat on the bed. Then she took off her slippers and brought her feet into the bed and pulled up the covers. Finally she reached over and turned out the light. Martin felt her shift back into bed.

"Quite an end to the evening." I observed.

"Yes." The answer was very flat. It was clear Margaret was lying

on her back and very still.

“Can I offer you an arm?” I volunteered.

“I ... I don’t know what you mean.”

“I’ll put out my right arm and you snuggle in close. Sort of like when we were looking at the disaster and I thought you were about to cry again.”

“I was about to cry actually. It’s so unsettling. Yes, an arm would be nice.”

“OK I’ll gently move my arm over and you manoeuvre in against me.”

Margaret did this, but things felt crowded.

“Oops. I think you need to lift your breast so it rests on me or we’ll be uncomfortable.”

“At least in the dark you can’t see me blushing.”

“It’s good you are getting a bit of a sense of humour about the awkwardness of real life. But after all that panic, I may need some mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’d like you to kiss me.”

“Oh. ...Oh. I’m ... er ... Well ...”

I felt her move and then felt a surprisingly warm kiss.

“Mmm. Nice.” I murmured.

“Yes it is. ... I hope this isn’t just the wine.”

“If it is, I’ll have to save the label.”

We both giggled. I kissed her again, and she responded in kind.

“Am I allowed to say I liked what I saw when you were stuck holding the bar.”

“I’m so mortified. But I’m glad you liked seeing me. Oh ... I’m sooo mixed up.”

“You didn’t think of this as a possibility for us when we talked of my coming last week?”

“No. Of course not. ... Oh. I’m lying. I’ve been wondering what it was like to ... to... be with a man. But I’m scared at the same time.”

“Can I touch?” I asked, but actually didn’t wait for her to respond and gently moved my hand up around the breast resting on my chest. The hand actually didn’t fit all the way round the surprisingly firm flesh.

“Naughty!” she said.

“Then I’ll take my hand away.”

“No!” The response was tinged with panic. Then more calmly, “It’s nice there. Oh. But I feel that I shouldn’t let you. I was brought up to be a nice girl who didn’t do such things.”

“Margaret, I don’t want to cause you confusion, but I like you, and I like closeness and cuddling and a whole lot more that we may or may not decide we want to do together. It seems to me you have a good healthy body and you like being kissed and touched. Your nipples here are betraying you.”

“Oohh nooo.” She wailed.

“Oohh yeesss. Just like some bits of me are quite insistent that you are a very attractive woman.”

“What do Oohh.” I had gently pushed against her and was obviously hard.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“You didn’t. I’m just surprised. And I’m not at all used to being with a man like this.”

“Are you unhappy about being close like this.”

“No. Just not sure how I should behave.”

“Be yourself and tell me what you like, what you don’t like. Let me do whatever you find pleases, and be insistent that I not do anything that causes pain or discomfort, including emotional discomfort.”

“That’s good advice. As I said, I’m twenty-nine and ...”

“Is that important to you?”

“Yes. I want to experience life, but there are so many horror stories, and as I said, I’ve had some close misses.”

“But do you feel we could be a horror story?” I asked.

“I don’t think so, but we’ve a lot to learn about each other, and we live a long way apart. We’ve only met a week ago. I can’t see either of us moving city to be with the other right away. It’s hard enough to find good positions for researchers.”

“No. That’s a bit sobering if we were to decide we want to be a couple. And it is rather recent that Clara died. My emotions are a bit frozen, I think. I couldn’t imagine being with you like this two weeks ago.”

“But Martin, this may seem very callous and unlike me. But I think I just realized it might not be a bad thing for me to get some experience with a man who is straightforward and gentle, even if it

didn't become a lifetime thing. Otherwise, how will I find out what I want?"

"Thank you for such honesty Margaret." I kissed her gently and slowly, and made it last.

We broke the kiss and lay together for a while. We were, I guess, both thinking. Finally, I asked,

"Do you want to take off your nightie?"

"After what I've said, I suppose I should say yes."

"But it still feels awkward."

"Yes. Though you've seen me already, so I suppose I'm still being silly."

"Please keep being silly if it means being yourself."

She kissed me quickly.

"Thanks for being so understanding. Let me go and I'll take it off."

"Do you want me to take off my PJs?"

"More silly. But I know I both want you to but am frightened too."

"I think you should put on the bedside light. I'll find the condoms in case we need them. Though I suspect we may decide to just learn about each other tonight."

Margaret put on the light, got out of bed and took off the nightgown.

"Turn round and let me look." She did as he directed. Magnificent!

I got out of bed and found the packet of condoms. I took off the pyjama jacket and slid off the bottoms. I was about to get back into bed, but realized Margaret had put on her glasses and was staring.

"It's so big. It'll never fit inside me!"

"I'm actually not extraordinary in any way. It's quite possible that we won't at first be able to achieve what the medics so coldly call penetration. By the way, I never want to hear you say something like 'Martin fucked me', at least in a way that it seems something that I do TO you, without you fully approving. Whatever we do should be shared, with affection and joy, and hopefully enthusiasm. So relax and let's see what pleasure we can share."

"All right." Margaret said quietly, inching towards the bed.

We got onto the bed, and I gently pulled her towards me.

"You really are lovely. Do you want to keep your glasses on?"

“I want to look, but they do get in the way. Do you really mind if I keep them on?”

“No. But we should see if we can find you some glasses that are not so heavy looking. Your hairstyle is fine without the glasses – it’s sensible and simple – but together with the glasses you get a rather severe look.”

“British NHS glasses. And I dress too plainly.”

“Maybe. Annie noted that you like to hide these.” I jiggled her breasts and she giggled.

“I don’t want them being a distraction.”

“Ooh. Lovely distractions.” I kissed her mouth, then gently pushed her to lie down as I nibbled down her neck and kissed her breasts and nipples.

“That feels nice.”

“Mmm. I like doing it. I’ll bet it makes you wet.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let your legs apart a bit.”

“You won’t try toAt least not yet please.”

“No, I was going to feel to see if you are getting wet. It will make things easier when the time comes.”

I gently put my hand between her legs and found that indeed she was quite slippery.

“Can you feel that?”

“Yes. It’s really embarrassing.”

“Why embarrassing? I’m sure I’m getting wet too. It’s to make things easier.”

“Can I see?”

“Of course.” I knelt up.

“Oh. It’s going to drip.”

“Why don’t you spread the lubricant around the head?”

She reached out and touched me.

“It’s soft. Feels nice.”

“It definitely feels nice for me. Quite takes my breath away.”

I put my hand back between her legs and found her clitoris.

“That takes MY breath away,” she gasped.

“Your clitoris. Clara and I sometimes called it the panic button. Oh. Maybe I shouldn’t mention Clara.”

“No. I think it would get in the way of me knowing you and you being comfortable with me to try to avoid mentioning someone you

clearly loved dearly. But why panic button?"

It was heartwarming to hear her say those wise words about Clara. But returning to the task at hand, I wiggled my finger and she breathed in suddenly.

"Is that an answer?" I said.

"Yes. It is rather. I know it feels nice, but we had all sorts of lectures in school about not "playing with ourselves"."

"Same for me. I don't quite believe it. I suppose if it gets to be something that occupies you all the time. Oh. Go a little easy or you'll have me squirting on the bedsheets."

"Really. You're not just saying that?"

"No. I don't mind if you set me off, but I don't want to surprise or upset you. Maybe we should lie on a towel."

"There's towels in the bottom drawer of the chest there."

I got a towel and Margaret moved aside while I spread it across the bed.

"Lie on that side of it and I'll lie on my side here and we can caress each other. But do it slowly so I can let you know if I'm about to come."

She put her hand round me again. I rested on my elbow and continued to caress between her legs, where she was now quite wet, while I kissed her breasts, occasionally sucking on a nipple to keep it hard. I noticed sucking quite strongly seemed to increase the flow of her juices.

"Margaret. I'm going to slip a finger inside gently if that's all right with you."

"Do you think it will hurt?"

"It shouldn't, but tell me if it is even a little uncomfortable."

I pushed my middle finger into her, noticing that she tensed up.

"You are pretty tight. I think a bit of nerves. But did it hurt?"

"No. It just feels odd. I've never had anything there before."

"No tampons. No pelvic exam."

"I haven't used tampons. Mother implied that they were for married women. I had to have a pelvic exam before I came to Canada. It was pretty awful. I hurt for days after."

"Enough to make you recoil from even a finger."

"I suppose so. They may have broken my hymen I think."

"But you like this?" I went back to massaging her clit.

“I **love** the feel of that. And I can do more or less the same to you too.” She gently ran fingers and thumb across the head of my cock.

“Oh. I think you’ve pushed me over the edge. Ah. Yes!” I said as I ejaculated. It had been a while, and there was quite a lot of semen, fortunately on the towel or Margaret.

“It’s not like I thought. Sort of milky and sticky.”

“And on your tummy.” I had already put some Kleenex under the pillow and gave her one while I mopped up her stomach. Then I wiped myself.

“Thanks.” She said. “I’m glad the paper hankies were there.”

“I put some under the pillow in case. I hope you don’t find it repugnant.”

“Sort of messy. But not repugnant. It has a slightly bleachy smell, but not nasty.”

“Shall we wash up so if I touch you there’s no semen to get where it shouldn’t?”

“Yes. And then maybe try to sleep. I want to think a bit about what’s happened.”

Rather unromantically, we washed together at the sink in the bathroom, put on our night attire and got back into bed, pulled up the covers and were both asleep in a couple of minutes.

May 15, 1964 – Anna

Dad left for Hamilton early on Friday morning. I went to work as usual, but I’d arranged for Fred to meet me as I finished and we’d come home together. He had a job helping out on a research project of some profs in collaboration with a group at NRC, and Fred was actually working out on the Montreal Road site. He normally took the bus, but today he’d the family car and he could pick me up.

Fred dropped me off, took the car home, then walked back – it was maybe a 15 minute walk at the most. I used the time to prepare some cheese and crackers. I’d a general plan to take Fred out for supper as a celebration of the scholarship he’d been offered at UBC. Nothing expensive, just a burger or fish and chips. But there was also an assortment of food in the house we could have.

And I was, I guess, wondering whether it was time to find out what sex was like. It seemed that Marcia had not had the best of

experiences, but Jane seemed to be rather satisfied in a quiet and non-boastful way.

Well, I'd see if Fred would talk to me about his feelings about life and love, so to speak.

When Fred got back, we sat at the kitchen table with the cheese and some cola.

"Congratulations on your scholarship, Fred. I hope it works out well for you."

"I think it will. There's talk that several universities will be trying to set up an accelerator facility. So it could be an interesting time. I just hope I can get a good thesis topic that won't be held up for need of research equipment or facilities."

"Yeah. Physics can be expensive for some areas of research."

"I'll miss time with you."

"Yes. I'll miss you too. Knowing you'd be going away has likely kept me from being ... well, allowing myself to get too attached to you."

"It's the same for me. I know you need to finish your degree and have two more years to go on that."

"Do you think we've held back on our feelings? Or are we more great friends than the love of each other's lives?"

"I'd not thought about that. Perhaps the way my family pushes for my sister and I to get a good education, I didn't dare think about it."

"For me, maybe Mum's illness and death has me a bit scared to let you become too close. And at this moment in life, I don't want to be madly in love and have to choose between being with someone and getting the career I want."

"I think it's easier for men. Women are sort of expected to follow the man. That's changing, of course."

"Do you think it should change?"

"Oh yes. But I don't think a lot of men are that thrilled."

"What do you think women should do to balance their education and social life?"

"I guess what we're doing. Being friends and working at our education but putting off marriage and family."

"It means missing out on ... well, sex, for some of the best years of ones life."

“An unwanted pregnancy would spoil both education and probably other parts of life. My Mum always warns me that I need to be careful not to get a girl into trouble.”

“There are ways to minimize the risk.”

“Yes. Some guys get prophylactics and keep one in their wallet. Probably makes it no use if they ever got the chance to use it.”

“I was asking Dad about contraception the other day.”

“You can talk to him about such things?” Fred seemed shocked.

“I think since Mum died, we talk about things. I don’t think we could have otherwise. He mentioned how in England you got them – condoms that is – from the barber, and we talked a bit. I’d sort of figured out that he and Mum had been together before they were married, and ... well, we talked about such things.”

“It wouldn’t happen at my house.”

“Nor here I think if Mum hadn’t died. It kind of forced us to talk about our feelings and stuff.

Fred. When we were talking, he said he realized that I might get into a situation where I was like Mum, and he didn’t want me to be at risk. So in fact there are some condoms in the house.”

“Oh.”

“I’ve never had sex, but I am curious. And I don’t want to do it under pressure or in the back of a car or ... well, you know.”

“I’ve never had much chance either – just once – but I know I’d love to, and particularly with you, Annie. I’ve really enjoyed our friendship.”

“We’re neither of us in love with the other, are we? Does that make it wrong to talk about having sex?”

“It might actually be better for your first time. We know we are good friends and care about each other. Not being out of control could be a very good thing.” Clearly Fred shared my thoughts along those lines.

“How should we proceed?”

“I’ve just started to think about that. I didn’t expect to have this possibility.” Fred was looking flustered. And a bit awkward in his chair.

“I won’t make you climb the chain link fence to get in.”

We laughed.

“We practised the fence climbing in case we needed to get over such a fence to get out of Hungary. But on the day we left Hungary,

we just walked across a field in the dark.”

I was feeling awkward, but figured we’d better do something if we were going to.

“Do you want dinner first, or shall we work up an appetite?”

“Work up an appetite!” Fred sounded very keen.

We went upstairs and into my bedroom. Fred was about to kiss me when I ducked away into the master bedroom and came back with the condoms.

“Why don’t you read the leaflet while I take a quick rinse in the shower. I got a bit sweaty at work hefting the bound journals in the library to find the papers we’ve been looking at.”

“Er... OK. Can I do the same? I’ll feel ... well, it would be nice to be fresh.”

“There’s a blue towel and facecloth.”

I took my shower, and came into my bedroom with my towel round me. No, not pink, but a maroon one. Fred put down the leaflet and disappeared into the bathroom. I reread the leaflet to make sure I knew the steps. Fred came back with his towel round his waist. I was sitting on the bed.

“You won’t need this,” I said, whipping off the towel. He was already at attention.

I’d half stood up to kiss him, and he pulled off my towel. “Nor you this!”

We kissed and I felt one of his hands behind me and one on my breast, and a pretty hard item pressing into my belly.

“I can see why it needs to go inside.” I joked, but I was actually pretty nervous. Fred picked up on that.

“You’re a bit scared it might hurt. That breaking your hymen might be painful.”

“Maybe. But I use tampons, and they go in and out OK. Mum said she never noticed her hymen, and thought it got stretched or broken through riding horses or bikes or other exercise, and for me maybe tampons.”

“In our house the women don’t talk to the men about that.”

“What about the woman you had an experience with?”

“She was a friend of the family who came to Ottawa on business. A very independent woman. About 2 years ago. My folks asked me to show her Ottawa, as they were both working. We had a really nice day walking all over the place, and we were going go back to my

house for family dinner. But a bit before 4 pm she said she wanted to go back to the Elgin where she was staying. I offered to pick her up later, but she said we could take a taxi, and why not have some tea and a bit of a sit down for a while.

She ordered tea from room service and after it came, she said she felt like a shower. I offered to leave, but she asked directly would I like to join her. She was older, but still very attractive. I'm not very good at recognizing the signals. Like just now with you. But I jumped at the chance, and after the shower, she took out this disk thing and put some cream on it and put it up her ... vagina. She said it was a diaphragm.

We made love twice. It was very nice, though I went off too quickly the first time. Clearly she was experienced. She told me what she wanted me to do. Slower, gentler, then as she got excited, harder."

"We'll have to learn together, I'm afraid. But please be very gentle and slow at first so we don't do me an injury."

"Sure. Shall I put on a sheath?"

"Better. You talking about it makes me want to try. But I'm still a little nervous. Actually a lot nervous."

I put a dry towel on the bed. Perhaps I'm a neatnik. Then I lay down. Fred was rolling the sheath on his penis, which looked as if it would be too big to fit in my hole. It was at least 3 times as fat as a tampon. Well, a new tampon. Maybe double a used one.

Fred lay down beside me and slipped one arm under my neck while he caressed my breast with the other. He kissed me, then kissed down my throat to my breasts and nipples. That felt nice.

"Shall I ...?"

"Yes. I want to try to find out what it feels like."

He rolled on top of me as I let my legs apart. I could feel his penis against my ... ? Pussy? Vagina? Cunt? ... We'd need to work out our own nomenclature. But he wasn't positioned to the hole.

"I think if you raise your legs and reach down and guide me into you." Fred said.

I did as he asked. His penis felt hard inside its rubber skin. I put the tip against my opening and he pushed a bit.

"I'm too small or too tight." I said.

"Possibly nerves. Try to relax. Maybe think about how pretty

the tulips are just now.”

Hmm. Thinking of the tulips I suddenly felt the his ... er... cock head ... go inside.

“Oh. You went in.”

“Just a bit. I’ll gently move in and out. Try to stay relaxed.”

“Think of the tulips.” I quipped.

He was gently pushing in then pulling out, but not all the way. He left the head always inside. Then I felt his pubic area against mine.

“Hey. We’re there. All the way in.” I said.

“Yes. And two lips either side of my penis.”

“Meaning?” I didn’t understand.

“The two lips of your ... vagina. I can’t really feel them, but I know they’re there. Oh. I shouldn’t think of that. Ooh. Sorry Annie, I went off too fast.”

“Better grab the condom as you pull out like the leaflet says. We’ve got time to try again.”

“Yes. But this happened with Anastasia too, as I said. It’s really embarrassing.”

“I’ve heard girls joke about guys losing it like that, so I don’t think you’re alone. How long before you can go again?” I was kind of getting a taste for this activity. Naughty me.

“A few minutes. Sometimes I guess almost right away. And I should last a lot longer the second time, and subsequent ones if we can manage them.”

Fred removed the condom and we wrapped it in a Kleenex. I’d have to make sure the garbage was well-wrapped. The leaflet said not to flush down the toilet, but apparently lots of people did.

“I’ll wash off. We don’t want any chance of stray semen.”

I could appreciate that. When Fred came back I motioned him to lie down. I wanted to take a good look at his equipment.

“What do you want to call this?” I said, gently lifting his penis.

“Penis or cock? Up to you.”

“I guess penis. I’m not quite used to cock yet.

What about me? Vagina really means the tube bit. I think vulva is the official name for the external parts. I’ve heard pussy used, and sometimes cunt. I don’t like how those words are used for expletives, but I don’t mind if we use them just for us when talking about me.”

“When you had your legs open for me, the word ‘cunt’ was in my head. It’s a very nice cunt too.”

“Hmm. You’re getting hard again. Here’s a condom. I’d like to watch as you put it on so I know how they work.”

I watched as he put it on. Rather like putting on silk stockings, but you didn’t have a garter belt. I almost laughed at the idea of a little belt and straps round his ... cock and ... balls... Oh. I was getting really slutty.

“Does it feel comfortable?”

“I can’t really feel it?”

“Shall I try coming on top of you? Everything I’ve heard about is with the man on top, but it might give me more ... er... freedom of movement.”

“Do you think they’ll ever ask how many degrees of freedom there are for a copulating couple?” Fred asked, and we both laughed. Inside joke for physicists.

“It’s hard to think of physicists and sex in the same sentence.” I answered as we stopped laughing.

I swung my leg over Fred’s hips. As I did, he reached out and gently stroked my ...er... pussy. Well the lips. Then he gently took them between his finger and thumb and gave a gentle tug. Then slipped a finger along between them. Rather nice. Not screaming ecstasy, but a pleasure I could really get to want regularly.

I scooched up a bit – the end of his ... er ... cock (I think I will use that term in my own mind and maybe with him) was up closer to his belly button.

“Why don’t you position it at my entrance?” I suggested.

Fred needed no prompting and with his hand pushed his cock up so the tip was between the lips he’d been playing gently with. I eased down and ... whoah ... suddenly I realized I had a cuntfull. Hell, I’m getting really bad. But it felt nice.

I gently moved about. Up and down, a bit forward and back and side to side.

“Fred. I’m not sure what’s nicest, so I’m trying out some different movements. Let me know what you like.”

“All of the above! Just don’t stop for too long.”

“I think we’ll use ‘All of the above’ as our private expression for fun.”

“I can go for that. It feels pretty fantastic, and I’ve a good view

of your tits ... er ... breasts.”

“You can use ‘tits’ with me. ‘Cunt’ too if you like. But I hope you never talk about me to anyone else using those words. People can be cruel.”

“I’m assuming I won’t get more of this nice activity if I were to do that. I really LOVE the feel of your cunt round my cock.” I think I prefer ‘pussy’, but just privately I don’t mind what Fred calls it as long as I get these nice feelings.

“Me too. But let’s change back to you on top.”

I eased off him, and we shifted round.

“Is it better legs up or down?” I asked.

“For in and out, when your legs are up. I think if we want to just kiss and be affectionate, it could be nice legs down and not doing too much. Just sort of be together. But I kind of feel like I’m near to going off. Do you mind? You haven’t got really excited.”

“No go ahead. Or should I say ‘come ahead’? The slang of sex is so confusing. But I’m having a nice time. Just take things a bit carefully so we don’t hurt each other or break the condom.”

Fred was now on top and I found myself almost involuntarily raising my legs to a level that helped him get all the way in. An odd sensation, but rather nice as he moved in and out. Then he started to breath heavily and suddenly pushed in as far as he could and held himself there for a few seconds.

“Oh that was a good one.” he said as he reached down to hold the condom on his cock as he pulled out. “I really hope that was nice for you. It was fantastic for me.”

“Yeah. I liked it. Could become addictive. Want something to eat now, or want to cuddle for a bit.”

“Tough question. I want both at once. Let’s eat, then see if we want it again.”

“Again?! Fred! You are now a certified sex-maniac.”

“What does that make you?”

“Oh. I’ve been a certified sex-maniac for at least the last 10 minutes. Since you put that wonderful cock in me.” Might as well make the man happy. His cock had felt nice, though he seemed to expect me to get much more excited.

“Fred. You seem to expect me to be more excited.”

“Well, Anastasia – the older woman – she moaned and groaned and made all sorts of noise and got quite out of control at one point.”

“Maybe it’s like women and babies. Some scream a lot giving birth, and some are pretty quiet.”

“You mean noise and enjoyment aren’t necessarily correlated?”

“Yeah. Maybe I’m not such a noisy ...er ... fuck.”

“You’ll do fine.” He gave me the most wonderful tender kiss. I nearly melted.

“Let’s put on some clothes so we don’t risk upsetting the neighbours. And we can have some supper, then, as you suggest, we can try it again. That’s if your equipment is up to it.” As I said this, I sort of wondered if my own bits were going to stand up to the bump and grind. Well, we’d see.

It was about 7:30. We were feeling a bit lazy, so I made a mushroom omelet with toast. We drank tea. I thought of offering some booze, but I was still under age and we really didn’t need any extra ... perturbations. In one of my classes they’d mentioned perturbation theory. Well Fred and I were involved in empirical perturbations.

We were naked and into our third session by 8:30. Am I going to be slut of the year? This time we took it very slowly. Fred lasted almost half an hour, but a lot of that was just lying together talking about everything and nothing. We even planned the rest of the weekend.

Then Fred pushed himself up on his arms and had me raise my legs and we got a bit more active. I could feel a sense of increasing excitement in both of us, and think I had a bit of a climax along with Fred, but I think his was more intense. Well, still learning. I’m surprised how much of the excitement is mental and learning how to let go and enjoy myself. And Fred’s you know what, of course. I wonder how much of the fun is me and how much is him. The imponderables of life.

May 16, 1964 – Anna

Looking back, we almost followed our plan to the letter. I think I almost had a timetable posted above my pussy.

Fred went home at around 10:45 Friday night. I read for a while, but my mind was elsewhere. Actually it was nowhere. This warm, gooey sensation between my legs seemed to have turned my brain to mush. I fell asleep pretty quickly. Sometime around 1 a.m. I turned

out the light that I'd left on by the bed. Good job I'd brushed my teeth.

Fred came about 3 on Saturday. We got in a double header – could I turn that into a double entendre? Maybe – before we went to dinner as Fred's treat in a local diner. This was the fish and chips we'd considered for Friday. Then we went to see the 'Pink Panther' at the Elgin. He dropped me off at home. Gave me a big kiss and manhandled my tits. My bra was all crooked afterwards. I'll have to tell him to be more careful. They cost money and I don't want them all stretched out of shape. And while I could go without, it really isn't considered proper these days.

He came over on his bike at about 1 pm on Sunday. He goes to church with his family. Better to not upset the parents. He helped me check out my bike. It needed a bit of a wipe, some oil and minor adjustment and tires pumped. By 1:45 we were able to ride together and followed Main Street past the University – I should use my bike to do this to get to work! – and then along Sussex to Rockcliffe. At the overlook we stopped. I had some snacks in my carrier and some pop. Damn. There was no toilet close by. Fortunately I didn't get too desperate, and we came back via Montreal Road and Rideau to Elgin and then back home.

Given the holiday weekend, it was pretty quiet. Fred had brought some things to use for supper and we cooked a curry together.

You could say we had each other for aperitif and digestif. I'm getting worse and worse. At least my equipment is holding up. So is Fred's – holding 'up' that is – and that's more critical of course.

On Monday there was the informal school reunion. Fred was required to be at home for a dinner with some Hungarian friends, but he came over for lunch where he was the appetizer and the dessert.

We got dressed and he had to say goodbye. Actually he was kissing me – or rather groping me – goodbye. I like it, but he really must learn. I said,

"Fred. If you are going to do that with my tits, you really should undo my bra. They're quite expensive and I don't want them all stretched. Besides, if they're crooked afterwards, people will know what we've been doing."

"You couldn't go without?"

"Sometimes. If it wouldn't be obvious. But you can learn to undo

me and do me up again. Here, I'll straighten myself out. Now put your hand up behind. No, not under the strap. Stay on the outside and you can probably use a finger and thumb to just squeeze the hooks off the eyelets."

"Oh yes. Easy."

"Now do it up again. Then you can undo it again and give my tits the most wonderful caressing you can while you kiss me."

He needed no encouragement. We kissed and I got caressed nicely for several minutes, then he put my tits back in their holders and did me up.

I felt a little lonely after he'd gone. So did my tits and pussy. Bad Annie! I tidied myself up, washed and put away the lunch dishes and walked over to Dow's lake. I could have ridden my bike, but walking seemed to be more my pace. And there were some tulip beds – the focus of the Festival. There weren't too many people at the reunion. A lot of people were opening their cottages, including the families of Jane and Marcia, but I had a chance to talk to a few old acquaintances. There was pop and some cookies. I stayed maybe an hour and a half, then came home.

I put on some music and got out my book. I was re-reading Graham Greene's 'The Power and the Glory'. Somehow I fell asleep in the armchair. It was getting toward 9 pm when I woke up. I didn't feel too hungry, so I just made some cheese on toast in the oven. What did the Brits call it? Oh yes, Welsh Rarebit. When I was small, I called it Rabbit, then got confused with Flemish and said 'Konijn'. I was a pile of laughs at 3.

There were supposed to be fireworks at 9 pm at Lansdowne Park – not a park but the Exhibition Grounds and football stadium. Also at City Hall. I heard some pops and bangs and went out on the front porch and could see some of the aerial fireworks as I munched my cheese on toast. I could have walked over if I'd thought earlier. But Fred and I had made lots of fireworks, anyway! I'll have to tell Dad, I guess. He'll find out when he puts the other box of condoms back. Assuming of course, he has any left! Oh. I'm getting so bad!

Still, in his place, how would I see Margaret. I'll bet she's still a virgin. I wonder what her breasts look like. I'm sure Dad would like to know, and if Fred's any guide, to touch and caress them. Margaret would probably like that, if she didn't die of embarrassment first. Oh well. I hope they are having a good time together.

Saturday, May 16, 1964 – Martin

I woke to light in the room. It took a few moments to realize where I was. Carefully I rolled over to see a lump in the bed with a mop of straw hair sticking out. I carefully moved to the edge of the bed and found my watch on the floor. It said 6:45. Early, but not exceptionally so.

Margaret stirred, then suddenly got up and walked quickly to the bathroom. I heard her pee, flush, and wash her hands, then come back.

“All right.” I asked.

“Yes. I just needed to pee. What time is it.”

“Quarter to seven. When do you usually get up?”

“About this time, but today’s a Saturday and a holiday.”

“I need to follow your example. Then I may get up before I feel the irresistible urge to ravish you.” I said, then gave her a kiss.

“If I was sure it was nice to be ravished, I might let you.” Margaret was getting more comfortable with being close.

I went to the bathroom. After I washed my hands, I realized I’d shut the door, which was really unnecessary after last night. I opened the door, but rather than return to the bedroom, I turned on the tub water and started to fill it, checking to make sure the temperature was comfortable. I made sure my towel was at hand, then got in and proceeded to wash. There was a shower head and hose that fitted on the tub filler, so I washed my hair.

“Martin. Are you in the tub.” Margaret asked.

“Yes. Why not join me?”

“I ... I couldn’t.”

“Well come wash my back.”

“All right.” She came in, took the facecloth and washed my back.

“Nice. Now why can’t you join me?”

“No reason. Just being silly.” With that she took off the nightgown, asking “Do I get the taps?”

“Why not get in and sit in front of me facing the same way?”

“Then I don’t get to see you.” Martin recalled Clara saying something similar.

“Plenty of time when we get out.”

“True. Let me steady myself.”

“Yes. Be rather bad form to have an accident in the tub and have to explain it to people.”

She got in and settled down. I almost immediately put my hands round her marvellous breasts, being in an ideal position to do so.

“Just making sure they didn’t escape during the night.” I said.

“You’re awful.”

“You’re awfully nice.” I kissed her neck, then took up her face-cloth and started to wash her back.

“Turn on the water and I’ll wash your hair if you like.”

“But I only did it two nights ago. Though it would be nice to have someone hold the shower for me and do it right.”

We washed her hair. Then I washed her breasts, probably unnecessarily, and between her legs.

“If you stand up and turn on the water, I can rinse you off to get rid of the soap.”

Margaret got up and I rinsed her.

“I suggest you get out carefully and I’ll rinse off.”

“OK.” Margaret replied.

We towelled off, and Margaret put a towel round her hair, then went back to the bedroom. She started to get underwear out of a drawer. I noticed that they were a sensible, no-frills sort.

“Not yet.” I said. “Come and let me kiss you.”

She walked over to foot of the bed where I was standing and I embraced her. We kissed and I turned her so her back was to the bed and gently pushed her down on the bed.

“Scoot up so you are on the bed,” I said.

As she did so, I moved and knelt between her legs. She seemed surprised how I did this so quickly and smoothly, but I think I was half lying on her and kissing her before she could say anything. I kissed her down her throat and she probably expected me to go to her breasts, but instead I kissed between them and put one hand on each and gently squeezed them. Then I kissed down to her belly button, where I stuck in my tongue. I thought it was time for some levity.

“That tickles. Stop it.”

“All right.” So instead I put my mouth on her navel and blew a big, noisy raspberry. We both dissolved in giggles.

“One must never take anything too seriously. Especially sex.”

“Really!”

“Really. Except for avoiding unhappy consequences. In fact, maybe I should put on a condom, if only to avoid any misdirected squirts.”

“You won’t ... force it in?”

“I should imagine that to be no fun at all. But I guess there are some men who like being domineering and frightening. That isn’t me.”

I reached over the side of the bed and got a condom and tore the corner of the package.

“Do you want to put it on?” I asked.

“Oh. I don’t know how.”

“That was sort of the reason for asking. I think it is useful for a person to know – man or woman. I told Annie when I bought these to try it using a banana. But she had time to read the leaflet.”

“Ooh. I don’t think I have any bananas. Do you think that will do?”

“Wicked woman. It will do very nicely. Now note the tip and the way it rolls. You make sure the air is out of the tip – you can even put a drop of spit in there to help it fit better. Then roll it down the shaft.”

Margaret was a quick study. Well, a doctorate in physics etc.

“There, now I’m dressed for the occasion.” I said.

“I still can’t see how it will go in without tearing me. It’s too big.” Margaret said anxiously.

“Injury can happen if you are not well lubricated and relaxed. Or the condom can tear. Neither will be any fun for either of us. But as I said, I’m not particularly big, though we do need to take it steady. Let me see where I was.”

I moved back to kneeling between her legs and once again took hold of her breasts. This time I held them firmly so the nipples were revealed and kissed and sucked these attractions. Then I moved down across her tummy, kissing from side to side. I nuzzled her thick fur, then used my tongue to find her clit. She jumped.

“No. That’s ... dirty.”

“We just washed you thoroughly.”

“It just seems ... not right.”

“Is your pussy well-washed?”

“Yes.”

“Does my tongue feel nice?”

“More than nice.”

I went back to work making sure I was assiduous in stimulating all over between her legs. I slipped one hand off a breast and gently moved so I could insert a finger, which I did very, very slowly as I licked and sucked. Then I moved that finger both in and out as well as in a circle so that it stretched the hole. Then I put in another finger. Margaret was breathing heavily. I increased the speed of the finger movements and licked vigorously. Suddenly Margaret grabbed my head and tried to push me away.

“Stop, Stop. It’s too strong. Ooh.”

I didn’t in fact stop, but moved very, very slowly and simply kept my tongue against her until her spasms stopped.

“Too strong?”

“Sort of. But ever so nice,” she sighed.

“That’s what you did for me last night. You are now very wet. And two fingers went in easily.”

“Really. I didn’t notice. It just felt wonderful.”

“Shall I try to come inside?”

“You can try very, very gently.” She said softly.

“You can guide me. Or you can be on top if you want.”

“I think like this.” She was barely whispering.

“Better raise your legs. Put your feet on my chest and you can push me away if anything hurts or is uncomfortable.”

“I can feel you at the opening. It still feels very big.”

“Put your hand on the shaft to guide me. That way it will go in straight if you are loose enough, and you can squeeze me if I’m not being a good boy as well as push me away.”

She did as I suggested, and I gently pushed at her opening while I caressed her breasts. As I did this, I noted that she relaxed slightly.

“Hurting.”

“No. It just feels that it’s stretching, but not uncomfortably so.”

“I’ll move a little out then back in to spread your juices on the head.”

As I did this, the head of my cock went in.

“Oh. It went in.” Margaret declared.

“Just the head. I’ll move in and out a bit if that isn’t uncomfortable.”

“Go gently. Please, don’t hurt me.” She said, once again anxious.

“Have I been gentle so far?”

“Yes. I suppose it still scares me a little that you might hurt me.”

While this was being said, I was very carefully and slowly moving in and out.

“Margaret, can you feel my balls with the hand that is guiding?”

“Oh. They are almost up to my bum.”

“I think you can take the hand away. And I think we can pronounce you no longer a virgin.”

“What if I say I still am?” She said mischievously.

“Then I’ll just have to pull out a bit like this and see if it will go all the way in like this.” I did this rather gently, but in a smooth and complete stroke.

“Ooh. That felt quite nice.”

“Looking down, I think you’ve managed the great magic trick of the disappearing cock.”

She paused, then said

“Stop joking and fuck me.”

“Margaret, I told you not to use that language!”

“It seems appropriate to the occasion just now.”

I obliged, and didn’t last very long. After I was spent, I showed Margaret how the condom should be held to avoid spillage of semen.

“Ouch. That pulled a hair.” Margaret said.

“I think the condom rolled back and trapped one of the hairs. We should trim them,” I said.

“Yes. It will avoid me having to tuck everything in when I put on the bathing suit. That was a serious problem with the old 1-piece. I think the new one won’t be pulled from side to side by my ... er ... tits.”

“We need another wash up. But a facecloth will do – it’s only our own juices. Here, to the bathroom with you.”

We washed up, then dressed, and Margaret combed and dried her hair. It was not quite 8.

“What do you want for breakfast Martin?”

“Well, that first course of pussy was hard to beat.” Margaret stuck out her tongue at me. I continued. “How about some eggs?”

“Scrambled eggs on toast?”

“Sounds good. Do you want coffee or tea?”

“I’m actually a tea person. But you can have coffee if you wish.”

“I’ll be fine with tea. English – sorry British – fashion with milk in it.”

After breakfast, we cleared away, made the bed and walked to the nearby hardware store. I found a small hand drill and some bits, and bought some screws and a small bottle of white glue. I asked the clerk if the store sold wood. He said they didn’t but he found a couple of lengths of strapping that would do. I realized a small saw would be needed and bought that too.

When we got back to the apartment, I made short work of gluing the broken support, first drilling it for two screws either side of the pipe position, squirting in the glue and tightening the screws. As insurance, I positioned the wood strapping below the support, screwing this into the studs behind the plaster, which I found by tapping.

I said to Margaret, who had been helping me do all this, “It’s nearly 10. Let’s put your clothes back in the closet and get on our way to Niagara. Oh. Don’t forget your passport in case we go across to the American side. The weather isn’t great, but below the Falls there’s always the spray and wet.”

“OK. But first you’ve got to kiss me.”

“Absolutely. But who’s kissing who?”

“Shut up and get on with it!”

* * *

The rest of our day was that of rather typical tourists. We walked by the lip of the Canadian Falls, had a rather plain hamburger and fries lunch, took a ride on the Maid of the Mist then drove up to Niagara on the Lake and past some of the vineyards that were beginning to be set up. There was a smattering of rain, but nothing that kept us from enjoying the day. By 7 pm we were almost back to Hamilton.

“What shall we do about dinner?” I asked.

“Can I take you out?” Margaret offered.

“You can. Where?”

“Something different. I’ve not had Chinese food before.”

“Do you know of any?”

“There’s a couple on the east side of downtown.”

“We can go there now if you like? Or do you want to go home first and freshen up.”

“We can go now. Otherwise it will get late.”

It was nearly 7:30 by the time we got to one of the restaurants, which turned out to have food that I thought pleasant and reasonably priced but not outstanding.

“This is good value and also tasty enough, but I’ve had Chinese food that was much more delicately flavoured and less heavy in texture.”

“As it’s my first time, I can only say I’m enjoying it. Rice at home is always rice pudding, except at an Indian restaurant. I’ve only had that a few times too. I really like the egg rolls.”

“They can have a lighter and crispier cover, and different fillings.” I said.

“You’re too fussy about your Chinese food.”

“Maybe. And this is, as I said, good value and tasty. I’ve been spoiled by places like the Lychee Garden in Toronto. A colleague from the NRC said they took a bunch of the students from the Canada Wide Science Fair there about two weeks – a fortnight – ago, and for some of them it was their first Chinese meal. I think they might be spoiled by that.”

“I have to remember that you did your Ph. D. in Toronto and lived there for some years.”

“Yes. An apartment over a store on St. Clair. It was our first place as a family.”

“I haven’t had much time to go and explore. I did manage to take the train for a day outing last November. It was cold and rainy, and I walked and walked but probably wasn’t ever all that far from the station.”

“Did you find any good meals?”

“Och. I was on my own – this weekend is a real shock to my system – so I just went into small informal places. I did have a smoked meat sandwich though. That was a bit of an eye-opener. So much meat. And tasty, but really too much.”

“I remember English meat sandwiches after the War. You had to check them with a magnifying glass to see there was meat and a micrometer to make sure it was at least 2 thou thick.”

“That about describes the Scottish ones too.” Margaret chortled.

We returned to the apartment and quickly got ready for bed.

Margaret turned out the light and without any prompting and sort of fell into my arms. I kissed her, and she snuggled in against me. The whole movement very natural and unfussy.

“Martin, I think I want to just fall asleep here. Is that all right?”

“Yes. But you may wake up when we have to untangle in a little while.”

“All riiiiight.”

She had fallen asleep. I found I was dozing off too. Some time later, I woke briefly as she rolled away and I recovered my arm and likewise rolled. It had been a rather satisfying day.

Sunday morning, May 17, 1964 – Martin

I woke and noticed it was quite light. I reached over the side of the bed and found my watch. It said almost 8.

“What time is it?” a sleepy voice asked from the other side of the bed.

“Almost 8. You’ve missed the first mass.” I said.

“If I were Catholic, I’d need to go to confession first, wouldn’t I?”

“So would I. But I’m not a church goer? Are you?”

“Only on family occasions. We were Church of Scotland. Not Catholic and not Kirk. Not much of anything really.”

“So no religious services for us today?”

“I don’t know. I could get very insistent on the liturgy we tried yesterday morning.” Margaret had a nice eye for the slightly absurd.

“For that the Presbyterians would damn you for eternity.” I replied.

“If they are right, and if I had every morning like yesterday, heaven would not be looking very attractive. But I think they’re wrong, and heaven is more likely to be full of happy, satisfied people.”

“Exceptional perspicacity, Dr. MacKay. Shall we endeavour to meet your expectations?”

“If I can get my lazy bod out of bed.”

She sat up and swung her legs over the side of the bed, got up and went into the bathroom. I waited for her to return. When she did, she had a pair of scissors in her hand and a comb.

“Martin, we talked of trimming my ... er ... hair. Can you help? I can’t see the area well enough. Even if I didn’t have these obstacles, it wouldn’t be easy.”

“Sure. Where’s the towel we used to lie on on Friday night? Oh. Here it is on the chair. And here’s the waste basket.”

I got her to lie back and raise her nightie. It took a while, but I trimmed the hairs to no more than a quarter inch.

“Raise your legs and I’ll get the hairs lower down.”

“Be careful not to nick me!”

“That would mean you wouldn’t want to have any fun, so I’d be penalizing myself.”

“True.”

I took care to get all the long hairs but to avoid clipping too close to any of the sensitive, wrinkly skin.

“Done I think. How does it feel?”

Margaret ran her hand over her pubic area.

“Different. It won’t poke out now.”

“Model the bathing suit – we need to cut off the labels anyway.”

“OK.” She seemed a bit hesitant. Probably not used to modelling clothes for men or women.

She got the bathing suit and walked out of the bedroom, then turned and came back.

“I was going to the bathroom to change. After what you’ve just been doing, that really is idiotic of me.”

“Not really, just habit. I found myself closing the bathroom door yesterday.”

She took off her nightie and pulled on the bottom half of the swimsuit.

“Neat. That would get plenty of attention on the beach.”

“And an indecency prosecution.”

“I suppose. Though I have difficulty agreeing with a law that prevents a perfectly nice looking woman from allowing her breasts to be seen. Or even women who aren’t beauty queens. It all seems incredibly illogical.”

“Well, now they’re covered. How does the whole ensemble look.”

“Take a look in the mirror.”

“I hardly recognize myself. It looks very nice, even if I do say it myself. Can you get those labels please?”

I cut the threads to the labels on each part of the suit.

“Now ”take it off” as they say at burlesque shows and we’ll shower.”

“How do you know what they say?” Margaret asked accusatively.

“I’ve never been in one. Probably from movies. Perhaps ”Gypsy” that came out a couple of years ago.”

When we got in the bathroom, we decided that one of us would hold the shower and the other would stand or kneel in the tub, since it was a somewhat makeshift arrangement and otherwise we would get a lot of water on the floor. We returned to the bedroom as they dried off.

“Martin. This morning you aren’t hard. Is something wrong?”

“I’m getting comfortable with you. Don’t worry, it will get erect when it needs to. Look, it’s starting now you’ve mentioned it.”

“Yesterday you kissed me ... on my ... pussy. Should I do the same for you.”

“I’d like that, but you don’t have to unless you want to. And you’ve already seen me go off. Some women like that, I understand, but I’m guessing most don’t.”

“Lie on the bed.” She said, taking off her glasses.

I did, and she kissed me on the lips, then dived down and stared at my half erect penis. All of a sudden she licked it with her tongue.

“Nice.” I exhaled.

Margaret gently put her mouth round me. That felt very nice, so I pulled her round and said, “Lift your leg so I can get between them.” She obliged and soon we were both giving each other pleasure. It was a lot easier with the hair trimmed, I noted.

I also sensed Margaret had a couple of minor moments of tensing up that I suspected were small orgasms. As I was getting rather excited, I suggested we stop and turn round.

“But it’s so nice with your tongue there.”

“Still, better put the condom on.”

She obliged, but before I could get up, she straddled me.

“Can I put it in?” she asked.

“Of course. I might not last long. This is a great view and these are wonderful handles.”

I actually lasted several minutes and we both clearly enjoyed ourselves. Margaret collapsed on me, but reached down and held the condom as I slid out. She rolled to one side and we sorted ourselves out.

“Nice for you?” I asked.

“Very. You?”

“Indeed. Most satisfactory Dr. MacKay.”

“Due to your inestimable skills, Dr. Tremblay. And the hairs didn’t get pulled. I’ll have to get one of those hair trimmers with a guard so I can keep the hair short.”

“Or get a permanent personal hair trimmer. I’m sure there’d be lots of volunteers. You have one here.”

“If you were here all the time, I agree, I could avoid getting the trimmer. Now. Porridge? I’m feeling hungry.”

“Some people do say Chinese food leaves you feeling hungry soon after. But maybe it’s the sex.”

Margaret stuck her tongue out at me. I used her nipples to pull her gently in for a kiss which lasted for a while. Then we got up, cleaned up a little, dressed and had breakfast.

The rest of the morning and early afternoon we spent around Hamilton and Burlington. The Botanical Gardens kept us busy for a couple of hours. Margaret had made some sandwiches and we were able to picnic. After this, I drove around Dundas then up to Guelph, along to Kitchener and over to Stratford, stopping various places along the way. It was after 4:30 by the time we got to Stratford.

Even though it was too late to get inside the theatre, we found a place to park and walked about the grounds.

“Shall we eat here in Stratford?” I asked.

“Will you not be too tired after to drive? It may get dark.”

“I think I’ll be all right if you keep me company and talk to me.”

“All right then. I’d like that.”

We had spied the Parlour Inn and decided to try it. There was fortunately room for us – possibly a cancellation. We were seated and the waitress brought menus.

“Martin. This is rather expensive.” Margaret commented.

“Not really by the standards here. But my treat. It’s been too nice in the last couple of days to let a bit of money spoil things.”

“I might feel I’m becoming a kept woman.”

“Please allow us to just enjoy our time together. There’s enough difficult times that a little pleasure now and then enables one to keep going.” As I said this, I felt a great tension between the sadness Blue and I had been through with Clara’s illness and death

and the comfort and pleasures of the last couple of days. There was a danger of mistaking my gratitude to Margaret for a grand passion. Fortunately Margaret agreed right away with my request and I didn't have time to ponder things.

"Amen to that. If you had told me two weeks ago what we'd be doing together this weekend I'd have told you to get to the lunatic asylum. But it's done me a world of good. I hope it's helped you with dealing with losing Clara. Sorry, maybe it's not my place to mention her."

"No. As I said before, Annie and I have decided she has been a big part of our lives and trying to hide her from the world – as well as from ourselves – will likely cause awkwardness. She was not a woman to deny herself or others the chance of happiness. We were able to talk about Luc, her first husband who was shot by the Germans. It let me be part of her whole life."

"That's an attitude that many men, or women, might not share, but I applaud your openness. Thank you."

We decided to forgo dessert. There were sweets at the apartment if we still wanted them when we got back. I remembered the shortbread – Margaret could make me very fat if there were an unlimited supply. But there were a couple of hours of driving to get "home".

Fortunately, traffic was not too bad and I was lucky to take all the right directions. Margaret, in contrast to her formerly quiet self, chattered gently for much of the time about what we'd seen today and how it compared and differed from places she knew and liked in Scotland and England.

We were tired when we got in and abandoned the idea of dessert. It seemed to take a lot of energy just to brush teeth and put on pyjamas and tumble into bed.

"I had a really special day, Martin. Thank you."

"Me too. It's been a nice weekend altogether. I'm really glad we met at the workshop."

I vaguely remember Margaret was saying "I wonder whether I'd ever have found how much I like ... " but must have fallen asleep.

Tuesday, May 19, 1964 – Anna

I got up and went to work on the bus as usual today, despite my intention to ride my bike.

My pussy felt ... extremely well exercised. Hope I didn't walk funny. And Fred had sucked and maybe nibbled on my nipples. They weren't sore, but sensitive. I'd been 'nibbled'. Good one, Annie. But it had to be written down for anyone to get the joke. Oh well. Maybe useful for a long-distance letter after he moved to Vancouver. I looked around on the bus. Did other women get these sorts of feelings about their ... sports equipment.

At one of the stops a large, sloppy woman got on carrying a baby and towing a couple of toddlers. She had stains on the front of her top, probably kiddie food. The bus driver didn't say anything, but was clearly impatient as she struggled to hold the baby and count money into the fare box. Following my previous line of thinking, I couldn't help but remember a ditty Marcia brought home from a concert by a Montreal group called the Raftsmen.

See the mothers in the park
All so fat and ugly
Someone must have loved them once
but in the dark and briefly

Nasty! But one did wonder what type of men found such untidy women sexually attractive.

* * *

About 5:30 pm Dad called out

"Annie, I'm home!"

"Up here Dad. Be right down."

When I came into the kitchen, Dad was looking through the envelopes on the kitchen counter.

"Did you have a nice trip?" I enquired.

"Yes. Very nice. It was good to get away and have a change of scene. And we had reasonably good weather. Was it good here?"

"Yes. Fine." I guess I sounded a little nervous.

"Anything wrong?"

"No, nothing wrong. Just I think I need to tell you something before you find out for yourself."

"Oh. Did you drop one of the best dishes or something?"

"No, not like that. It's just I don't want you to think badly of me."

“OK. Out with it.”

“Well. I was, er, ... in the drawer where you put the condoms.”

“Oops. I took one packet with me, just in case.”

“I’d noticed.”

“So I’m the one with the red face.”

“Um. Not totally.”

“Meaning?”

“Well. I invited Fred over on Friday. He’s received a letter offering him a place and scholarship to do a Ph. D. at UBC. I thought we’d celebrate that, and, well, I like him and he’s gentle, and ...”

“Looks like we’re equally guilty. I’m assuming you took the proper precautions since we’re talking about them.”

“Yes. You’d shown me where they were and the leaflet. But of the eleven left in the packet after I tried on the banana, there’s less than half left. I think you may need to get more.”

“Annie! Fred must have amazing powers of recuperation to do that in one evening.”

“Actually, you were away Friday to today.”

“Oh.” Dad laughed, and in a mock tone said, “Hardly worth a mention.”

“Dad! I didn’t mean the whole time in bed. We did lots of other things. And Fred went home at night. He didn’t want his folks asking questions.”

“More importantly, or as importantly, are you comfortable with your decision?” Dad asked.

“Mmm. Yes. It was very nice. I think Fred expected me to get more excited or agitated, but I enjoyed myself, and I’m glad I learned what it’s like. I think some of my girlfriends have not had the privacy and time to enjoy it. They’ve just ‘done it’ with some boy in the back of a car or behind some bushes. They make out how grown up they are, but I don’t think that they had much pleasure. And I think they often had to worry about pregnancy or disease or the fellow making rude comments to his friends and such.”

“Very perceptive of you. And the reason I wanted you to have access to precautions.”

“I really appreciate it Dad. Thanks lots. Though I wonder if Mum is not looking down on us with steam coming out her ears.”

“Clara had a good sense of proportion, and a love of life’s pleasures.”

“Talking of which, how was Margaret.” I know. I was prying.

“Annie!”

“I didn’t quite mean it that way. Well. Maybe I did. I’m sort of curious. Not worried about you being with her or anything like that.”

“At first she was really tense and shy. I finally had to ask bluntly if we needed to talk about sex, which at least got her to admit that she was all very anxious about that, as she’d never had a man stay with her overnight before. And she worried I might ‘take advantage’. As it turned out, her heavy Scottish woollens did us a favour.”

Dad told me how Margaret’s heavy clothes had pulled down the clothes closet rod just as she was starkers. This led to what probably for an outside viewer was a hilarious comedy. But clearly it opened the door – and apparently Margaret’s legs. Oh. I’m getting terrible! – so that she and Dad could enjoy themselves.

“Did Margaret enjoy it?”

“By ‘it’ you mean sex? Yes, once she got over her shyness, she was fine.”

“So you’ve a long-distance girlfriend. Do you think it will become serious?”

“I don’t know. What about you and Fred? That’s a very long-distance boyfriend once he goes to Vancouver.”

“I kind of chose Fred because we are good companions and friends. He’s gentle and funny and I like him. But also, as I told you, I know that I want to get my education and start a career. He’s partly attractive because he will be going away, so I know that it is likely we’ll not be ‘forever’. That’s OK. I think it’s OK with him too. I’ll be surprised if we don’t stay friends, but for now I need to be able to focus on my degree. Sometimes I feel I’m being a bit calculating and manipulative. I’ve been to dinner at his place, and his Mum was watching us rather closely. I quite like her, if I could only understand half of what she’s saying!”

“Margaret and I may be in the same situation. She is enough younger and at the beginning of her career that I’m not sure how we’d manage to set up a household together, even if we wanted to. And you may guess that this was her first try at sex. She kept saying ‘I’m twenty-nine’. I think she had a fixation on her next birthday being 30. And when I asked her whether she thought children were part of her future, she tried to answer in a diffident manner, but it’s

clear she wants to have children. I'm not sure I want to. I loved bringing you up, but to start over? I don't know whether the answer is yes or no, but I suspect no.

Also I'm still very much attached to Mum and her memory, though I think I needed to start living in the here and now again. I wanted an escape. So maybe I'm a bit manipulative too.

Anyway, I made sure she knows how much I enjoyed my time with her, and I've invited her to come and stay any time. Tentatively we're planning for Dominion Day. But we talked about distance and decided we'll be open to going out with other people. I actually left the rest of the condoms with her. I can't even imagine how she'd get some at a pharmacy given how shy she is."

"Dad. You are a strange one. But I think you're right. Though the way she dresses, she hides her best assets."

"Actually, we were invited to a pool opening party on Monday. I had to go to Eaton's to get a swimsuit – forgot to pack mine. Anyway, Margaret said she hated wearing her swimsuit. She had an old 1-piece that she'd probably acquired before, well, before filling out."

"Hah. And the bump and grind of her big breasts made the suit ride up in the crotch!"

"My local expert! Personal experience?"

"Not quite. You know I'm not that big in front – you do laundry so you see my undies. But Jennifer from high school. She had all kinds of trouble if she didn't get properly fitted things. So what did Margaret do?"

"While I was shopping for a swimsuit, since I didn't pack one, I suggested she look for a 2-piece, since she said she didn't like the one she had. She found a nice one, and that solved a lot of her problems. The suit was in no sense improper or teeny-weeny. It just made her look much more attractive. And at the pool party, I think she got more attention than she is used to from a couple of the men. In one sense it upset her, but in another, I think she liked it.

But enough for now. What are we doing for dinner."

Tuesday, May 19, 1964 – Martin

What I didn't tell Annie was that I'd stopped in Toronto and parked on St. Clair more or less opposite the building where Clara and I – and Annie too – had our first apartment together. I'd left Hamilton around 8:30 to have a reasonable chance of getting home not too late. A whim had brought me there. Sitting there in the car, I thought, "Clara, what am I doing? It's not been 4 months since you died, and here I am ... cavorting with another woman. On one hand it seems the right thing, on the other totally wrong. Margaret will want babies and all that. I don't think I do, even if I like her a lot."

Just then a young woman and a little girl came out of the door – the door to the apartment. I remember I froze, not even breathing. It wasn't Clara and Annie, of course, but the coincidence shocked me. I remember how I had to take a sudden breath, having realized that I needed one after a few seconds. And my cheeks were wet – without noticing, I'd been crying.

I actually sat there for at least another 20 minutes, my thoughts a changing pattern of recollections of the weekend just past and memories of my life with Clara.

We'd gone to the pool-opening party yesterday and people had taken me at face value as a colleague and friend of Margaret, which of course I was, possibly even a boyfriend. But that was new to me – I was used to being with Clara and/or Annie. Nevertheless, people had been friendly, and Margaret was, possibly because of my company and the appreciation I showed for her, more self-assured and confident. Her appearance in her new swimsuit got plenty of looks, likely because it contrasted so strongly with her usual sober attire.

I talked with various people – mostly men, as Margaret was the only female staffer, and the wives seemed to gather to talk of domestic issues. I had a chat with a mass spectroscopist named Duckworth. He told me he had a stock seminar he gave called "Weight and C" based on the use of carbon as the basis for molecular weight. Clever title!

Afterwards we'd come home and gone to bed early, and passed a long slow session joined together. It was nice, but a little sad too, since we didn't have any idea when we'd be able to share time

together again.

May 23, 1964 – Anna

Aunt Penny had invited Dad and I to Brockville for the weekend. We drove down Saturday, arriving around lunch. We'd come back Sunday evening. Dad let me drive. It wasn't a great day. Kind of rainy. The hope had been to have a barbeque. It looked unlikely that would be possible.

"Did you remember the present for Gloria?" I asked Dad.

"Yes – nine years old already. What did you get her?" I'd been delegated to do the selection and purchasing.

"A kit for doing embroidery with wool. It goes fast so she won't get bored with it, but she can still learn a skill. I'm guessing there'll be plenty of other stuff."

"How's the job going?"

"OK I guess. They don't seem to know what to do with me, so I suggested I take the main papers related to our project and spend 2 to 3 half days a week in the library building up a list of references and checking for things the team may have missed. They liked that idea."

"Good suggestion, and it ensures you get to learn the subject and get familiar with the library."

"I may have to go over to Sussex Drive to the National Science Library. There's some journals and books we don't have."

"Wear slacks if you do go there?"

"Really? Why?"

"The floors are glass. You can't really see through them, but I think you'll be more comfortable if you do wear slacks. And watch out for the static that builds up – you can get some great sparks just walking in those stacks."

Uncle Joe's church is fairly modern. The modest house next door is the minister's residence. We pulled up and went in to the mild chaos of 5 kids and no end of church visitors. Dad wonders how Aunt Penny can put up with this, but she seemed to thrive on it.

I'd be sharing a room with Joan and Gloria. Michael and David have a room Joe added in the basement, along with a Rec Room he uses for some church meetings. He'd sensibly put in a second bathroom – the house originally had one very small bathroom, which the

regular household of seven put under some stress. Desmond, however, was now out on his own, he would be 21 this year. It seemed a black cloud appeared ever time his name was mentioned. Both Dad and I wondered what the problem was. Of course, Desmond had always been a bit of a handful, born after his father was shot down and killed over Holland in '43.

Penny came rushing to the door when we rang the bell, apron flying. She'd filled out a bit since the War, but had avoided 'letting herself go' as some described it. With 5 kids, she gets plenty of exercise, but some women just give up trying to look presentable. Maybe being a minister's wife meant you had to try a bit harder.

"Come in you two. Sorry about the weather."

"Joe didn't have influence this time then." Dad teased.

"I forgot to put it on his 'to do' list." Penny responded in kind. "There's Annie. Looking very grown up."

"I am 20, Aunt Penny."

"Don't remind me how old I am!" Aunt Penny responded, obviously in a good mood. "Come in the kitchen and have some tea while I fix lunch and get some of the dinner ready."

"I'll go wash up and come help." I beat Dad to the punch, knowing he was about to say the same thing.

After I returned from the bathroom and was busying myself with tasks Aunt Penny suggested, Dad went to wash up too.

"Joe out?" he asked when he came back.

"A parishioner is dying. Joe went to visit and see if the family needs any help or support."

"I know he takes the job seriously. It's why he's so good at it." Dad said.

"Yes. Though it does leave me holding the baby – literally – some of the time."

Joe came in as we were finishing the soup that Aunt Penny served for lunch. The four children who were at home were all at the big kitchen table, along with Aunt Penny and Dad and I. Aunt Penny jumped up.

"We saved some soup for you. Wash up and join us."

Greetings were exchanged, and as the children had finished their soup, Joe said. "Children, you may excuse yourselves if you want."

"Thank you Dad," said Joan. "Annie's going to walk with us down to the river."

“All of you?”

“Yes, Michael will get all cranky if he can’t come along.”

“Better make sure you have your rain stuff on.”

There was a lot of commotion as everyone got ready. I’d guess it was pretty tranquil after we left.

Afternoon, May 23, 1964 – Martin

After lunch with Penny and family, Annie took all the kids for a walk. Everything seemed pretty quiet suddenly.

“Some coffee Martin.” Penny asked.

“Yes please.”

Penny brought it for me, with milk, and one with milk and sugar for Joe. She knew both of us well, and didn’t bother to ask how we wanted it.

“So we thought you’d come last weekend, but you went to Niagara,” she said.

“Well to Hamilton, then Niagara. At a recent conference I met a new professor from McMaster who has been doing some work related to some of my research. She only came to Canada from Edinburgh last August and doesn’t have a car, so we decided it would be a good chance for her to see some sights and also to talk about some work.”

“And for you to get some social practice while you figure out how to rebuild your life.” Joe commented. As I expected, neither he nor Penny asked where I’d stayed.

“Yes. Both of you have been there in your lives. I didn’t think I’d ... well ... start socializing again so soon after Clara died, but Margaret – that’s her name – was so shy and awkward at her presentation that I started to talk to her to help her gain a bit of confidence. Blue was having a boy over for supper, so I invited her to join us, and the experience was a great comfort, I think for all of us. The younger folk wouldn’t let Margaret be too quiet, and Fred – that’s Annie’s friend – was relieved of the burden of parental focus. So when Margaret said she hadn’t seen the Falls, the idea of my taking a weekend off followed. I think it did me some good. Likely Margaret too. She’s still finding her feet.

Though I must say, I kept having thoughts of Clara. On the way back I went to the old Toronto apartment and sat across the street

for the better part of an hour. Don't quite know what I was thinking about, but the time went by."

"Takes a while to re-orient your emotions." Joe said. "But did Annie mind?"

"No. In one way she treats it as great fun, though she is not at all unkind. She had some catching up to do with friends. And she is, after all, a grown woman now, hard as that is to comprehend when I recall pulling her out of a bush near Ninove after the mine went off."

"Yes. We're trying to come to terms with Desmond being 21 shortly. He'll come into a bit of money from his father's family then. Not a huge amount but I'm afraid it will be enough to get him into trouble." Joe said.

"I have to try not to let it gnaw at me." Penny said.

"You have me at a disadvantage," I said. "The last I heard, Des was working on a degree at Guelph."

"We thought so too." Penny replied. "Turns out he dropped out over a year ago and joined some sort of band. He plays guitar as you know. We only found out when one of the parishioners brought us a flier for a concert they were giving somewhere near Windsor. The parishioner's son knew Des in school."

When we phoned what was supposed to be Des' apartment in Guelph, we eventually found out he'd departed long ago, but had an arrangement where they'd keep his mail and take phone messages. It seems he's been staying on friends' sofas and such, and generally living from hand to mouth. Our big concern is that he may be getting into more serious trouble."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Des always was a bit wild."

"You haven't had troubles with Annie?" Penny probed.

"No. She's been a rock during the time Clara was sick and died. In fact, lately she's been a great support. We've had some good conversations about serious issues in life."

"Religion, politics?" Joe asked.

"No, more career and boys."

"She'll talk to you about boys?" Penny seemed shocked.

"As a matter of fact, yes. I think because Clara couldn't. And I've come to respect my very hard-nosed daughter, who seems to know what she wants and is determined not to get side-tracked from doing it. On the other hand, she's managed to make a few friends

with men of her own age, and I think to demand their respect for her plans.”

“Yes. You mentioned she had a friend for dinner when you asked your new lady-friend to dinner.”

“It’s all new territory to both Annie and me. At least we can talk to each other, and that has been immensely helpful to me – more than Annie realizes I think.

Do you have any ideas what you will do about Des?”

“No. We’re hopeful he’ll come home for a visit so we can talk?” Joe said. “It will likely be difficult to accept him as a long-haired musician, but it will be much worse if he’s got into drink or drugs.”

Monday evening, May 25, 1964 – Martin

It was Monday evening. Blue had breezed out after supper to visit Marcia, who apparently had a copy of a new Beatles album. I think I heard a track from it on the radio that I didn’t much like. Some Beatles stuff seemed OK. I wondered what kind of noise Desmond’s band made.

The doorbell rang. I put down the Citizen and got up to answer it.

“Hello Mrs. McPherson.” It was my neighbour on the left, a woman of about my own age whose twin sons were working for the summer planting trees, and whose husband apparently was a geologist working for an oil company in Alberta. I had seen him only a couple of times, and had not, in fact, ever spoken to him. She was holding a plate of cookies.

“Dr. Tremblay, I thought you could benefit from some home baking.”

“Thank you Mrs. McPherson.”

“Call me Gail.”

“Thank you Gail. I’m sorry that since Clara died I’ve not been a good neighbour.”

“Well, given your situation, maybe I haven’t been either, but perhaps I can rectify that. I did want to speak to you about something else too. Perhaps I could come in?”

“Would you like some tea. There’s some in the pot.”

“Thank you yes.” She helped herself to a chair at the kitchen table. I found her a cup and poured tea.

“Milk?”

“No, I’ll take it black thanks.

Now Dr. Tremblay, I thought I should talk to you because when you were away the other weekend, I noticed Annie had a guest.”

“Yes. Fred whose last name I cannot immediately remember kept her company. Annie is still a bit nervous on her own, and Fred is a good friend.”

“Oh. You were aware of this?”

“Naturally.” I fibbed. I hadn’t known in advance, of course. But I wasn’t going to let a busybody cause trouble and have more to gossip about.

“It just surprises me that you’d let a girl have men stay in the house.” Gail said.

“You have to remember that Clara ran a farm on her own with a live-in farm-hand from age 17. Fred did not stay the night – his parents are quite strict. And Annie – maybe we should now call her Ann – is over 20.” I countered.

“I hadn’t thought of that.” Gail was clearly nonplussed.

“Annie and I are careful to maintain a conversation about things like this. It can cause a lot of unhappiness when there are secrets and lies.”

“Don’t I know it.”

“May I try one of your cookies?” I changed the subject.

“Of course, they’re for you.”

“I’ll get out a plate so you don’t miss one of yours.” I transferred the cookies and rinsed and dried her plate.

“And how are you managing Dr. Tremblay.”

“Martin. Please. I’m gradually coming to terms with Clara not being here. And starting to ask myself how I want to live the rest of my life.”

“If you need some female perspective, don’t hesitate to drop round. George is never here. It gets lonely.”

“But then other neighbours might have something to say.” I could not resist, but I tried to say it gently so it could not be taken rancorously.

“Yes. It’s a burden.” Gail was not comfortable. “Thanks for the tea and setting me straight about Annie.”

“Not at all. If the situation had been otherwise, I would have wanted to know.”

I showed her out and thanked her for the cookies. Bloody nose woman! I'll have to tell Annie and we'll have a laugh – and some cookies, which really are very good.

I'd just got back to the newspaper when the phone rang. It was on the wall in the kitchen, and I could reach it without getting up.

"Hello."

"Martin, it's Margaret."

"Hi. Lovely to hear your voice."

"Nice to hear yours too, but I've some news that isn't at all good."

"Better tell me." It was a bit soon for her to know if the condoms had failed.

"My mother has had a stroke. It looks like she will survive, but won't be able to live alone. My brother and his wife are doing their best, but we need to arrange something long-term."

"Have you decided what to do?" I asked.

"This will come as a bit of a jolt, but I've decided to go back to Edinburgh and see if I can find Mum a place in a home there. Jock and Mary are close enough in Lanark to be able to visit easily, in fact I think easier than to Perth."

"Are you resigning at McMaster?"

"Unfortunately yes. But the day after you left I got a letter from a colleague at Edinburgh. There's a position opening up, and he said I'd be first in line. I even phoned him after I heard about Mum – my phone bill is going to be crippling – and he is working on it already."

"How soon do you leave?" I felt a twinge of sadness, even though it had been clear we may never be a "permanent fixture".

"I'm trying to get away in the next 10 days, so we won't see each other again soon."

"For all sorts of reasons, that's a pity."

"Yes. Martin. I want you to know how grateful I am for the ... experiences we had together. It will always be precious to me."

"Me too."

"I'll send you my address as soon as I have one, and I do want us to stay in touch."

"I'll say "me too" again. If you need anything – and I know how you are about money, but I'm happy to let you have some if you are short – I'll be very annoyed if you don't let me know."

“What I need you can’t give over the phone,” she half-giggled, half-sighed. Martin suspected she was crying quietly.

“I think we both feel that, in my case quite acutely,” I agreed.

“Goodbye then.”

“Till we meet again. Bye.”

I rang off. It wasn’t quite the same feeling as when I left Ninove in ’47, a month before I’d married Clara. But I still felt a sense of emptiness. Margaret was ... “nice”. A lot of people considered “nice” a pejorative, but I really felt she was a good and pleasant person. If we had been in the same town, it could have worked, I felt.

Monday, May 25, 1964 – Anna

On Monday evening I went over to Marcia’s after supper. She’d snagged a copy of the new – and only in Canada – Beatles album ‘Long Tall Sally’. We spun both sides, had a cup of tea, and I came home – work in the morning.

When I came in, Dad was in front of the TV. A program was about half way through.

“What’s this program about?”

“Not sure. I’ve not been paying much attention to it. Thinking about different things. ”

“That bad, hey Dad.”

“Well, a couple of things happened tonight.”

“Bad news.”

“Some. At least mixed. I’ll go in reverse order.

Margaret’s mother has had a stroke and she’s decided to return to Scotland.”

“Oh. Just as you were starting to get to know one another.”

“Yes. Even though, as we’ve discussed, it likely would not have worked out, she helped me start to move on and deal with losing Mum. And I was thinking how nice a young woman she is, even though ‘nice’ is considered so boring and bourgeois these days.”

“She is nice, and she was nice to you, Dad. I like her. What else happened?”

“Gail McPherson came round, ostensibly to deliver us some cookies – they’re quite good – but actually to tattle on you and Fred.” My eyebrows must have been up to the ceiling by this point.

"She must have practically been peering in the windows! I was careful not to do anything obvious." I spluttered.

"She'd have liked to, but I suspect she saw you going out together. Then she as good as invited me over in case I needed 'female company'. What a double standard! I said would that not get other tongues wagging since she was a married woman. I rather enjoyed her discomfort at that."

"What did you say about me and Fred?"

"Told her I knew Fred was coming round because you didn't like being alone so soon after Mum died. Seemed to stop her in her tracks."

"Thanks Dad. I'll try to make sure you have some advance notice in future."

"I'll try to do the same. I'm still trying to sort myself out."

"Talking of sorting out, I had a letter from Des. Right out of the blue. Or right to this Blue!"

"Really. Penny and Joe were saying they were rather worried about him."

"He says he's coming to Ottawa this week and wanted to talk to me. Hasn't bothered to say boo for 3 years, then 'wants to talk'."

"Do you feel OK with that?"

"Not really. If he wants money or something, I don't think I trust him to pay it back. But I wrote to the address of his friend in town here as he asked and said he should phone when he got to town and we'd work it out from there. He didn't say directly, but I got the feeling he wasn't planning to talk to you."

I knew Des would come into a bit of money when he turned 21 soon, and Joe and Penny were concerned that this would be a source of trouble rather than a help to his career. I was pretty poor. My bank account couldn't have more than about 90 bucks just now. If I didn't live at home, I'd be pretty worried.

Dad said, "Look. Joe and Penny are worried that he's got into bad company. Possibly drugs. If so, you should only talk to him where you are comfortable."

"I thought I'd take Fred along for security."

"Good idea. And if there is a way to bring him back here so we can find out what the real problem is, then please do so. If it helps, tell him I said you should bring him here and that whatever he says to me won't be relayed to Joe and Penny unless he is OK

with that.”

“That could get you in hot water with them.”

“True, but it may be that their situation is part of the problem.”

“You mean, church minister etc.”

“Yes. Even though they are pretty tolerant, their parishioners may not be, and they may be put between a rock and a hard place if Des has got himself in a jam and turns up looking for help.”

“I understand. You’re the best, Dad.”

“Bed time. Let me know what’s happening. You have my work number if you need it.”

“Yeah. I’ll even leave a message with your secretary if it’s important. And I’ll write the lab phone number down for you.”

“Night Annie. Love you.”

“Love you too, Dad.”

May 27, 1964 – Anna

It was two days later, mid-afternoon, when Chandra called me to the phone at the lab.

“Dad. Is that you?”

“Yes. You called.”

“Yep. Des is in town. He wants to meet this evening at the Cathay at 7.”

“Can Fred join you? I was going to work a bit late. I’ll stay until 6:30 and you can call me if Fred can’t make it.”

“I’ll call his home now. His Mum is usually home, and though it’s a bit difficult to communicate with her, I think I can get the message across to call me here urgently. I think I’ll stay and go directly to the Cathay if Fred can join me.”

“If he’s not available, I’ll come with you. I’ve an uncomfortable feeling that you shouldn’t be with Des, and possibly some of his buddies, on your own.”

“Yeah. I have a similar feeling.”

I tried to arrange something with Fred, but he had family duties. At 5:30 I called Dad.

“Martin Tremblay.”

“Dad. Fred won’t be able to make it. He promised his Mum he’d drive her to see an ailing friend.”

“OK. I’ll leave shortly and meet you. How about the lobby of the Lord Elgin at a quarter to 7? That will give us time to walk up the street to the Cathay.”

“See you there.”

I was sitting in a comfortable chair in the Elgin when Dad walked in. He’d parked a couple of streets away.

“Ready?”

“Yes. As ready as I will be.” I replied.

We walked more or less in silence. When we arrived at the Cathay, Dad suggested I lead, and that I could take the initiative in how I explained Dad’s presence. Of course, Des might not be there.

In the event, I spotted him right away at a table near the back. He glowered when he saw Dad, but I simply said

“Both Dad and I had to work late, so we’re here for dinner. Have you eaten?”

Des mumbled something almost incoherent, but it was clear he’d been having only Chinese tea while waiting.

“Would you like to join us for some food, Des? My treat.” Dad asked.

“OK ... Yes please.” He was trying to remember to be polite. At least there was no bunch of ruffians there.

“Des. It’s been three years. You’ve got long hair. If you’d a beard like Dad I wouldn’t have recognized you.”

“I’d have recognized you. You’re looking really nice, by the way. And I sort of wanted to talk, but I don’t want my folks getting a big report.”

“When Annie mentioned your letter, I suggested to her that you probably would want reassurance that whatever you had to say would not get back to them without your OK.” Dad said calmly.

“You’d do that? Not tell them anything?”

“Not unless you say we can.”

“Dad and I have got to be quite good friends since Mum died. I had to ask him something very awkward recently and he gave me a straight answer without any extra junk,” I said.

A waiter came by for our order.

“You choose. I like most stuff.” Des said.

Dad ordered some soups and egg rolls along with two simple dishes plus some rice.

“We can order more if that isn’t enough. Now what’s your problem, Des?” Dad said.

“Well. I’ve been playing in this band, and we’ve had some gigs across southern Ontario and a couple in the northern States, though sometimes the border is a problem. Not making a lot of cash, but enough to survive.

About two and a half months ago, we were in London Ontario. There were these girls hanging about the stage door, and they were showing a lot of interest in us, so we all went back to the motel together. One of the guys had a couple of bottles of rye and we all got a bit tight. This one girl was hanging around me and she said ‘I’m on the Pill’ and well, we ended up having sex. Now she says she’s pregnant, and I’d already found that I had some sort of infection. Apparently gonorrhoea.”

“Have you seen a doctor.” Dad asked.

“Went to a public health clinic in Toronto. Got a polite lecture about where not to put my Sorry. But they gave me some penicillin and it seems to be cured. They also insisted I show ID and wanted me to give a list of the people I’d been with sexually, but that was just this girl, and I didn’t even have a name other than Sharon at that time.”

“Probably you should see a doctor and ask if there’s anything else you need to do. Some infections hide for a while. I know of a case where someone was cured of gonorrhoea but still had syphilis. If you need it, I’ll contact my own doctor for you.” Dad seemed more knowledgeable than I expected about these things.

“Thanks. But first I need to know what to do about this girl. Until I got her letter, I didn’t even know her last name. She was just a band follower. Not that we’re a big-enough name to have them before. This was the first time we had such girls around.”

“What does she want?”

“Money for an abortion, so she says. And she asked me to find a doctor to do it.”

I gulped, then asked

“How do you feel about that?”

“I don’t like the idea, but I’d probably go along with it. I’ve no idea where to find either the money or the doctor. I wrote to Annie because I thought she might know girls who had got into trouble and had an abortion.”

"I was talking to Dad about things like that the other day, mainly because I didn't really understand some of the news stories. I guess I'm pretty sheltered." I said.

"Is the baby yours, do you think?" Dad asked.

"No idea. Given the clap I got, quite possibly not. I haven't been with another girl for over a year. But if the baby's mine, I wouldn't run away. It's at least partly my responsibility."

"What would you do?"

"Probably have to find a job. Wouldn't pay a lot, so I'd become a working guy and family man. I'm not afraid of work."

Dad said, "Here's our food. Let's eat a bit and consider the options."

We divided the food and ate.

"Where are you staying, Des." Dad asked as we finished.

"One of the band members has a brother here. I'm on an old sofa in the basement."

"For tonight at least, stay there. I'd offer to put you up with us, but I think we need to be able to have the confidence of both you and your parents. I know they care about you, and communication can be the most troublesome aspect between the generations."

"You and Annie seem to have it worked out."

"Clara's death has kind of pushed us together."

"I'm really sorry about that. I should have come to the funeral. I knew she was ill. It was as though I were frightened of it all. I really am sorry."

"Let's focus on getting some sort of understanding of your present situation. Do you have a way of communicating with this girl."

"I've an address. She says she wants me to send her money – \$500 she says."

"No phone number?"

"No. She says her name is Sanderson, Sharon Sanderson, and there's about a dozen Sandersons in the London phone directory. None have her initials, nor her address. I suspect she lives at home, but that the address is that of one of the other girls."

"What else, if anything, do you know about her?"

"She said she was 19 and studying sociology at Western. Of course, I don't know if any of that is true."

"I suggest you write back immediately and tell her she needs to go to a doctor to deal with the gonorrhoea. You can tell her to

contact you via me, your uncle, Dr. Martin Tremblay, at my home address and phone. Tell her you are concerned about her and the baby, but other than that, you may be best to say or write nothing specific. If anything comes, I'll phone you if you keep us informed of where to get in touch."

"Thanks Uncle Martin. Do you know what you'll do?"

"No idea, except to get the truth and find the least damaging solution for all concerned. If the girl has an infection the baby's at risk, whether or not you are the father."

"I've been an idiot."

"For a short moment. Not the first. Unlikely the last. Is the band doing well enough to keep you going for a bit."

"I don't know. I think we're running out of energy. I can sight read music, so I get some invites to do session work backing other people who are better known. The other guys in the band are not so fortunate, and there's a bit of friction. They sort of need me to give a solid sound, but I'm not sure how long we'll manage. There's a few gigs in the pipe that will last another 6 weeks."

Dad settled the bill and we made our way to the car. We dropped Des at his temporary accommodation and started home.

"The wind's gone out of his sails," I said.

"Yes. By the way, if this girl does phone, be friendly and concerned, and get as much information as you can, but don't offer anything concrete, especially money. Until we know where things stand, she could be the front for crooks trying to get money by a sort of blackmail."

"I hadn't thought of that. I half feel that the girl doesn't have a clue who got her in the family way and is grasping at whoever she can name. Of course, that doesn't mean she should be abandoned."

"I'm glad you have that perspective. It's one I share," Dad said. I was learning stuff about him I didn't know before. No wonder Mum found him so interesting.

May 31, 1964 – Anna

Sharon phoned on Sunday morning. I answered the ring.

"Yes. This is Dr. Tremblay's house. Can I tell him who is calling?"

Sharon identified herself and said she was calling from a pay phone. For once I had the good sense to ask for the number and said I or Dr. Tremblay would call back. I let Dad know. He was in the back yard mowing the small patch of grass with the push mower, and he called back. I listened on the extension in the master bedroom.

"Sharon, this is Martin Tremblay, Des' uncle. Before we go further, I want you to know that we think it's important that your health and well-being are the first consideration."

"That's why I wrote to Des. I can't have this baby."

"Do your family know of your situation?"

"No. My Dad's a Presbyterian minister. They'll kill me. That's why I'm phoning from a pay phone."

"OK. I understand how many parents take a very closed view. So we should write to you at the address you gave?"

"Yes. That's my friend Julie who has her own apartment."

"Have you been to a doctor? Des had an infection, and it's one that is dangerous to you too."

"Not yet."

"Are you really 19, as you told Des?"

"Yes. That's true. Though I lied about being in University. I'm going to secretarial school."

"You believe your family would give no support?"

"My Dad would either kill me or beat me up and throw me on the street."

"Let me consider possibilities for a minute. Could you come to Ottawa? I suppose we could pretend you have a training job here for a couple of months and we could get your infection looked after and try to work something out."

"You mean arrange to get rid of the problem?"

"I've no knowledge of how to go about that. It's not my field." Clever Dad. He didn't need to reveal the type of work he did. "But we can offer at least support and safety for you until something can be worked out."

"But you won't send money?"

"No. But what we're offering amounts to more than the sum you asked Des for."

"It's not fair!"

"No. It's not. But Des has no assurance that he is the father of

the baby. The gonorrhoea suggests he might not be. But despite that we think it's important that you get proper care and be treated decently."

There was a pause.

"I guess that's more than I deserve."

"No. Everyone deserves decency and humanity. I don't know your family, but if they are good Christians, then their love will be stronger than their upset and anger. Regardless, we're ready to see what we can do to help."

"Good Christians! I don't know. Well. All right. I'll think about it and let you know within a week."

"Good luck. Sharon."

"Goodbye."

I was pretty stunned by this. I came downstairs.

"Dad. You are pretty generous."

"Maybe. But perhaps it's cheaper in the long run for both our family and her family and society as a whole. And if she's not genuine, we'll not hear from her again. If she is, accommodation and food here won't bankrupt us. Can you phone Des and let him know what transpired?"

"Sure."

"Ask him if he's ready to talk to his folks yet. I can't see them being holier-than-thou and refusing to be concerned. And Joe and Penny likely have more connections to agencies that help unwed mothers than we do."

* * *

"Des. It's Annie. We had a call from Sharon."

I relayed what had been said, along with Dad's offer.

"But where will she stay?" Des asked.

"If necessary with us. Des. Dad thinks you should talk to your Mum and Dad. They've done lots of work supporting people get housing and services over the years."

"But they'll be really mad at me."

"Probably less than you imagine. And you aren't being a jerk and ignoring the girl, even if you might not be the father of the baby. If it helps, I'll come along as support. They won't blow their top while I'm there. I think they may be glad to be in touch with

you again. Aunt Penny is worried about you, and Joe cares too, once you ignore the ‘Reverend Baker’ face.”

“You’d do that? You and Uncle Martin are really great. OK. I’ll arrange to go down to Brockville sometime next weekend. I’ve a gig in Kingston. How will you get there?”

“Dad may let me have the car. I’ll ask. If not, I’ll take the bus. By then we may know if Sharon is going to accept our help or go it alone.”

June 6, 1964 – Martin

I was at home reading a magazine item about D-Day and its 20th anniversary when the phone rang that Saturday night.

“Martin, it’s Penny.”

“Hi, I guess Des has been home.”

“Yes. Annie came too. Smart girl – Joe couldn’t give his fire and brimstone sermon with her here, and Des was going back to Kingston.”

“Sorry – well maybe not – Annie’s got a pretty good sense of how to act in these situations.”

“‘Situation’ is right. Do you think Des really is at fault?”

“He’s at fault enough that he owes the girl a hearing. And you of all people should know we owe her decency and humanity.”

“Yes. And I’m glad Des is back talking to us. He doesn’t seem nearly as wild and extreme as I’d imagined.”

“He may have a bit of a chance as a backing musician for other groups from what he says. But he’d better get some other job to ensure he can survive in the slack times. However, that isn’t the immediate problem.”

“Annie said the girl – Sharon – has said she will come to Ottawa. Are you proposing to put her up there?”

“If we have to. I don’t know who is around to help unwed mothers, and was hoping you knew someone.”

“Well, there is Bethany Hope Centre near the Grace Hospital, and the St. Mary’s Home. Maybe some others. I used to know some people who were associated with the two I mentioned. Let me look in my files and get back to you. But do you think she should go to a place like that? Especially if the baby is really Des’s.”

“First we need to get her checked for gonorrhoea. Then find out what the real situation is before we make any decisions.”

“Yes. We’re getting ahead of ourselves.

Martin, in case I forget. Thanks for this – I think you’ve done the right thing. And got Des to talk to us again.”

“Keep in contact with him. He needs you more than he’ll admit.”

“As his Mum I plan to do that. Bye for now.”

“Bye.”

June 6, 1964 – Anna

I got back from Brockville about 9:30. It hadn’t been a good trip. Or rather, it had been fine except for about 10 seconds of sheer terror.

“Glad you’re home safely.” Dad said as I came in.

“So am I. A crazy idiot passed me on a curve and cut me off when he saw a truck coming. I had to brake really hard and skidded a bit.”

“But you’re all right?” Dad asked with concern.

“Yep. And I managed to avoid any damage to the car too. I’m not sure how I missed the guard rail though.”

“Cars can be fixed or replaced. You can’t.” Dad was shaking slightly.

“Yes. After Mum’s passing, the importance ...” I started to blub. What was wrong with me?

Dad put his arm round my shoulder.

“Sometimes it catches up with us when we’re not ready,” he said.

“Yes.” I stopped crying and dried my eyes with a tissue.

“Penny phoned. I think you have a career in the diplomatic service. Of course, there’s plenty of family precedent there.”

“Oh. Was she mad?”

“Not at all. I think she rather admired your skill in getting everyone talking again rather than shouting at each other.”

“Wasn’t really me. You did the legwork.

All I really had to do was be there as kind of a silent umpire. With me present, Aunt Penny and Uncle Joe couldn’t shout and jump up and down. And from time to time I could put in a question or comment – something pretty innocuous and factual that would interrupt someone getting up a storm of indignation.”

By this time we'd had a call from Sharon that she would come to Ottawa. Dad asked, "Can I ask you a favour? Can you phone a couple of the homes for unwed mothers to find out what is involved if Sharon is to go to them? We'll put her up here for a few days and try to get more information."

"Sure. Should I pretend I'm in trouble?"

"No. Just be honest that you are calling to find out for a young woman your family is trying to help who has been abandoned by her family. I think you'll get answered quicker than a middle-aged man who might be fishing for information about a girl."

By the way, there seems to be some debate as to whether you can get gonorrhoea without sex. Without getting paranoid, we should probably be a little cautious about towels and bed-linen. We'll keep our towels in our rooms and clean the tub and sink before use. Let's put out some guest hand towels and a basket for used ones. The washing machine can get some extra use if needed. But I don't want Sharon feeling she's a leper."

"OK. Good thinking."

Clearly Dad had been working out the details. Good for him. Good for us.

June 11, 1964 – Anna

Sharon came by bus on Thursday night. We picked her up and brought her home, a seemingly small and mousy girl who looked tired and defeated. If you looked carefully, she already had a slight swelling of her tummy. But we said nothing, and went about the business of showing her where she would sleep in the small guest room, pointed out her towels, places to put the very few clothes she had brought.

"Have you eaten anything?" Dad asked.

"Only some chips and a chocolate bar. I'm rather thirsty."

"Lemonade, milk, tea?"

"Milk please. A friend told me a baby can pull the calcium out of your teeth if you don't have enough."

I went to the fridge and poured a glass.

"Why not sit down at the kitchen table here and we'll see if we can find you something to eat. I could do an omelet ..." I suggested.

"Oh no! I find eggs right now make me feel sick."

"How about a grilled cheese sandwich?" Dad offered instead.

"That would be good."

"I'll make it, Dad," I said and got busy.

"Sharon, I'm Martin, or Dr. Tremblay. You choose which to call me. I'm Des' uncle – his mother's brother. Annie's my daughter."

"Will Mrs. Tremblay be home soon?"

"Afraid not. Unfortunately Clara died of breast cancer about 4 months ago. We're still getting used to changed lives."

"Oh. I am sorry ..." Sharon looked mortified.

"Annie! Have those two boxes of sweaters and stuff of Mum's gone to the Sally Ann yet?"

"Yes. Oh. No they didn't come by so they're still on the porch. Sharon could have a look and see if there's anything there that would suit her. Sharon, unless you have a steamer trunk following, you'll need some stuff."

"I suppose so."

"Do your folks know what your situation is?"

"No. I just said I had a training job with a Dr. Tremblay and got out as quickly as I could."

"Can you tell us something about your family?"

"I don't much like my family. My Dad's a Presbyterian Minister, but I think he's a big hypocrite. My Mum acts like his slave. Let's him dominate her and make her do all the dirty work around the house, then shouts at her for being a stupid cow."

"Any brothers or sisters?" Dad asked.

"I've an older brother. He left home two years ago and we haven't heard from him at all. I think he's in Alberta."

"How old is he now?"

"Four years older than me. He'll be 23 at the end of the summer."

"Pity you can't be in touch with him. Sometimes easier to talk to your own generation." Dad said.

"Where's Des?" Sharon asked.

"The band has some commitments. He needs money, like all of us." Dad replied.

"I used my last money for the bus. I still owe my friend Julie thirty bucks." Sharon looked about to cry.

"Over the next few days we'll see what we can sort out." Dad said, noncommittally. "First, have you been to a doctor?"

"No. All the doctors in London know my folks."

"I'll arrange for you to see my own physician, and I'll worry about the cost. I'll take tomorrow morning off work and get things organized. How close were you to finishing secretarial school?"

"My typing's pretty good. I'm up to 40 words per minute. And I know how to file and index. I've also done a bit of shorthand, but that isn't very good yet."

"There may be some temporary jobs. Sometimes government departments and businesses need help when staff is on holiday." Dad was doing a good job moving the conversation to practicalities.

I put the sandwich, with slices of tomato beside it, in front of Sharon, who devoured it. She also drank all the milk, including a refill.

"Annie has to work in the morning, and normally so do I. We'll have to figure out how you will spend your days. I think you need to keep active and busy. Do you sew or knit?"

"I know how to knit plain things, and how to sew. I made myself some clothes a few years ago, till Dad said they looked cheap and reflected badly on him. I made colourful clothes that were too bright, I think."

"You won't find us critical of your taste. There is a sewing machine. Annie, do you know where there are knitting needles?"

Sharon interjected

"I won't knit baby things. This baby really can't happen! It's all wrong."

She started to cry quietly.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to upset you." Dad apologized. "But you do need things for yourself, and making them will keep you busy and you'll have something to show for your time. Let's get immediate things sorted out as soon as we can, and then see what can be done to get you on track again."

I could see Dad wasn't sure how things were going and if there was any good ending for this unfortunate girl. I decided we could work on the present moment.

"Sharon, Let's go up and get ready for bed. Do you want a bath to get rid of the bus dust?"

"Bus dust'. That's a neat expression." Sharon brightened, and got up to follow me, then turned round.

"Shall I clean up my dishes."

"Not tonight." Dad responded. "But you'll be more than wel-

come to help out with the household chores. We're still at sea with the loss of Clara."

"I'm being too self-centred. You've been very kind to me, when you didn't have to, and when you are ... grieving."

"Have a good night, Sharon." Dad said, closing the discussion on Mum's passing.

Friday, June 12, 1964 – Martin

In the morning, we breakfasted together, and Sharon did eat some scrambled eggs and toast, with orange juice and fruit. A reasonable appetite, I thought, and seemingly not too much morning sickness.

Annie went to brush her teeth and hair, and came down ready to go to work, but came in the kitchen and put several gold-coloured rings on the table.

"Sharon. I wonder if you'd like one of these? They're only Woolworth's cheap ones, but people can be very cruel."

"Oh. Thank you! That's a great idea. But what name do I give?"

"Why not your real one? It's nobody's business. And the main reason for these is to minimize the questions and looks." Annie said.

"Riiight."

"I'm off then. Bye Dad, Sharon."

"Bye Annie – good thinking by the way." I added.

"Bye Annie, and thanks," said Sharon. "I'll do the dishes, Dr. Tremblay."

As soon as I could, I called Jim Sinclair, my personal physician. I explained to the receptionist that I needed as early an appointment as possible, and that Jim could call me during the morning if there was a need for clarification. The receptionist said that she knew Dr. Tremblay would not ask frivolously and gave me an appointment for 11:30.

We showed up at 11:20. I explained, to raised eyebrows, that it was Mrs. Sanderson who would be seeing Dr. Sinclair, but that I would pay.

I'd told Sharon that she must, at all costs, tell Dr. Sinclair about both the baby and her infection. The latter, I pointed out, was a danger to her, to the baby, and others. Sharon said she didn't think she had an infection – she had no symptoms now – but I told her he would find literature for her if she wished that this was quite

common. Because the infection could have no immediate symptoms in women, it could be especially dangerous. Silently, I noted the "no symptoms now".

After Sharon was ushered into the examination room, I felt embarrassed enough to approach Mrs. Jones, the receptionist who had been with Jim since I became his patient in Canada more than a decade before, though Jim had been M.O. for 247 Squadron for a while in the War and had actually treated my embarrassing war wound.

"Mrs. Jones, the story behind Mrs. Sanderson is rather involved, and I won't betray confidences, but I'd like you to know that my role is all above board."

"I was just surprised by you showing up with her in tow, that's all, Dr. Tremblay. You and Mrs. Tremblay – and I was very sorry to hear about her – have always been very straightforward. In any event, Dr. Sinclair is very strong on "help first, and keep your mouth shut", and I've learned that that generally ends up being for the best."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jones. I'm hoping that eventually all will be sorted out. At the moment, we're really not sure what is going on, except that there is a young woman in need of some support."

I went back to the newspaper. I was looking for "help wanted" and had circled a few items looking for stenographic help. After a few minutes, Mrs. Jones called to me.

"Dr. Tremblay. Dr. Sinclair would like to speak with you."

I went into one of Jim's examination rooms. Sharon was sitting on a chair, looking very glum.

"Martin. I've asked Sharon if you could be present when we talk about what has to happen and what might happen, since you seem to have taken charge of getting proper support for her. She has agreed."

"Are you OK with that Sharon?" I asked.

A very small yes answered my question. Jim continued.

"Sharon. Martin and I go back a long way, to the War. I was for a time the Medical Officer for the squadron where Martin served. We had several cases of the infection it seems likely you have. In one case a very active young lady at a wedding in Brussels gave the clap to almost all the squadron pilots."

"Ooh. I'm not like that!"

“We know you’re not. It seems that you possibly got too much alcohol in you at a party, had sex with some man or other whose name you cannot remember, and got pregnant. Then you went to another party about 3 months ago and had sex with Martin’s nephew, who says he hasn’t been with another woman for over a year, and he realizes he’s infected. From my physical examination, you seem to be 5 months along. Your baby will likely arrive around Halloween or Remembrance Day. And you know I’ve taken a swab, so we’ll soon know if you really are infected. I’ll write a prescription anyway and phone when we have the results, probably by next Wednesday.”

Sharon was crying.

“Now I’m a gruff Scotsman, but I didn’t mean to make you cry. And you are not in as bad a situation as all that. Dr. Tremblay and his daughter and nephew’s family are all very decent. Ask him to tell you how he met Annje – the woman you call Annie. They won’t treat you like a princess, but they won’t abandon you. And you’ll have me to deal with if you aren’t decent to them too.

And I want to see you once a month so we keep you and the baby healthy.

Now I’ve got another patient and hopefully some lunch.”

“Bye. Jim. Thank you.” I said.

“You’re welcome Martin. Keep up the good work. And come in for a physical before winter. When we lose a spouse, it can affect our health.”

In the car, I asked

“Did Jim – Dr. Sinclair – upset you?”

“It wasn’t him. He told me right away he wouldn’t tell anybody anything he didn’t have to unless I gave my permission. But he said that he couldn’t be a good doctor if I didn’t tell him things fully and truthfully. That was hard.”

She started to cry again.

“You must think I’m terrible. Dr. Sinclair as good as told you Des can’t be the father.”

Given making a fuss about that wouldn’t do any good, I said “Why don’t we just stay quiet for a while on that. First, if you do have gonorrhoea, we need to get you healthy. Can I ask you to be a little careful with towels and cleaning the bath? There seems to be a dispute over whether infection can be passed without sex, but I’d hate Annie to get it.”

"I don't want to pass it on. I'm mortified that I may have given it to Des."

I wanted to ask how she might have got it, but figured this wasn't the time. Sharon changed the subject.

"What did Dr. Sinclair mean about Annie? He called her Annje."

I related the story of the mine. As I finished by telling how they'd come to Canada in 1947. She interrupted saying, "Wow. You took in a widow and child. That's real generosity."

"I got back much more than I gave." I countered.

"Really! I guess it really is hard to be in someone else's shoes."

"Let's go home and you can try calling some of the Help Wanted numbers I've circled."

"Oh. Already. OK. I could use a job. It looks like I'll have to have the baby, so I'll need some money. Dr. Sinclair was very blunt. He told me that he had known doctors who did abortions, and that even the most brave of them would not touch a woman after the baby was 3 months along. It could kill the mother. He said he'd seen such cases in Glasgow. It sounded really horrible."

"There was always a lot of poverty there. Very bad conditions."

"Will I be able to stay with you and Annie? That is, can I pay you rent and stay there if I get a job?"

"We're not going to throw you out on the street unless you do something that puts us in danger. I'd be very upset to find strange men or drinking or drugs in the house." I said this because that was the sort of situation I knew we couldn't deal with.

"No. I wouldn't do that. I don't really drink."

"Not even when you ?"

"Can I just say "no" and leave it at that?"

"Sure. I hope you'll tell us the whole story when you feel OK about it. But the important thing is not the past, but the future. And browbeating you isn't going to get an honest account, is it?"

"Thank you."

When we got home, Sharon asked if she could make lunch, and I was happy to agree. I told her what we had. She prepared some sandwiches of luncheon meat with lettuce and tomatoes and a little mayonnaise. Even toasted the bread.

After lunch, Sharon sat in the kitchen by the phone and started making some calls. The sixth call seemed to last a while. I came in the kitchen and put on the kettle for some tea. I was reading some

research papers I'd brought home in preparation for not being able to go to the lab. Sharon said goodbye, then gushed

"Dr. Tremblay, I've got an interview on Monday. There's an agency that is doing transcriptions of some international meetings. The work is piecework, but they supply a tape recorder and an electric typewriter. I could work here if you'll let me."

"Let's see if they give you the job. And we'd better check them out. Some of these agencies get the work and disappear without paying."

"Oh. That's terrible."

"As I say, let's check them out. I think you should ask them for references. You can tell them you've heard that some agencies have been less than reputable. If they don't like you asking, it may tell you that you should not work for them."

By the way, if they ask why you are in Ottawa, you can say you moved here to be with family. It's not quite truthful, but close enough. And beyond that, I'd stick to telling them about your education, and that you are looking for experience."

"OK. Should I call some more. I really don't feel like it much."

"It may be that you've done enough calls for today. Why don't you look through the boxes of Clara's things. They were ready to go to the Sally Ann. I'll also hunt out her collection of cloth and wool to see if there's anything useful for you, but don't start anything until you ask Annie. She puts on a brave face, but sometimes things remind her of Clara, and sometimes it's silly small things that you want to hold onto."

"Yes. I can understand that. Though I guess what I said about baby things was a bit premature – double meaning intended."

We both laughed.

I spent some time finding the old suitcases where Clara kept fabric and wool. I remembered the sewing machine was in the guest room that Sharon was using, so asked her if she minded if I looked there and invited her to join me. We found the sewing machine was sitting on the cupboard shelf. The suitcases were on the floor of the same cupboard. There was also a sewing basket and a sort of briefcase with knitting and crochet needles.

"Clara had all the equipment." Sharon said.

"Yes. My family gave us a typewriter and sewing machine when we came back to Canada at Christmas 1947. We had our religious

wedding here.”

“Separate from your real wedding?”

“We wanted Clara’s family and my European friends to be at our wedding as well as my family here, so we had two weddings. In fact, Joe Baker, Des’ Dad, did the ceremony.”

“He’s a minister!”

“United Church down in Brockville. They’re nice people.”

“I hope not like my Dad.”

I noticed the comment, but pretended to ignore it.

“Joe’s a special guy.” I related how he’d lost wife and child in a fire, and how Penny had been widowed. I went into the master bedroom and came back with the photo of Clara at David’s grave and explained it.

“She’s really beautiful. Not in a superficial pretty way. Really deeply beautiful.”

“Yes.” I said, turning to hide a tear.

“Sorry. I reminded you of her.”

“But Annie and I don’t want her ignored.” I took the photo and put it back in the bedroom.

“Did you find anything you can wear in the boxes.” I asked.

“Several items. Especially a couple of big sweaters. I’ll need some that cover my belly in a little while. And a few smaller items. You don’t mind.”

“I hate waste. Probably anyone who went through the War does.”

“My Dad didn’t join. He claimed a heart murmur, but I think my Grandad paid off the doctor doing the examinations. You were with Dr. Sinclair, but he’s not Canadian.”

I explained how I’d come to be in the RAF. Somehow that had been omitted from the story of the mine.

“Dr. Tremblay, can I make supper for you and Annie?”

“Sure. If you are going to stay here, we’d better make you sing for your supper.”

“OK. Show me what there is and I’ll check with you what I plan to make before I start preparing it?”

I gave her a tour of the cupboards and fridge.

“There’s a notepad hanging from that hook where you can make a note of things we need. If you think about it, look in the newspaper for the ads from the supermarkets in case there are specials we can take advantage of. While I’m thinking about it, let’s put \$10 in that

empty tea tin for housekeeping petty cash. If you buy anything, put the receipt or a note in there.

If you want to buy anything for yourself, let me know and I'll do what I can. Hopefully you'll soon have a job and can set aside a small allowance for silly money – you know, small indulgences that aren't part of the serious plan."

"Annie's really lucky. You see the importance of small things."

It turned out that Sharon had good home skills. She proposed a tuna casserole in case Annie were late or going out – I suddenly realized it was Friday night. I'd almost forgotten it.

Annie came in about 5:15. Indeed she planned to go out to a movie with Fred, but they were meeting at the cinema. Dinner was a minor success, and Sharon chatted quite easily about her day, even about Dr. Sinclair. Annie gave me a couple of meaningful looks when Sharon was at the stove or sink. I mouthed "later".

After supper, Sharon insisted on clearing up and doing the dishes. I put on the TV and told Sharon she could change the channel as she wanted. I would be there, but reading some of my papers. She was welcome to read any of the books and magazines, but please put them back where she found them so they could be found again – one of the particular problems of a house full of writings.

"I thought you were a doctor – I mean medical doctor – but that looks like it's science or something."

"I am a scientist working on radio frequency transmission. Microwaves, radio, communications. That sort of stuff."

We dropped into silence.

The phone rang about 7:30. It was Penny.

"Hi Penny. Yes Sharon's here. She's settling in. Cooked the supper tonight. ... Oh. Tomorrow. Let me ask.

Sharon. My sister, Des' mother, wants to come up tomorrow to see me. She'd like to meet you if you will agree. I didn't get a chance to tell you, but she and Joe have a lot of experience helping people. They probably still have connections to different services. And on top of it, they are nice people, as I said earlier."

"OK." Sharon said tentatively.

"Penny. Yes. What time will you be here. Yes, 11 is fine. Will you stay for dinner. No. OK, we'll make it a big lunch then. How many of you? Three, OK. Bye."

"Penny is coming with Des, who was in Kingston, and his youngest

brother Michael.”

“How many brothers and sisters does he have? I really don’t know him that well. Oh. That must seem so bad of me!”

“Joe and Penny have 4 children of their own. Joe adopted Des so his name would be Baker rather than Stedman, which was David’s name. The youngest is Michael, who turns 6 this year.”

“What do you think they want with me?”

“If I know Penny, she wants to make sure you’re OK. I mean that you are safe and well looked after. I’m sure she’s curious, but she has enough practical experience that I really doubt she’ll embarrass you.”

“I’m wondering if I should go out while they’re here.”

“You’ll do better to meet them, and treat them at face value. Keep your head up and look them in the eye. You may have made a mistake ...”

“It wasn’t a mistake! Oh. I can’t say more ...”

“Then shall we say ”were taken advantage of”.”

“I suppose”

“And that should not mean you have to pay the price forever as if all, or even any, of the blame is yours.”

“But how do I keep my head up? Even if I didn’t really do anything wrong ... at least at the start.”

“You look after yourself and your unborn baby. You do what you can to be a good citizen and contribute to society, to make your way in the world. And as much as you can, you try not to feel sorry for yourself, because it doesn’t do you any good anyway.” I said this knowing that while it had a lot of truth, it skated over an awful lot of the grimy realities. Still, Sharon responded, “That’s good advice.”

We fell into silence. At 9, Sharon got up and asked,

“Would you like some cocoa. It has milk, so I thought it might be good for me.”

“Yes please. I prefer it with almost no sugar. A trick I learned in the War was to put a spoonful of cocoa in the saucepan with the milk. Sometimes I wouldn’t bother with sugar – we often didn’t have any with the rationing. And the milk often came from powder. Sometimes we had some condensed sweetened milk, and could add that for sweetness.”

“I’ll try making the cocoa like that, and just add sugar to mine.”

“Yes. Give it a try.”

After cocoa, Sharon said goodnight. I waited up for Annie, who came in just after 11.

"Fred OK." I asked.

"Yes. Except for ... We figured too many people around to ... well, you know. Even for a bit of a cuddle. And we went to the Elgin again – Sean Connery in 'From Russia with Love'. A bit too much going on all the time to ... you know."

"And we don't want to set a bad example, do we?" I teased.

We went in the kitchen, where we would not be heard upstairs if Sharon were awake.

"What did Dr. Sinclair have to say, if it's not a secret?" Annie asked.

"She's 5 months gone. Baby's due around Halloween."

"Not Des, then. Did she say who?"

"No. Though I'm sure it's not some anonymous fellow. She made a couple of comments that make me think she's been pressured somehow. Jim Sinclair said he'd let us know next week sometime if we need to get the prescription he gave us filled for an antibiotic."

"She seems to want to do stuff. I saw how she'd been through the box for the Sally Ann." Annie observed.

"Yes. And she insisted on doing dinner and the dishes. And cocoa before she went to bed."

"If we get along OK, maybe she can do some light housekeeping in lieu of rent and stay here for a while." Annie said.

"Maybe. I don't know if that is altogether a good idea. We really don't know who is behind her troubles. Could be some criminal or other. She clearly is frightened or worried about someone.

Let's wait and see how things go. Oh. I forgot. Aunt Penny phoned. She and Des and Michael are coming for lunch tomorrow. Are you going to be around."

"Yes. I'm meeting Fred later and Jane and her new beau are double dating with us at the Little Theatre. The curtain's at 8:30."

"No fooling around in the back seat on the way home."

"No way! You've properly corrupted me to want a comfortable bed so I can be totally wicked. Though we may cuddle a bit."

"I suppose I have expressed an opinion in favour of comfort. But I think that's the better way."

"No argument there."

"G'night then."

“Night Dad.”

Saturday morning, June 13, 1964 – Martin

I noticed that Sharon was up well before either Annie or I had woken. As I had cautioned, I scrubbed the tub before taking a shower in it. By the time I was dressed and came to the kitchen, I found there was a percolator of fresh coffee, and the oven was warming to accept a couple of pie crusts Sharon had made.

“I hope you don’t mind. I thought we’d need some pies for dessert at lunch. I’ll go out after breakfast for either some apples or some cans of cherry pie filling. Both are advertised in the paper, but I’ll have to ask where the supermarkets are that have them.”

“There’s an IGA on Bank Street and I think it’s at least Steinberg’s at Billings Bridge – I can never remember the names, and they may have another one there too. The latter is a bit far, though you could take a bicycle if you can ride one.”

“Yes. I can ride a bike. You don’t mind?”

“Not at all. It will give you some independence and a bit of exercise. We’ll pump the tires and adjust the saddle after breakfast.”

“Do you want eggs? We had them yesterday.”

“Maybe just some shredded wheat and banana. And some of that coffee.”

“Annie’s not up?”

“I heard her go in the bathroom as I came down.”

I ate, then put my bowl in the sink. I put on my shoes and a cap and went out to the garage and moved things around to get at Clara’s bike. I had to move Annie’s – she must be using it; I hadn’t noticed.

I moved the bike into the driveway. It was essentially dry out now, though there’d been a shower earlier.

In the driveway I pumped the tires and found some oil to get the chain moving smoothly. The bike was a standard 3-speed upright. It had a basket on the front and a carrier on the back. I found the chain and combination lock and fiddled until I remembered the combination was 4709 for the year and month Clara and I married. This lock luckily let you set the number.

I went to the side door and called out “Sharon, Can you come and try the bike? Put on some shoes though.”

After a minute or so, Sharon appeared at the door and stepped out.

"It's a nice one. I only ever had a back-pedal coaster bike."

"Stand beside the saddle. I need to lower it an inch. Clara was taller."

I used a couple of wrenches and had the saddle adjusted quickly.

"Give it a try. You know how to brake and use the gears."

"The brakes seem to work like this. Sharon squeezed the handles. But I don't know for sure how to change gears."

"These ones work by coasting or pedalling backwards to ease the tension on the chain and moving the lever here up or down. You need to anticipate changing."

"OK, I'll try it." She stepped through the opening between saddle and handlebars, straightened up the bike and with her foot raised the left pedal. She pushed down on it and went off down the driveway, braked to slow her progress, then turned onto the road. I walked to the end of the drive and saw her pedalling, coasting, pedalling more slowly, coasting, pedalling faster, then looking over her shoulder and making a U turn and coming back. She stopped easily, and could put her foot on the ground.

"It's great."

"The lock uses 4709 for September 1947. Can you remember that?"

"Sure." She had a big smile.

"I'll go now. I checked that what I need is at Billings. I've taken \$5. It should be enough."

And she was away, her skirt blowing lightly as she pedalled away. I closed the garage and went in the house. Another cup of coffee would be nice.

"What were you doing outside with Sharon, Dad?"

"Setting up Mum's bike for her. She's roared off to Billings Bridge. Wants something to fill the pie shells she has cooling there."

"We might get spoiled."

"So we throw her out so you don't get fat?"

"Dad! If I get fat, you'll get fat too."

"We may not like her pies. I should have asked her to get some ice cream too."

As it turned out, Sharon bought some Neapolitan ice cream too.

“It’ll be cherry pie and ice cream for dessert. I thought I’d make a stew so people could have as much or as little as they wanted. I put out some chuck steak I found in the freezer as soon as I got up. I hope it thaws soon enough to cut. I saw onions and carrots and some cabbage. Will that do?”

“Wonderful. I’ll walk up to the bakery on Bank and get a fresh loaf of crusty bread.”

“That would go very well with it. Sometimes at home I’d bake, but I need whole wheat flour and yeast to do it right.”

“We’ll wait with our tongues out,” said Annie.

Lunchtime, Saturday, June 13, 1964 – Anna

When Penny, Des and Michael arrived, the introductions were awkward and formal. Dad suggested they wash up and have lunch. The aroma of the stew broke the tension. Penny said,

“Wow, that smells good. It’s like Clara was here – oh, I’ve stuck my foot in my mouth.”

“Not to worry Aunt Penny. We’ve decided we aren’t going to avoid mentioning Mum. It’s too much work anyway.” I told her.

“So you’ve taken over the kitchen, Annie.”

“Nope. This is Sharon’s work. We’ve been getting spoiled.”

Aunt Penny – uncharacteristically – was for a few moments silent. Des chimed in, “I didn’t know you could cook, Sharon?”

“You weren’t thinking of food.” Aunt Penny was back in the conversation.

“Aunt Penny. That’s a bit harsh. When did Joe find out whether you could cook?” I asked.

“That daughter of yours, Martin. I swear she’ll be one of Canada’s ambassadors before she’s 30.”

“Mummy. Can I have some more?” Michael had not been talking, but eating.

Sharon looked at Aunt Penny, who nodded, and took Michael’s bowl and filled it. Dad passed the bread to Aunt Penny, who took a piece for Michael and cut it in half for him.

When it came to dessert, Sharon turned first to Michael and asked him “Do you want vanilla, strawberry or chocolate ice cream on your pie, or a bit of each?”

“Lots of each!”

“That isn’t good manners Michael.” Aunt Penny intervened. “What do you say?”

“Some of each, please, Sharon.”

Sharon moved easily from one to the other of the table’s occupants, then sat down herself with a serving of pie and ice cream.

“Tea?” Dad asked.

Michael had lemonade, but the rest of us had tea. Des had been quiet, possibly embarrassed. Sharon rescued him.

“Would it be all right if I went for a walk down to the river with Des?”

“Certainly.” Dad said. Aunt Penny nodded. I knew she wanted to talk to Dad, so I said,

“Michael, why don’t you come and see the chipmunk in the back yard. But you have to be very quiet. I’ll get some peanuts and maybe he’ll come to us.”

There was the usual kerfuffle as we all went out. I think Dad got to share some thoughts with his sister. I hope so, anyway.

Afternoon, Saturday, June 13, 1964 – Martin

“I haven’t been at this table for nearly 2 years, Martin.”

“Yes, once Clara got sick, we didn’t feel much like entertaining, and couldn’t really.”

“I feel guilty I’ve not been up since the funeral.”

“Though I’m not religious, I’m sincere in saying that we could feel your prayers and sympathy.”

“Thanks for that. And very much thanks for helping with Des’ problem. Though it seems that technically it isn’t his fault.”

“I suspect that Sharon is apologizing right now. My guess is that there is some quite dark history and she tried to find a way out in Des. Though not as she planned, she may have a chance to move on.”

“What do you think should happen, Martin? Surely she can’t stay here.”

“For the time being, I think she can. The dark history she mentioned is what concerns me most, especially if she is mixed up with criminals. I’m inclined to think it is more likely a teacher or family member.”

“That’s really ugly. I’ve read about such cases, but they are so far from my experience”

“Mine too. I couldn’t imagine doing anything to Annie. Even if she’s not my bloodline, she’s my daughter.”

Afternoon, Saturday, June 13, 1964 – Anna

Aunt Penny and crew left before 5. Dad asked me what show Fred and I were going to see with our friends.

“I’m not sure. ” Actually it was ‘Oh Dad, Poor Dad’, but somehow I didn’t want to say that out loud for some reason. “Nothing special. Fred said he’d call before supper. Why don’t I suggest we all walk up Bank and find a burger and you and Sharon join us? ”

“Sharon?”

“That would be nice, but ...”

“But what?”

“Nothing I guess. I’m not used to that sort of thing. We didn’t ever go out together as a family.”

“I was going to ask if you wanted to go to church in the morning. We’re almost a house of sinners. We go sometimes, but we’re not very devout.” Dad said.

“No. I don’t want to go to church.” This was said with such firmness it took me by surprise. Dad too.

I decided to change to go out. Found I had a plaid shirt-like blouse that I could wear decently without a bra. Fred could give me a gentle feel if we had a modicum of privacy in the car.

Sunday, June 14, 1964 – Anna

At breakfast on Sunday morning – again prepared by Sharon, we were getting spoiled – Dad asked “Have you communicated with your folks yet, Sharon?”

“Not yet.”

“You can phone if you’d prefer not to write.”

“Thanks, but I’ll write. I want to see if I get that job first.”

“You can say you are living here temporarily, and getting accommodation in exchange for some housekeeping duties for a widowed

scientist and his daughter. It's truthful enough, and will possibly avoid other questions."

"Smart idea Dad." I said.

"OK I'll tell them that. Shall I put my address c/o Dr. Tremblay."

"Yes. Do that." Dad answered.

Monday, June 15, 1964 – Martin

On Monday morning, I had a call from Jim Sinclair at work.

"Jim. This must be important."

"Martin. I didn't want to call you at home. I've been mulling over this girl's situation all weekend. She was lying to me when she said she didn't know who got that bun in her oven."

"She essentially admitted to me she wasn't drunk. I think she is very scared of saying whoever did it, though."

"Hmm. I got a similar feeling. And I'm worried who else he's infecting, assuming the culture is positive, which I suspect it will be. Poor Des was a casualty too."

"He came up with Penny on Saturday. They got along with Sharon OK. I don't think there's any rancour there, and Des and his family are talking to each other. It also turns out Sharon can cook up a storm. Annie and I are getting spoiled."

"Well. You might as well get some return on your generosity. I'm glad you're doing it. As long as the culprit doesn't turn up after your hide, I think having to help someone out may keep you from getting too lonely."

"Anything else, Jim."

"No. Just wanted really to tell you that I want to know anything that might be pertinent to Sharon's well-being and that of the baby. At some point she'll have to sign papers to put it up for adoption."

"Assuming the father, or someone willing to be the father, doesn't come forward." I said.

"There's always that possibility, I suppose. Though I don't think she wants to have anything to do with whoever the father is. Bye Martin."

"Bye Jim."

Tuesday, June 16, 1964 – Anna

Jim Sinclair had phoned Dad to ask if he could come by around 5:30 on his way home. He said he wanted to talk to Sharon.

When Jim arrived, he asked where he and Sharon could talk privately, and Dad offered them the living room. We'd go out on the porch. However, Sharon said,

"I think I'd feel better with Annie and Dr. Tremblay here. They've been good to me."

"That's understandable, and they may be able to give you some help in deciding what to do. I did not want to violate your right to confidentiality."

Now the bad news is that the culture was positive. I found I have some pills with the right antibiotic of the right dosage. Here they are, so you won't need to fill the prescription I wrote.

Take them as the label says until they are all gone. Make sure you don't miss any. Then we'll run another swab to be sure you've eliminated the infection."

"They won't harm the baby?" I asked.

"We've no evidence that this treatment does any harm. Given the thalidomide disaster, there's a lot of testing of common drugs like this, so I think we can be confident there'll be no problem."

However, the microbe we're trying to knock out can do a lot of damage to you and your baby, so we really need to try to find who it was who infected Sharon, and impregnated her, assuming they are the same person. As gonorrhoea is a notifiable disease, there will be at least some level of report, even if the name entry is anonymous. However, I think that Sharon knows who is responsible, and is frightened of them or for them."

Sharon went pale. Jim continued.

"Sharon. I know what I just said sounds harsh and I'm sure you have good reasons for wanting to withhold the information. However, when I was a medical student in Glasgow, we had a couple of separate cases where a girl was made pregnant and given syphilis or clap or both by her own father or uncle. However, we weren't able to do much other than try to cure the infection and offer care for mother and baby at a minimal level. We didn't have the resources to get the girl away from the family and get those infected some help to cure their infection, let alone proper facilities to care for the

men and control their behaviour. Things are better here for you, Sharon."

Sharon was sitting in stony silence. Jim stopped talking and allowed a long pause. He continued,

"Think about what I've said. The important things are to get you healthy and getting on with a productive life."

Jim got up, and Dad saw him out. I stayed with Sharon in the living room.

"I can't ..." Sharon said.

"What?" I asked.

"I can't say who it is. It won't help anyway."

"You mean it would cause more trouble? But wouldn't that mean evil was rewarded?"

"I'd have to accuse him, and it's a crime."

"You mean all the fuss with police and lawyers?"

"Yes. I couldn't bear it. I'd rather kill myself."

"That would let them get away with it too. Sometimes just telling the truth to people you trust allows you to figure out ways to solve problems. Not always the rule-book way, and maybe only for yourself.

But it would be better if other people could be protected. If the man has a wife, she could get the infection, and so on."

"He might come and beat me up or kill me if he thought I'd spill the beans on him."

"Dad and I would be here."

"And also in danger in that case."

"I hadn't thought of that. Could the person get the address?"

"I would think so." Sharon was trying to skate on the very thin ice the conversation had left her.

"It won't hurt to think over what Dr. Sinclair said for a day or two. For now you are safe here."

Dad seemed to be staying out of the way. He'd probably expect a report of anything important. I saw him looking at the garden. Apparently Sharon had been out there tidying.

Thursday, June 18, 1964 – Martin

Sharon received a phone call from the temporary steno agency she'd applied to. They were willing to give her a two week trial. The rate

was 30 cents a page with a maximum of two corrections per page. There would be a \$25 deposit for the electric typewriter and tape recorder. Paper, ribbons and correcting material were provided at a cost that seemed high to Annie and me.

When I did some calculations and showed Sharon how to estimate her income, it was clear that the company would be earning, but Sharon would not. She was downcast and quiet as she prepared supper, but did ask if she could do some gardening in the morning.

I said, "Of course. I'm afraid we've been letting it go a bit. Clara used to do the plants. I've always just mowed and followed directions on the heavy work. I noticed you'd done some tidying. Thanks."

"I like to garden. It let me get out of the house and keep out of the way. We had a flower garden behind the minister's house with a hedge separating it from a big vegetable garden. I used to grow all sorts of things there."

"Let me know if you need some money for plants or seeds. I'm afraid Clara used to do all that – she'd had a farm in Belgium – and I'm a total klutz with plants."

Later, over dinner, Sharon brightened up when asked how her day had gone, saying "Des wrote to me. A really nice letter about his music and what he's doing to see about work when the music jobs are slack. He has been talking to a plumber about becoming an apprentice. The plumber is an amateur musician, and he's willing to let Des have a bit of time off if there's no pressing work."

"Plumbing can be a solid career. You don't see too many of them out of work." I said.

"But Dad, the work can be pretty messy when you have to clear drains," Annie noted.

"True. But someone has to do it."

"Des mentioned that, but said they have pretty good protective gear and equipment. He's already started." Sharon said.

"What about the band?" I asked.

"I think they've broken up. Some of their gigs were not confirmed, so they decided to tell the promoters they would not be coming."

I said "Des told me he had some people wanting him to back them up for recordings, but that he thought the Canadian industry too fragile to trust music as a complete career."

Sharon continued "He wrote that he's thinking of doing the plumbing while working on a long term plan to set up his own small studio. He said he wanted to talk to you, Dr. Tremblay, about the electronics for that. Something about new types of amplifiers and sound mixing equipment."

"Is Des back at home?" Annie asked.

"Apparently. He said to write to him there. He even said I could come and see him there. I'm not sure I should."

"I'll ask Aunt Penny if it would be OK." Annie said.

"That's sort of why I was not sure about what to say to Des. Thanks. I'll keep quiet about coming until I'm sure it's OK."

"Have you heard anything from your parents since you wrote on Sunday?" I asked.

Sharon's face clouded.

"I had a letter from my father today. It didn't really say anything. 'Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old'. Didn't ask whether I was happy, or even healthy."

"I'm sorry your father doesn't want to learn how you see life. I get a lot of joy from Annie telling me how she is doing."

"Really Dad?"

"Of course. You see things a lot different from me. It helps me to take a wider perspective."

Next Wednesday, June 24, 1964 – Anna

As we were clearing the dishes, the phone rang. Dad picked it up.

"Hi. Penny. How are things... Good ... So you think Sharon should come for a week starting this weekend, then you'll drive her back the following weekend."

"Sharon. Did you hear that? Give you a chance to see Brockville and the St. Lawrence. And there's a big garden. Is that OK?"

"Penny. Sharon is nodding. We'll put her on the bus Friday night – I'll phone once we know the times."

Sharon asked me "Can you help me hem a dress I've made up from bits and pieces?"

"Sure! You have been busy."

"I didn't bring much with me. Most of my clothes I didn't like."

A while later, I called down “Dad, come and look at the dress Sharon’s made.”

Dad found us in my bedroom with Sharon in front of the mirror.

“I still need to adjust the dart here under my left arm.” she said.

“It’s nice,” Dad said. “It seems familiar, but I cannot place it.”

“I saw long dresses like this in a book you have about Jane Austen. The high Empire line will hide the baby for a bit, and I was able to take the white material for the bodice and use the blue pastel material for the sleeves, blue and red panels for the skirt, which I shortened so it’s just below the knee – that’s what I needed Annie to help with – and a bit of the pastel red for the neckline.”

“It’s rather good, Sharon. You have talent.” Dad said.

“Mum taught me to sew, but my Dad wouldn’t let me wear stuff I made. Said it was too colourful and looked home-made. It would reflect badly on the minister. But he wouldn’t give us much of a clothing allowance, so we wore dull styles in drab colours. But I like bright colours and interesting styles, even if they aren’t quite the current fashion.”

“Take that with you and show Penny. I’ll be surprised if she doesn’t share my opinion that it’s really very good, and ...”

“I think it’s brilliant, Sharon,” I said. Dad was being far too conservative.

“Thanks. It’s really nice to find someone likes what I do.”

“Everyone needs to be appreciated.” I said.

“I think that’s why Allen left home. Dad kept criticizing everything he did.”

“Not very Christian. Sorry. I should not have said that.” Dad apologized.

“He wants anything he does to be seen perfect, like his project to rescue street women.”

“You’re saying he has a project with prostitutes?” I asked.

“Yes. Sometimes he seemed to give them more attention than any of us in his own family.”

“Sounds like ‘Rain’,” I said.

“What?” Sharon asked.

“A story by Somerset Maugham. You might find it interesting.” I said.

Friday, June 26, 1964 – Martin

Annie and I were driving back from the bus station.

“Dad. Do you think Sharon’s father made her pregnant and sick?” I ventured.

“Jim obviously thinks it’s a possibility. I could not imagine treating you or any child that way. So I had trouble accepting that idea at first, but the way he seems to be so controlling and domineering, and the way Sharon goes to ice when he’s mentioned, makes me feel it could be the case. It’s just so totally out of my circle of experience and understanding.”

“She said some things to me that more or less support it too. But I don’t think she’ll make a statement. She’s too scared, and more or less implied whoever is responsible could be violent.”

“If it is her father, he has a lot to lose if she accuses him. And so does her mother, since the family income and house would be lost.”

“Yes. I think that’s likely why Sharon won’t do much. But it seems so unfair that he can’t be stopped. I guess I should say ‘supposing it is him’.”

“Jim suggested golf tomorrow. I told him I’d meet him for breakfast instead, and we agreed to meet at his clubhouse after his round.”

After Jim left the other night I had heard the girls’ voices and decided to stay out of the way, trusting Annie to relay anything really important. I’d gone into the garden and seen an improved state of affairs. It was tidier.

Sharon seemed to have rather limited presence and skills for the working world. On the other hand, she seemed happy in the kitchen and the garden. I wondered if she were not a born home-maker. I didn’t hold that women had to be housewives and mothers, but she was good at it and seemed to like it.

Saturday, June 27, 1964 – Martin

“So Sharon hinted to Annie my guess might be right?” Jim asked after I told him of their conversation. “That’s something, but it doesn’t let us do anything concrete.”

“Yes. And it doesn’t look like Sharon will make any formal accusation.” I said.

“Martin, this sort of thing makes my blood boil. I’m tempted to phone the father and suggest that we have information indicating he’s responsible and see what reaction that triggers. If he is adamant he’s innocent, there’s not a lot we can do, but I can say – truthfully – that I’m following up a contact for a confirmed case of a notifiable disease, conveniently omitting that it isn’t really my job.”

“It might work, but I think you could precipitate other trouble. If we had more certain knowledge that the father is responsible, I’d say go ahead and see what happened. But without Sharon confirming that, I think we should hold back for now.”

“Wish it were otherwise. It might be good if Sharon stays with Penny and Joe, but uses your address for corresponding with her parents. That way there’s a chance of blocking attempts to intimidate her.”

“Agreed. I’m unhappy about not being able to do anything too. But it could get you in a mess of trouble. Selfishly, I don’t want to have to find a new doctor.”

“To change the subject, how are you doing on your own.”

“Not so bad, and not so on my own.”

“Meaning a girlfriend.”

“Sort of, though I meant that Annie is good company.”

“How about some juicy details about the ”sort of” girlfriend!”

“Maybe a few, under doctor-patient confidentiality.” I summarized my trip to Hamilton briefly.

“Pity she had to go back home.” Jim sympathized.

“Maybe. But I’m not sure I should dive into another marriage until I’ve had time to settle my feelings a bit. Or even an intense personal relationship.”

“Good thinking. Nevertheless, the fling probably did both you and the young lady a lot of good as long as you took precautions.”

“Yes. I’d bought some after Annie asked some awkward questions and we had a refreshingly frank talk about avoiding babies, and told her that she should be aware of the possibility while using good sense about her behaviour.”

“But how’s a single woman like Annie to get condoms easily in this straight-laced town? It’s not like the UK where you go to the barber and they slip you some.”

“I told her where they were kept.”

“Oh! Very broad-minded! But then you’ll notice when she uses

them.”

“And vice-versa – red faces all round after the Victoria Day weekend.”

“That’s precious!” Jim laughed. “I hope she found a nice young man who was gentle with her.”

“I think so. He’s come round a few times for supper and such. Annie has pretty good judgement.”

“So does her father. I hope she used the condoms carefully. They’re not statistically very successful, but my feeling is that the main reason is sloppy use.

But I’m glad you are getting back into things.

I also have been feeling badly that I didn’t push Clara to come for more frequent checkups. It may not have made any difference, but ... well, you know how I want things to be right, just as in our discussion today.”

“I sensed that there was something bothering you soon after Clara had the mastectomy.”

“It’s a nasty disease, and I also realize that I’d forgotten Clara had said her mother died of it. We’ll not get really good medicine until we learn how family history affects some of these cancers.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself or you’ll become obsessed with too many details and miss the bigger picture.”

“True. And I’m glad I was able to talk to you about things. More coffee?”

Some notes from early July 1964 – Anna

Sharon was invited to stay at Aunt Penny’s and accepted. More to the point, Aunt Penny and Uncle Joe found it very helpful to have someone around who could cook, sew, knit, garden, and, as it turned out, do bookkeeping. Sharon had done the records of the parish monies for her father. They figured they could easily offer room and board, and would try to work out some pocket money and ways for her to get other income, possibly by dress-making and alterations. Penny had also learned from Dad that Jim Sinclair had wanted to intervene by calling Sharon’s father as if he were tracing contacts, even though it wasn’t his job and he didn’t have a proper lead. Dad persuaded Jim this might do more harm than good and get Jim into hot water, but talking about Jim reminded them to

arrange regular prenatal checks for Sharon, which Aunt Penny did with her own physician.

We got a letter from Penny early in July.

June 27, 1964

Dear Martin and Annie,

Just an update on how things are going.

Sharon seems to have settled in. She and Des have had time to chat and get to know each other, which I don't think they'd done until now. I'm making sure they are well-chaperoned. If there is to be any future for them, it will have to be a proper future.

Joe is going to make an announcement in church to try to forestall unkindness. Our parishioners are pretty good, but there are always gossips.

Hope you are keeping well.

Love,

Penny, Joe and family.

Des told me about the announcement later. He could remember it word for word:

"At this time I'd like to make a small announcement to all members of this congregation to introduce Sharon Sanderson who will be staying with Penny and I and our family for a while in the role of part-time housekeeper and helper. She has encountered some serious difficulties recently in her life. Please give her your kindness and prayers and friendship, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, and remember that things are seldom precisely what they seem. "

It gave him a lot of respect for Uncle Joe.

Sunday, June 28, 1964 – Anna

The weekend Sharon left, Fred and his family invited both Dad and I to dinner on the Sunday. The conversation was rather mixed but friendly, and both of us felt the event was a success.

On the walk home, Dad said, "You realize that families meeting is often the prelude to more formal arrangements?"

"Yes, Dad. Fred and I are conscious of that and discussed it a bit. We are pretty close, yet we know we're likely not to end up together. We're thinking of going camping over the August holiday weekend to see Quebec City – I've not done that yet. We figure there'll be less family angst if you and the Pinters have met each other. It'll be just before Fred takes off for Vancouver."

"Likely be a bit of a tough time for you."

"Yes. I realize it will. But I'll survive. So will Fred. We're still in the middle of getting our educations."

On a more serious level, Fred did point out that I could transfer to UBC to finish my degree and possibly continue my studies there."

"With marriage in mind?"

"I don't mind a bit of fun – and fun taken seriously with respect to avoiding bad outcomes – but anything long term, I want a proper arrangement. Fred knows that in no uncertain terms."

But I don't think I'm quite ready yet. I've told him that we should let him get established there, and maybe I come and investigate for a couple of weeks at the end of my coming year. There's a bit of a question of summer jobs and such, but I'd not want to go there with no solid plan for both of us. I think Fred is more or less of the same opinion. I've said we should both feel OK about going out with other people, while keeping in touch with each other. If we really are meant to be together, we'll find a way without taking the habit."

Dad replied, "From a selfish point of view, I would find it pretty hard if you left now. On the surface, I don't think I show much of an effect from Mum's death. But there are moments."

"For me too. And leeching onto Fred right away might be driven by the loss, at least in part. That's not fair to him."

"Yes. I fear some of my involvement with Margaret was driven by that, as we've mentioned before. I was worried about how it might affect her. In some ways events may have been fortuitous in avoiding a painful breakup later."

Wednesday, July 1, 1964 – Anna

July 1 is mid-week this year. Fred and I and some friends are going to Parliament Hill for the concert and fireworks. Dad says these were only introduced in 1958 by Ellen Fairclough who badgered Diefenbaker into getting cabinet to attend. Parliament actually was still sitting on July 1 then, it seems. Guess I should have been old enough to note that, but somehow I didn't.

Given parking would be a mess, we planned to walk. Jane's place is the closest, near Glebe Avenue. We parked there. We decided to have an early supper in her garden – sort of a planned pot luck, with each of three couples – Fred and I, Marcia and Constantine, and Jane and Roland – bringing an agreed part of the meal. It'll be a first date with Constantine. Roland was Jane's new beau when we went to the Little Theatre together a couple of weeks ago. Don't know how she met him. He's an accountant. Well, he will be in a year or so when he passes the CA exams. Seems nice. Serious. Not artsy, but he was very positive about Jane's work.

Jane and Roland provided drinks, including a bottle of wine. Six ways, so nobody got drunk, but it was enjoyable. Fred and I did a lasagna for the main course, and Marcia and Constantine brought salad and a dessert. It turned out to be Greek baklava, and Constantine was of course Greek. Great meal.

We waited until about 7:30 then walked to the Hill. Very crowded and noisy. There were different acts. We milled around and as the sun set and it got to be after 10 the fireworks started. Colour and noise. Rather fun, especially with Fred's arm round me.

All of us were quiet on the way back. Even Marcia. She held hands with Constantine, but I think that was so they weren't out of place with the rest of us, who were into that comfortable place where holding hands and such were natural. I couldn't really make out how Constantine fitted with Marcia. I think she rather awed and intimidated him, even though she didn't intend to.

Wednesday, July 1, 1964 – Martin

Annie and Fred and some other friends were going to Parliament Hill for the concert and fireworks. I'd been wondering what I'd do for Dominion Day, until a couple of days ago my secretary, Miss

Lacroix, said she and her family were having a barbeque and would I like to participate. It would be a pot-luck, with the family providing some steak and chicken, the barbeque, and tea and coffee. Everyone else was asked to bring either something like a starter, a vegetable, a salad, or a dessert, and drinks. When she asked, I said,

“Thanks for the invitation, Nicole. I was sort of wondering what I was going to do. Annie and friends have plans. I’m still getting used to being single again. I’ll bring a mixed salad and something to drink. Is wine allowed?”

“Absolutely! And I think you’ll find there’s a good mix of people, and I know you can get along in French, so I think you’ll fit in.”

“My French is a bit rusty. Despite my name, I’m an anglo, though I did pick up some street joul when I was a schoolkid here.”

“About 3:30 to 4. Here’s the address.”

* * *

I showed up at a quarter to 4 to a big house in Eastview. There was a sign on the door to come round the back, which I did. Nicole yelled a greeting, then in a very rough local accent yelled

“Michelle, viens prendre la salade de Dr Tremblay.”

A tiny, pixie-like woman, thirty-something, with short dark hair and green eyes appeared from the back door onto the deck and looked around to see who Dr Tremblay might be. She spied me and called

“Ici, s’il-v’play.”

“Call me Martin. Nicole looks after things for me at the lab, so I kind of expect Dr. Tremblay from her.”

“You have a French name but seem to speak English.”

“I’m an anglo with a French name.” I explained my history (again!), and that if she wished I’d try my boyhood French.

“I’m Michelle Corcoran, though soon I hope to change back to Lacroix.”

“Should I ask?”

“Divorced – just got the final papers. Family sort of wants me to go hunting again, even though they know Catholics aren’t supposed to, so they have this confusion. If you are single – which I’ll guess you are since you’ve come on your own – you could be here as likely prey. Don’t worry, I’ve no interest or inclination. One disaster is

enough for one life. Andrea, come and take this salad and put it in the basement to keep cool.”

A girl of perhaps 14 came out of the house and took the salad.

“Andrea, this is Dr. Martin Tremblay, Nicole’s boss. Martin, this is my daughter Andrea.”

“Nice to meet you Andrea. And you too, Michelle. I’ve a couple of bottles of wine to contribute too. They don’t have to be opened unless there’s demand. And some soda in case someone – like me – wants a wine and soda spritzer.”

“Then we’ll open a bottle now and I’ll join you. That’s a great idea to get a nice drink and not too much alcohol. Be back in a minute.”

Michelle disappeared inside, returning as promised with two plastic tumblers.

“Here you are. Top of the line elegance, of course. But we don’t have to worry about broken glass in the yard.”

“I’m more than fine with that. Why put people at risk for the sake of being fashionable. Like you, I’m newly single.”

“Divorced?”

“Widowed. Breast cancer. I’ve a daughter too. She’s a bit older than Andrea.”

“You don’t look old enough for that.”

“I’ll be 40 next month. Annie is my wife’s daughter. But you don’t look old enough to have a teenager.”

“I’m 35, and I won’t be able to have any more kids. My wonderful ex had his fun with some hookers and I got the emergency hysterectomy. Sorry – I’m a bit jaded by men. It’s probably unfair to you.”

“Understandable. Annie and I and my sister and her family have been trying to help a young woman both infected and impregnated by someone who we suspect is pretty evil.”

“I like this spritzer. Suppose we toast ”Better times”.”

“Better times!”

“Talk to you more later. I’m supposed to be in charge of keeping order inside.”

“I’ll look forward to chatting with you.”

When it came time to eat, the meal was more or less a slow buffet as there was not enough room on the two barbeques for everything to be cooked at once. This was actually an advantage, as

it slowed down the eating and increased the time for conversation. Someone had set up a croquet game, but it looked like the rules were being largely ignored by the few teenage players. I circulated and talked to several people. The Lacroixs were in construction in a reasonable way, doing small to medium sized projects relating to roads and sewers and repairs to municipal infrastructure. I asked some simple questions and learned some of what was happening in different parts of town, or rather, the towns, since Ottawa was part of an agglomeration of several municipalities – Eastview, Rockliffe, Gloucester, Nepean, and several others. A dog's dinner of political geography. The local joke was that a building permit was not needed on Saturday in Eastview.

I didn't join the first rush for food, but waited until the second batch of meat was ready. As I selected some steak and chicken, I found Michelle right behind me.

"Did you want some more wine spritzer?" she asked.

"Yes, I think that would be OK now. I found a bottle of cola after I finished the first spritzer. I don't like getting loaded at a family event, and on a warm day like this when it's over 80 it's easy to swallow it down."

"If you'll snag me a potato and some of your salad to go with this meat, and go sit over there by that small table, I'll bring you another."

"Deal. Here's my plastic glass – we don't want to mess up the yard."

I got the food and made sure there were two chairs next to the small table Michelle had pointed out. I watched her coming back. She was really petite, in a pair of modest white shorts and a pink pastel top with short sleeves. Where Margaret had filled out anything she wore, Michelle had an almost imperceptible bust.

"Here you are. Thanks for getting the food."

"Fair exchange. Is the chaos inside under control?"

"More or less. Since you work as Nicole's boss, I'll guess you do something electronic."

"Yes. Mostly radio or microwave communication technology. You?"

"I'm not precisely a cartographer, but I work with the Geological Survey making maps of aspects of Canada's resources."

"Interesting? Or heavy slog to get the details right?"

“To be fair, both.”

“Most science and technology fits that mould. It should soon get more automatic I think, with better computing tools and some of the remote sensing we’re starting to do. My own work touches on that sometimes.”

“Mum, Mum. François and Jeanne and Bill are going to watch the fireworks, and they said I can go with them. Can I?” Andrea butted in.

“I don’t know. That will end very late. Let me talk to François.”

Andrea scurried off to find her cousin. They came back a few minutes later.

“François, you are a couple of years older than Andrea. If she goes with you, I want to be sure you all stay together.”

“Certainement, Tante Michelle. C’est plus secure.”

“OK. Ou est-ce que je peux la ramener? Et a quelle heure?”

“A onze heures quinze juste à côté au Centre d’Achats East-view?”

“OK. Bon temps.

Sorry Martin. Having a daughter in her teens is a challenge. And the older kids aren’t close relatives, though they call me aunt. I don’t know them terribly well, so I am a bit cautious.”

“Annie is 20 now. Variations on the same theme, though.”

We talked a bit about our daughters, having a common subject that was safe. I went home about 8 and wrote to my parents, Miriam and Robert.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Sorry I’ve left it a couple of weeks between letters.

Annie and I are both well. This Dominion Day Annie is with friends on Parliament Hill for the concert and fireworks. Nicole (my secretary) invited me to her parents’ for a BBQ. It was good for me to be in a new social situation. I spent a good deal of the time talking to her sister Michelle who has a 14 year old daughter and is recently divorced under very unfortunate circumstances.

Annie and I are planning to come for Labour / Labor Day, depending on which side of the border you live. We'll drive down Friday and home Tuesday. Don't plan too heavy a schedule in between, as the drive is -- I'm sure you know -- a long one.

Have you started to make plans about retirement? It will be a change for you to be out of the service. There's the issue of where to settle and what lifestyle you want. I'm sure Annie and I will be interested.

We've been seeing a bit of Penny and Joe and their family. We're all helping a young woman who has been badly treated to get back on her feet. By the time we see you next I hope that we will have some progress to report.

Annie has become a very forthright young woman in the best sense of that expression. I've been so fortunate to have her with me over the last few months. I think she is more affected by Clara's death than she lets on. I'm probably the same. Mostly I'm fine, but odd situations will remind me of something and the wind goes out of my sails for a few minutes. It's getting less intense; more a sort of background. Annie and I talk about Clara and have decided to keep her in our stories, even if other people are a little awkward.

Keep well, Love,
Martin

After I finished, it was about 10:15, and I thought of Michelle waiting in the shopping centre parking lot. It was not likely dangerous, but I felt that perhaps it was better if she had some company and drove back to Eastview. Looking about, I spotted her in a Ford station waggon near the Montreal Road side of the lot.

"Hi. Thought you might like a companion while waiting."

"I did have a few thoughts that there may be some drunks around and I'd have to close the windows and lock the doors. But so far very quiet. Why don't you get in?"

"Party end well?"

"Soon after you left, so did most of the rest except the clean-up crew. We had everything totally clear and put away by 10, which is nice for Mum. Nothing left for the morning."

"With families having kids and such, parties don't run late, which I prefer. Seems a lot of people think it isn't a party unless you get drunk and make noise and a lot of mess."

"Me too. Are we getting boring as we get older?"

"Are you calling me boring?" I teased.

"No. That's not what I meant."

"I know. Just teasing. I'm still coming to terms with Annie being a grown woman."

"And Andrea being nearly so. Be warned! I may have some questions for you on how to deal with teenage crises."

"I'll be happy to help if I can, but I suspect the gods of teenagers have conspired to ensure each one gets to try out some new torment for Mum and Dad."

"In my case, just Mum."

"Sorry. I'm not quite sure how to speak about the divorced state, and to be honest I'm still all at sea with "widowed"."

"It's probably easier for men." There was a tinge of bitterness in her voice.

"Maybe. But can men ever really know precisely how women experience things, and vice versa?"

"Fair enough. I don't know how life is for you."

"Maybe we can educate each other informally over an occasional coffee or ice-cream?"

"Are you suggesting asking me out?"

"In a clumsy way, I guess so. Though I'm still feeling my way in the world of meeting people and getting to know them. Clara and I had external forces."

"Meaning?"

"A Teller mine." I related a shortened version of the story.

"Wow. Blown together. Saves a lot of idle conversation. But a bit of a risk that you might not know each other."

"Do we ever?"

“That’s a low-blow, given my situation.”

“Oops. It wasn’t intended to refer to you in particular. Sorry that I’ve managed foot truly in mouth.”

“Actually, you’re right. We rarely really know everything we should about someone else we let close to us.”

“You haven’t said if I can call you.”

“Oh. Well, I don’t know. I don’t want a boyfriend or anything like that. But conversation over coffee or tea might be nice. You may, of course, get a torrent of invective about my ex or men in general.”

I took out a small notepad and pen and wrote my number on one sheet, then handed it to Michelle.

“Tear off that one and write your number on the next. Better be quick, I see the younger crowd over there.”

We greeted the youths and goodnights were said and I drove home. I wondered whether I had made a good decision to exchange numbers with Michelle. After all, Nicole might start gossip. Still, I liked talking with Michelle. We had common ground in Annie and Andrea, and maybe in our work. Time would tell.

Monday, July 6, 1964 – Martin

On Monday night, I phoned Michelle’s number around supper time.

“Hi, Michelle, It’s Martin Tremblay.” I wonder if I sounded nervous.

“Martin. How are things?”

“Fine. Wondering if you’d like to get an ice-cream after dinner?”

“OK. What time?”

“Seven suit you?”

“Fine.”

“Shall I pick you up? I don’t know where you live, however.”

“I’m south of Sunnyside and west of Bank.” She gave the address.

“I can walk there, then we could saunter over to the Dairy Queen on Bank if you like.”

“Sounds good. See you later.”

“See you later. Michelle.”

* * *

I found I was early as I walked up to Michelle's house. However, she was sitting on the front step waiting for me.

"Nice evening for the front stoop." I said by way of greeting as she got up.

"Yes, it is nice. Keeping well?"

We exchanged small talk as we started walking towards the river. I asked Michelle how she got her job at the Geological Survey.

"After Andrea was in school, my Mum offered to take care of her when she got home until Bryan or I came in. So I went back to university and got a degree in geography and somehow tumbled into one job that led to another and finally to the present one."

"Isn't your ex an Assistant Deputy Minister at ... is it Indian Affairs?"

"Yes. And he could afford to pay a bit more to help out with Andrea. He not only acted like a ... oh, don't get me started."

"Shall we say he's ancient history?"

"Please." Michelle answered.

"I worry that if I mention Clara, I could cause upset."

"Say what you feel? We'll either figure out what we want or ... well, not see each other again."

"I suppose we have to recognize we both have previous lives."

"That's a better way to put it. Frankly, one of the reasons I want to chat with you is that we're both adjusting to new situations. I've nothing specific or pressing to ask. Just a kind of "same boat" and possibly an understanding and viewpoint that we can share. Does that make any sense?"

"Plenty. Happily married couples seem to look at me with smug condescension or careful avoidance." I said.

"I sometimes feel that too, though I don't know if it's just my sensitivity rather than them actually feeling that."

"Sometimes I'm sure there's a feeling that my situation might be contagious."

"We're already sharing some observations. And we haven't got any ice-cream yet." Michelle giggled.

We chatted about other things as we walked. When we arrived at the Dairy Queen, there was a line-up, mostly of children with a few adults.

"What would you like?" I asked.

“A small hot fudge and marshmallow sundae, please. Some places call it a Jack and Jill sundae, I’ve no idea why.”

“Sounds good.” I ordered two. We found a place to stand and eat them, then wandered back towards Michelle’s house.

“Martin. I described how I came to be divorced. I rather like talking with you and sharing things like this, but you should know I really can’t let it be more than that.”

“Let’s try for friendship and companionship then. I won’t pretend I don’t want to find someone with whom I can share more, but that someone has to be a willing partner in whatever we do. Given what you’ve told me, you’ll want to take your time to figure out what you want and need out of life. For different reasons, so do I. Let’s take it a day at a time.”

“OK. Actually a bit more than OK. I’ve only had my family and a couple of women friends – well, only one close friend – to talk to in the last year and a half. It might be useful to have a male perspective on things.”

“I’d better warn you too. My particular ”male perspective” would not be very close to the usual ones in our society. I’m pretty pragmatic, not driven by what some pompous ass in a pulpit or a parliament building tells me to do.”

“You mean, a man with uncommon good sense. I might like that.”

“Thank you – but we’ll need to wait and see if you do. Perhaps I should give you the Cooke’s Tour version of my background.”

“OK. We can sit on the steps if you like.”

I related my growing up and War experience, then how I came to live in Ottawa again. Michelle added a few more notes about her background too. We realized it had become nearly dark, and there was some minor embarrassment that time had slipped by as we said our goodnights.

Monday, July 6, 1964 – Anna

On the Monday following Dominion Day, I went for a walk with Fred after supper. We walked down Bank Street to the Rideau River and back. Fred kissed me goodnight some while before Dad got in.

“Hi Dad. Saw you over on Bank St. with a little brunette woman.”

“Oh dear. Can’t do anything without the KGB telling on me?”

“Sorry. Is she nice?”

“She’s Nicole’s sister, Michelle. Recently divorced. We met at the Dominion Day party at Nicole’s parents I was invited to. Both of us are feeling like fish out of water.”

“Misery loves company?”

“Am I miserable lately?”

“Not at all – figure of speech. I think you do need friends – women friends. And you had a bit of a false start with Margaret.”

“That was a little too much, too soon, in some respects. But I suspect Michelle has been hurt rather badly – both physically and emotionally – to be more than a nice friend. However, I can use a few women friends and some social practise won’t hurt me. Also women sometimes introduce a man to other women. Am I being calculating again.”

“No more than your daughter.” I laughed. “Actually, I’ve a favour to ask.”

“What?”

“Can I borrow the car for the August long weekend? ”

“More details please?”

“Fred will be leaving August 5. I mentioned that we thought a camping trip to Quebec City might be a good farewell experience. I’ve never been there. Nor has Fred. We’d leave Friday morning and return Monday night. But Fred can’t get the family car.”

“And you’ll take care in more than just the driving?”

“Yes. It’s a bit embarrassing to have you know about us, but I don’t have the anxieties of some of the women I know who have to have all kinds of stories for their parents.”

“You’ve seen in Sharon the consequences of things going wrong. And if you meet Michelle, she may tell you about her misfortunes. But I’ll leave to her what she decides to tell you.”

“By the way, she’s a 14 year old daughter. Quite a nice girl. I expect that dealing with a teenage girl on her own is an additional burden.”

“Why don’t you invite them to come to dinner? Maybe suggest a shared dinner so it isn’t anything formal.” I said.

“Sunday?”

“OK.”

“Do you want to invite Fred too?”

“Nah. Michelle’s daughter might be competition for me. Seriously, I think if Fred is there, both the daughter ...”

“Andrea”

“Andrea and her mother will clam up and the evening will be all stiff and silent.”

“As usual, you probably have hit things on the nail.”

Sunday, July 12, 1964 – Anna

Michelle and Andrea arrived around 4:30.

“Oh. It’s such an awful weekend.” Michelle said as Dad took their raincoats.

“Come in and get introduced. If it’s nasty out, maybe we can make things brighter in here.”

“Let’s hope so.”

“Michelle, Andrea, I’d like you to meet Annie, my daughter.”

“Hi. Do I call you Michelle, or” I asked.

“Michelle will do. I’m Mrs. Corcoran legally, but am thinking of returning to my maiden name of Lacroix.”

“Oh yes. Dad said you are Nicole’s sister.”

“Do we need to put any food in the fridge or the oven.” Dad asked.

“Here’s the dessert promised – a lemon meringue pie – which would be best in the fridge. And I thought we deserved a bottle of wine. Hope you like a medium dry white. It’s already chilled. But you’d better not throw us out too quickly – I decided to drive over given the rain.”

“Should be fine. We’ve a baked ham, baked potatoes, some peas and – given the weather – tinned corn, with pineapple for garnish.”

“Sounds good.” said Andrea.

“Dad, do you and Michelle mind if Andrea and I go have some girl talk and I show her my room.”

“Not at all. Michelle?”

“It’s up to Andrea.”

“Oh. That would be nice. I want Mum to let me redecorate my room, and maybe I can get some ideas for a room for a grown-up young woman.”

“Get yourselves something to drink and some peanuts, but make sure you use a tray. I don’t want to attract a bunch of squirrels.”

Dad cautioned.

In a flurry of giggles we raided the kitchen, then went upstairs.

I showed Andrea my room. It's pretty ordinary and functional, but that's how I like it. She seemed very enthusiastic about it. Possibly its the small touches. I've got a cork board to pin things on, and a reasonable but not overbearing desk.

Sunday, July 12, 1964 – Martin

"Now. Some wine for us?" I asked after the younger women disappeared upstairs.

"Yes. Thanks."

"I'll absolve myself of any responsibility for redecoration chaos at your house. Annie can have all that on her head!"

"She seems socially very adept. I wish I were so smooth."

"Yes. She does have a knack for getting people to do things as if they thought of it themselves. I rather envy her that."

"I haven't seen her room. I hope it is not too extreme."

"Not at all. She has generally good taste, as far as a mere mortal male can tell. What have you been up to since last Monday?"

"Oh. Been arranging some work on my cottage. Actually "our" cottage. It's one of the items being sold to divvy up the marital property. It's a small shabby place just outside Arnprior, so pretty near town. But it needs some work on the supports – some have rotted. And a new roof, and a lot of general tidy and paint."

"Have you found someone to do the work."

"Yes, there's a handyman along the road from the cottage, and he's going to fix up the posts and beams, and he has a cousin who does roofs. It's a simple upside-down V roof that has the peak parallel to the river, so not much work. The stove-pipe doesn't go through the roof itself, so no fancy work. They said they'd have it all done by the long weekend. I plan to do the rest more or less by myself, but that will take a while. Normally I'd get Daddy's firm to do it, but they are busy this year."

"Need a hand?"

"I can't ask that of you."

"Well, Annie is having the car over the August weekend. I was thinking of putting an ad in the Citizen. "Abandoned widower will work for food and accommodation"."

“Sure. Sure. Though if you really mean it, I’d welcome some help. I’m not very good with tools, despite the family business. I think it’s because I’m so small.”

“I am – or so I’m told. And I have tools I can bring. Make a list of the things that need doing and we’ll make a plan so we don’t get stymied by needing to do something that needs tools or materials when the hardware store is closed.”

“That isn’t much of a holiday weekend.”

“I’m hoping there’ll be a bit of time for enjoying cottage life.”

“We do have a Sunfish. And it can be nice to watch the sunset on the River. Bring a book or two to read – trashy novels are preferred by the hostess. I can prepare some meals that will keep in the cooler, though if you have a cooler too, it will make it easier to have things keep properly.”

“Yes, we have one. I’ll dig it out. Will Andrea help? Or be a teenage daughter and be watching us ever so carefully?”

“Martin, I guess you know how teenage girls are. But no, Andrea is going to summer camp for two weeks straddling the holiday.”

“Ooh. No chaperone.”

“Martin! You know how I feel about that.”

“Yes. And I didn’t mean things that way. I was actually thinking of Annie, who takes an interest in my social life. She’s pretty sensible about it, but still I find her curiosity awkward. Probably she feels the same about me wanting to know about her friends.”

“I can understand how you would feel that way. So far I’ve had nothing to tell myself, but Andrea might be curious and concerned.”

“Maybe we should say nothing about this tonight and see how our plans develop.”

“OK. That suits me.”

We moved into the kitchen and organized the serving of dinner, which unfolded in a remarkably cordial fashion, with discussion of decorating, cottage repair, camp, summer jobs, and sundry “safe” topics. Shortly after 8, Michelle and Andrea left to drive home. Annie and I cleared the dishes and started the washing up.

“They seem nice, Dad. Andrea told me the history. Rather different from Margaret.”

“Rather? I’d say very. And given Michelle’s history, I want to go very slowly on the personal front. But I quite enjoy conversation with her, and she seems quite good company. What did you think

of Andrea?”

“Hard to say. 14 is a difficult age, and she’s been through some turmoil with her parents’ breakup and divorce.”

“Thank you for being so welcoming to her. I’m very grateful.”

“No need to worry. She’s a nice kid, and it was fun discussing how to decorate her room.”

Friday, July 31, 1964 – Anna

I’d finagled a day off on Friday, and we left soon after 9 to drive to Quebec City. We managed to get to the campground on the south shore near Levis by 4, and had the tent up – Fred had the equipment – by 4:30. It was dry but not too warm. I’d done a lot of the driving through Montreal and was pretty tired.

“Do you mind if we have a nap, then go into the city with the ferry and find some dinner?” I asked. We’d decided to have one meal a day out, and for the rest of our food just stuff we could put together as sandwiches or cereal or such. We had a cooler, but would need more ice at some point. My school French would get a workout. I hoped it would suffice.

“Sure. I can set an alarm.” Fred offered.

The tent was a modest one, but had poles that bowed from the corners, so we could put the air mattresses and sleeping bags together. I went to the ablutions block and went to the toilet and washed my face. After I got back, Fred decided to do the same. While he was gone, I stripped to my panties, then put on a big T-shirt – it was not cold, but not the warmest of days. I opened the sleeping bag and crawled in.

Fred came back and zipped up the door. He saw I’d put on the T-shirt.

“Just the T-shirt?”

“Yes. Well, and panties. I can take them off if you want.”

“We haven’t – you know – for a while.”

“That’s what I was thinking.”

Fred stripped entirely, and I took off my panties. Where to put them. I didn’t want to find ants or a spider in ... well, you can guess where. Eventually I put them on the cooler.

Fred was clearly interested! He rummaged in a rucksack and brought out a box of condoms. I’d put a few in my washbag in a

little waterproof purse I'd found.

"Great minds think alike. I've some in my washbag."

"One of the things I really like about you Annie. You're not coy about sex. You're straightforward about it."

"I enjoy it. Well, I've enjoyed it with you. And you've not been pushy. We've been able to talk about what we like and such."

We didn't talk much for the next half hour, but we weren't in a mad panic to couple ... er... copulate ... well, fuck. Took things rather slowly. Then we lay comfortably and quietly together – Fred had thought of real pillows. I don't think I slept, though for a while Fred was snoring. At about a quarter to six the alarm went off and we got up.

"Do I need to take my purse with me to the washroom?" It was a pain to have to do so, but I wasn't going to leave it in the tent if we were both away.

"No. I can stay here till you are back, then you can watch my wallet and stuff."

By six we were in the car. Had to explore a bit to get free parking at the ferry. We decided we'd not climb, and stayed in the lower town, and after a bit found a nice restaurant that offered crepes. We were able to watch the other diners. They were probably watching us. The evening and the meal passed gently. Damn, I was going to miss this comfortable companionship with Fred. And the other, of course.

Friday, July 31, 1964 – Martin

Annie and Fred left soon after 9 to drive to Quebec City. I took the day off, as did Michelle, and around 11 Michelle picked me up and we drove to Arnprior. She was surprised at the weight of the toolbox. I also had a square stool, the cooler, and a kit bag with some clothes and odds and ends. The first stop was in town at a supermarket. Michelle had a couple of items she wanted, but the main thing was ice for the coolers. We bought 2 blocks and 1 bag of cubes. The coolers were straining to keep closed.

The next stop was a Beaver Lumber in Bells Corners, where we picked up some paint, some screening and some wood strapping and a few 2 by 4s.

"Do you have any screws, nails or staples, Michelle?" I asked.

“There’s a box of odds and ends, but I’m not sure of what. I think they’re pretty much old stuff.”

“I’ll get a few that are generally useful. If we don’t use them, I can put them in my stock at home.”

I got a pack of 3/8” staples for my staple gun in case we needed them for the screens. I got some black nylon fishing line too, as I’d found this useful for fixing screens that got a tear by sewing them. I had a darning needle in my toolbox for this purpose. Also got a box of 100 1” number 8 round-head screws with Robertson heads and a similar number of washers to use with these. And a box of number 8, 1 1/2” flat head ones, some 3” spiral nails and some 1 1/2” finishing nails. On a long weekend, one did not want to be fiddling about.

“Michelle, Did you say you had some wire to replace?”

“Yes. I asked Mike – the handyman – to get me the materials needed. He told me he’d got the wire and electrical boxes. We can return the unopened ones. He said he’d also got some staples – but you already have the staples and gun.”

“He probably means big staples used to hold wires to the wall.”

“And he said he’d got a box of what he called marrettes?”

“Sometimes called wire nuts. They ensure good connections can be made quickly. Actually named after a man named Marr who invented them while working for Ontario Hydro.”

We loaded the waggon. I had sensibly put a couple of ratchet fasteners in my kitbag and we used these to hold the lumber to the waggons roof-rack. We got to the cottage around 1:30.

“Lunch first?” Michelle asked.

“If you make it, I’ll unload and bring stuff in.”

By 2 pm, we were sitting on the deck with sandwiches and lemonade.

“What do you want to start with?” I asked.

“I’d like to make sure the pump for the well is working. It only gives us water in the kitchen, and only cold, but it is useful for washing and for water to heat in the kettle. I’ve brought some drinking water in the big jerry-can.”

“Should I take the pipes apart and ensure they’re all clear.”

“Please! That’s a chore I hate.”

“Where is the well?”

“I’ll show you.”

We went out the door at the road side of the cottage and walked to the corner of the property away from the entrance. There was a privy 20 feet in the other direction from the "back door" as Michelle called it. The well was some distance away and uphill. It was a 3' diameter concrete sewer pipe installed vertically with a metal cap.

Beside the well was a roofed box, rather like a dog kennel. Michelle lifted off the "roof" to reveal a pump connected to a wire rising from the floor and two pipes, one into the well and one into the floor.

Inside the back door, I checked the fuse panel. One of the screw-in fuses was a 20 amp rating. I suspected – in fact am almost certain – it should be a 15.

"Do you have any fuses, Michelle?"

"I don't think so. Do I need some?"

"I think one is over the proper rating. Maybe we can run into Arnprior and get some. But let's do some checking in case we need other stuff."

"OK. But is it unsafe?"

"In principle, yes. But I doubt we'll push the limits."

I spent the better part of the afternoon with the plumbing and then with Michelle fixing the screens, which would keep mosquitoes and other insects at bay. Once the screens were fixed, of course, there were some insects trapped inside, so we had to spray for those.

Supper was a salad with tuna and some fresh crusty bread, after which we sat with books and the radio drinking up a bottle of Chianti we'd started with dinner. Around 9:30 it was time for bed. The cottage had three smallish rooms at the back.

"Got your flashlight for the biffy?" Michelle asked.

"Yes. Still got my RAF issue one."

Returning from a trip outside, and after brushing my teeth at the "kitchen" and in fact only sink, I changed into my PJs while Michelle was in the outhouse. I don't remember any time after I clicked out the light, so I must have fallen asleep right away.

Saturday, August 1, 1964

We decided to breakfast at a cafe in Arnprior and get the fuses and a couple of other overlooked items. The cafe was half-full when we

arrived at 8 a.m., but got busier by the time we finished bacon and eggs and hash-brown potatoes.

By noon, I had the wiring upgrades done and tested. After a sandwich lunch, I joined Michelle in painting. We got it essentially done by the time the sun was setting. Supper was a shepherd's pie – or *pâté chinois* in French, which always struck me as very strange.

"Tomorrow we'll touch up the paint and then clear up." I said.

"You'll finally get to try out the Sunfish. But I've a confession that I really don't know how to sail it."

"I took the white sail qualification course for beginners a couple of years ago."

"That's a relief. I've been told anyone can sail the Sunfish, but I don't believe it."

"Changing the subject, I was told the hostess liked trashy novels, but I see you reading 'The Feminine Mystique'."

"My friend Barbara lent it to me and told me I had to read it. I can appreciate the ideas, but you're right – it's not cottage reading material.

What are you reading?"

"'Never Cry Wolf' by Farley Mowat. It's not fiction either, but quite a good read."

"Did you bring anything less serious?" Michelle asked.

"Graham Greene's 'Our man in Havana'. But I've seen the film, so I can't imagine the characters except in the form of the actors from the film."

"Is it a serious book?"

"Actually a black comedy. An expatriate English vacuum cleaner shop-owner in Havana needs money so takes on an invitation to spy for the British. But he worries he doesn't have enough to report, so he invents things. Then reality starts to copy his fiction."

"Worth reading?"

"Greene is almost always worth reading. Though sometimes a bit dark."

"He's Catholic isn't he?"

"But often pokes holes in the doctrines as far as I can understand. In 'The Power and the Glory' he has the wayward priest trying to reconcile his love for his out-of-wedlock child by his housekeeper with his shame at how the child was conceived."

"I'd heard something like that. I've not read his work. Possibly I should."

"Did you bring anything lightweight to read?" I queried.

"I don't know if it's truly lightweight, but I've "Rue Deschambault" by Gabrielle Roy. I think they called it "Street of Riches" in the English translation. And somewhere on the shelf is Richler's "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz". I've also been meaning to have a go at James Michener's "Hawaii".

"That's literally heavy. He always writes these very long books.

I suppose I should read more in French. I do sometimes read the paper, but not novels or stories. I think I'd do best with some short stories."

"I've a collection of de Maupassant in French somewhere. Also almost the same set translated."

"I'll have to take a look sometime, but I think I've enough for tonight. In fact, I'm already feeling sleepy."

"Me too. But we've worked hard. Thank you, Martin. It's helped me a lot."

Sunday, August 2, 1964 – Martin

"Martin, we're done and it's just gone 2 o'clock. How about we call it a day and take out the Sunfish?"

"OK, I'll put on my swim trunks and a t-shirt."

"I'm already in shorts and t-shirt."

Indeed, she had on bright pink shorts and a simple white T, similar to those she wore on Dominion Day. I quickly changed and joined her down by the dock.

"We need to put it in the water and rig it. Do you know how, Martin? I've only helped do it before."

"I think I can figure it out as long as you've got all the pieces, though I'm not sure how the sail is attached to the mast. As I said earlier, I took a sailing course a couple of years ago at Britannia and really enjoyed it. I was looking into getting a small boat when Clara got sick. Do you know the rigging at all?"

"I remember that you need to make a kind of slipknot that lets you haul the top boom to the top of the mast, then fasten it to that two-armed thing there."

"The cleat on the mast. OK."

It turned out that all the parts were present in a couple of kit bags, including the dagger board and the rudder. I quickly put the parts in place, and got the lateen sail rigged and gently flapping in the breeze.

“Ready?” I asked.

“I suppose so.” Michelle sounded hesitant.

“The breeze seems to be from the West as usual, so I’ll put the boat at the end of the dock pointing into the wind and you can get on. We’d better put on life-jackets.”

We did this, then I used the hull to position the Sunfish at the end of the dock, while keeping hold of the painter. I made sure the dagger board was down as far as reasonable this near the shore or it would be tricky to control.

“You can step into the centre and sit as close as you can to the centre on the far side to balance my weight when I get in.”

Michelle did this.

“Now I’m going to have you hold the main sheet – the rope controlling the sail – while I get in and take the tiller.” I already had the tiller extension in my hand. I continued

“When I’m in, I’ll get you to shift to this side of centre, but keeping close to the middle until we have wind in the sail and need to counterbalance it. I’m going to let the boat go backwards, then steer it so the sail gets the wind, and then pull the rudder round and off we’ll go across the river. Ready?”

“OK, I hope so.”

I stepped in gently, and crouched in the centre of the cockpit – a bit crowded with Michelle present, and kept the rudder more or less centred to allow the boat to make way slowly backwards.

“Over to this side, but keeping to the middle.”

Michelle moved over.

“Here we go.”

I pushed the tiller and the boat turned toward the shore going in reverse.

“This seems the wrong way.” Michelle gasped.

I pulled the tiller back.

“Pull in the main sheet gently.” I said.

The boat fell away and started forward.

“Oh. We’re moving, and quite fast.” Michelle said. I adjusted my weight outward.

"You can sit more on the side to balance the wind. But move gently. I'll make the quick adjustments. If we both move together, we could be in the drink. Actually we should try to do that deliberately before too long."

"Perhaps not today, please."

"Let's go upstream to avoid ending up by Parliament Hill. There's a current in the river."

"Isn't going upwind also difficult?"

"We'll tack upstream, then run back. That should be enough for today."

I want you to gradually haul in on the main sheet as I turn towards the wind."

This manoeuvre worked fine, and we were soon close-hauled and steadily moving upstream.

"It looks like we're pointing towards that red building over there on the Quebec side. But the current and the wind will push us downstream. The amount of shift is called leeway."

"Oh. That's why we say "how much leeway do I have"."

"Yep. Because if you have the shore there, you don't have any. That's called a "lee shore" and not a good situation for sailing."

"But we have to change directions before we hit the Quebec shore. I've seen Bryan do that, but don't know how."

"Let's practice now. I'm going to say "ready about", and if you are ready, you tell me "ready". Then I'll say "hard a' lee" and turn the boat so the front goes across the wind. We need to both move across without getting in each other's way or getting brained by the boom. You should pull in on the main sheet so it doesn't get loose and tangled, but then let it out once we're around or have "gone about". In fact "if in doubt, let it out" is a good rule to avoid the wind pushing us over."

"It sounds tricky."

"Not too bad if we work as a team. And you are small and fairly nimble. So. Ready about?"

"Er. ready."

"Hard a lee."

I pushed the tiller and moved smoothly across as close to the rear as I could. Michelle rather clumsily got across, but let the sail go too loose. I moved himself more central and said.

"Pull in on the sheet to get the wind in the sail."

Michelle did this and we picked up way toward the Ontario side, in fact pointing not far above Michelle's cottage.

"Now haul it in tight," I instructed.

Michelle did this and the boat heeled. She squealed and I pointed the boat up-wind.

"No need to squeal, just haul in more slowly. You'll get the feel of it soon. You can also adjust your weight in and out to keep the hull flat. We can go faster that way. I'm going to come off the wind slightly to do that and I'll let you move further out. You can even put your feet under those straps and hang over the side."

As I eased the boat to port, the boat started to heel again and pick up speed. Michelle moved a bit and the heel reduced. I eased even more off wind, and moved my own weight out, and the boat started to plane, vibrating as it did.

"Oh. It's like a motor, and we're really moving."

"Yes. Planing on the water, like a speedboat. Now we'll pull the sail in as close as possible and go as much up-wind as we can reasonably do. We may need to adjust our weight as we do."

We did this, and made some progress up river. When we got about 100 yards from the shore, I said "ready about" and we executed a smooth tack.

"Nicely done, Michelle."

"We hardly slowed down."

"Yes, that's how to do it. And tacking is generally the safe way to get the sail across."

"I don't follow."

"Well, the other way – which we should try also – is a gybe, where we turn so the back of the boat crosses the wind. Generally you need to be pretty careful, because the wind can flip the sail across very quickly. A good way to clear the crew off the deck with the boom."

"Oh no! That sounds terrible."

"Gybes need to be done carefully, but they were the main way to come about for old square rigged ships. They did a 270 degree turn for each tack because they would too easily stop dead doing what we've done. They'd get stopped with the wind pushing them back and they'd have no control. That's called being "in irons"."

We did three more tacks and were heading towards the Ontario side when I suggested a gybe.

“You’ll pull in the sheet and let it out again to avoid tangling – fouling – the rope. But first we’ll go on a broad reach downwind.”

We sailed downwind.

“We don’t seem to be moving very fast, even though we’re going downwind.”

“That’s just the apparent wind. We’re actually moving relatively fast. Now I’m going to pass the wind across the back and you’ll keep the sheet under control as we carefully avoid getting bonked by the boom. Here we go.”

We managed the turn without disaster, but the quick change of the sail surprised Michelle.

“That’s quite tricky.”

“Yes. And we need to watch for gusts and quick wind changes when the wind is near the gybe point. In fact, the ripples on the water there mean there’s a gust coming now. I’ll turn us a bit to port to reduce the chance of an accidental and uncontrolled gybe. You try to keep the sail full but not pulling too hard on us.”

The gust came and Michelle eased out the sheet as the tension increased.

“Well done. We’re getting to the other side of the river. This time let’s do a 270 degree turn into the wind – that is, we’ll tack rather than gybe – and head in.”

“OK. The rope – sorry sheet – takes a lot of strength. I’m getting tired.”

“Ready about.”

We executed the turn OK, but it was more clumsy than regular tacks. I got the boat back on course.

“We need a bit of practise.” I said.

“Yes.”

“Oh Oh. I see a gust coming, and it looks to be a direction change too.”

There was a pattern of ripples on the water that suggested some turbulence. Before I could instruct Michelle what to do, a small squall hit us. I noticed it included a couple of vortices, one of which gybed the sail. The boom pushed Michelle over the side, and the boat capsized. I was able to step over the upwind side and get a foot on the dagger-board and right it, almost avoiding getting wet at all. I clumsily fell back into the cockpit and tried to get the bow into the wind.

“Michelle, you OK?”

There was some spluttering near the back of the boat.

“I think I swallowed some water.”

“Grab hold of the boat and gradually pull yourself along the side until you’re near the cockpit.”

While she was doing this, I found the main sheet and got it tidied and moved it out of the way near the mast, but kept it loose enough to avoid another capsize.

“Michelle, I’m going to move so your side of the boat is level with the water and you can pull yourself into the cockpit, more or less floating in. Don’t worry about the water. We’ll get it out later. When you are there, keep yourself as small as possible and I’ll sail us home as best I can.”

“OK. I hope I can.”

I moved towards the middle then leaned a little and the starboard side of the hull dipped into the water. Michelle grabbed the edge of the cockpit and flopped in. I pushed the sail to bring the boat round to port going in reverse, and moved myself to the starboard side – I already had the main sheet in my hand – and got the boat under way on a reach heading to the cottage.

“I’m going to move the sheet over you,” I said. “You keep huddling there for now, but in a minute I’m going to want you to get the painter – the rope that attaches to the front of the boat. It’s unfortunately on the starboard or right side of the mast and we need it the other side.”

“How am I going to get it?”

“Can you wriggle up the left side of the boat as close to the middle as possible and pull it to the left side and then come back to the cockpit with it?”

“I’ll try, but won’t that tip the boat again?”

“I’m going to ease off the sail and work on balancing you.”

We did what I instructed. Michelle came back into the cockpit.

“Thanks, Michelle. Well done.”

“Martin, How do we get in without damaging the boat?”

“We sail along until we are near your dock, then try to do a sort of half-tack so we end up stopped just beside the dock. In irons actually. If we do it right, you get to step onto the dock with the painter and we’re done. That’s why we needed the painter on the port or left side.”

“And if we don’t do it right?”

“I get wet too!”

“I hope not. I’m already uncomfortable.”

As it turned out, I did a fairly good job and brought the boat a hand’s width from the dock and Michelle was able to clamber out. In fact, it was probably the best round-up I’d ever managed, so I was very relieved.

“Just tie off the painter to that cleat there and I’ll get the sail down.”

I quickly de-rigged the sail, and unclipped the sheet.

“Haul me back to the dock please, and I’ll pass you the sail.”

I grabbed the dock with one hand as the boat came alongside. I passed Michelle the sail with my other hand. I moved the boat round to the side of the dock and removed the mast, then the dagger board and rudder, putting these on the dock. Michelle moved these to their storage under the cottage. I would have to dry and stow the sail later. For the moment I spread it out but made sure a corner was tied so it could not blow away.

“Shall we pull the boat up on shore? Or will we try again tomorrow.”

“Maybe pull it up anyway in case we decide not to.” Michelle said.

I pulled the boat to the shore, then waded into the water.

“Can you get the other side and we’ll partly lift it rather than drag it?”

“OK. Do you think I’m strong enough?”

“Yes. It’s about 60 pounds each to lift clear. We will only try to ease it in, then drag it across the rough carpet there where it can rest safely. Let me make sure the drain at the back is open though.”

We got the boat up, tied the painter to the stake that was there for the purpose, and climbed the stairs to the verandah and inside the cottage. Michelle led the way, hanging her life jacket over one of a pair of wooden chairs that were there. I did the same.

“We’d better get dry,” I said.

“Yes, I’m a bit chilled even though it’s not a cold day.” Michelle said, turning round. This revealed that the wet T-shirt was almost transparent, and her small breasts were clearly visible, with her nipples hard from the cold.

I gave a bit of a wolf whistle. “This cottage has a great view.”

“Martin! I told you there’d be none of that with me! I thought you were different and understood.” Michelle exploded. She seemed livid. “Here – take a good look.” She peeled off her T shirt and threw it at me, then pushed down her shorts and panties as one, and threw them at me too so I had to dodge so they didn’t hit me in the face.

“I’ve no tits to speak of and this” (she pointed to a red line across her abdomen just above her pubic hair, which I noticed was closely trimmed) “is where they cut out my ovaries, my uterus and my cervix. I had a sudden and unpleasant menopause. So no sex even if I wanted to. I’m not a real woman. You said we could be friends and not ... well ... introduce sex.”

“Michelle, I agreed not to make sex or the possibility of sex a condition of friendship and spending time with you. I didn’t say I’d stop regarding you as a woman, and my eyes see a petite, very attractive woman wearing nothing but a fierce scowl, who has suffered a lot of troubles that she didn’t deserve.”

“That just makes it worse.” she sobbed.

“Why?”

“Because we can’t do anything, even if we want to.”

“Do you know that for sure?”

“The doctors didn’t say much. They did the surgery and gave me antibiotics and tested me to make sure the infection was gone. But surely with all that gone, I can’t expect to ... to ...”

“Have your way with me?”

“Martin! First you get me mad enough to throw off my clothes, then you make me laugh.”

“How about some towels? And if you wish, I’ll adopt your wardrobe.”

“No! You mustn’t. But ... it does seem unfair that you see me and I don’t see you.”

“And you’d better not say I made you undress.”

As I said this I took off my t-shirt and then my trunks, which were wet, and threw them at her before walking to the verandah and getting our towels that were on the lines there. I returned and handed Michelle her towel and started to dry myself, but found I could not take my eyes off her. She was very cute.

“It’s rude to stare Martin.”

“Sorry. I rather like looking at you. How about we open some

wine and potato chips and sit on the veranda and try to make some sense of what just happened?"

"Will you mind terribly if I put something on?"

"No, it might be less distracting if we are what general society calls "decent"."

We each went into our rooms. I pulled on a pair of khaki slacks and a dry t-shirt. I came out to find Michelle in a blue pair of shorts and another white t-shirt. She was taking a bottle of white wine and a couple of glasses to the verandah.

"Bring the chips and the bowl along with the corkscrew please, Martin."

I brought the requested items.

"Shall I open the wine or the chips?" I asked.

"The wine please. I usually manage to break the cork."

Once the wine was poured and the chips in a bowl on an old coffee table, we sat on the rustic double chair that had a foam rubber cushion seat.

"To us. May we sort ourselves out." I toasted.

"Yes. Let's hope so.

Martin. You really do want me, well ... as a woman?"

"Of course I do. Wasn't it rather obvious from how I couldn't stop looking at you?"

"But I've showed you why that won't happen. And you could just be looking at me because I'm a freak."

"I certainly don't think that. You've showed me that we will need to be gentle, patient and perhaps a bit imaginative if we want to share sexual pleasure together. I promised you I would not push you to share sex with me – I want a willing partner in everything I share with a woman, and sex is just one activity among many. But having had a very full life with Clara where sex was a joy and comfort to both of us, I'm sure I'd feel the absence of that pleasure with a woman. I'm sure we can find some way to enjoy each other physically if we both want that."

"Martin, when I met you, I don't think I cared about sex. Bryan disappointed and hurt me in more ways than just the physical damage, and I didn't want anything to do with sex. It just seemed so damaging and corrupting."

"And now?"

"Now I feel that if I start to get close to you, things will come to

a terrible and awkward stop when we try to put well, try sexual intercourse.”

“Michelle, I asked before. Do you know if intercourse is impossible?”

“I guess I can’t imagine how it could be possible.”

“From what I saw, the surgeons left what we might call your sports equipment.”

“You mean the external bits?”

“Yes. And did they not leave your vagina?”

“Some of it. I’ve always thought only an inch or so.”

“You’ve never tried putting in a finger?”

“No. In school we got told that touching yourself was a mortal sin. I suppose that idea is somehow fixed in my mind, even though I only very partly accept it.”

“Did anyone say you couldn’t have sex?”

“Not as such. One nurse even said I could now have my fun and not worry about getting pregnant, but I thought she was just trying to make me feel better.”

“Look. This is an interesting academic discussion, but I haven’t even kissed you yet. To put first things first, we need to decide if we both are interested.”

“Until this afternoon, I didn’t think I was.”

“And now.”

“I rather surprised myself to find I liked you saying you found me attractive, even as I was trying to show you how horrid my body is.”

“It isn’t horrid. You’ve rather tiny but very cute tits. And a trim figure. The surgical scar is rather long, but it’s tidy and it will fade over time. Will I make you angry if I say I found the trimmed hair rather fascinating.”

“They shaved me for the surgery, but that’s a lot of work. But I found the short hair more comfortable, so I use a hair trimmer.”

“So you didn’t mind me looking at you.”

“More that you said you liked what you saw. And – a bit shameful – I rather enjoyed what I saw of you.”

“What would the nuns at school – I assume there were nuns” (Michelle nodded) “– say about that?”

“Probably die of a heart attack. Though we had one nun who’d gone into the convent after being widowed. She was a bit differ-

ent, and I noticed once that she wasn't so rigid about some of the interpretations of rules concerning family life."

"Meaning?"

"Well, we were told sex was only allowed when there was the possibility of children. But she pointed out that Christ never made such a ruling, it was an interpretation of the Church, a bunch of supposedly celibate men. There was a bit of a stink about the "supposedly". I liked her."

"She seems to have had a humane and wise view of life."

"But the "possibility of children" would not exist for me, and I'm divorced, so double penance for me. You know that I'm reasonably devout – I went to church this morning while you worked. I felt guilty about that."

"I'm afraid I can only be the devil's helper here. I don't believe any of that argument about "possibility of children". Given that view – and I assume you practised it – I'm surprised you have only Andrea."

My view is that sex is a great gift to help people find joy in everyday life. I've been fortunate to find it a couple of times – well actually three times – and all were positive experiences."

"I've sometimes wondered why I didn't get pregnant again. The nurse who said the hysterectomy meant I could have my fun without worrying suggested that Bryan may have infected me earlier – not necessarily gonorrhoea – and that blocked my tubes."

But about sexual experience, I've only had Bryan, and, well"

"It wasn't good at the start?"

"I enjoyed it mostly. But I don't believe some of the romance stories where women are carried away on a wave of pleasure. Bryan would come on top of me and, you know, put it in and it felt not bad, but no violins."

"It's difficult for me to know if my partners got a lot of pleasure, since I'm a man. Apparently the Greek philosophers argued whether men or women got more pleasure. I think they decided women, and my temptation is to agree."

"Really. I want to ask why you think that, but maybe that's prying."

"I'm willing to tell you. Perhaps it might help you to find ways to enjoy sex. But don't you think we're overdue for a kiss?"

"Absolutely. But I've potato chip bits in my teeth."

“So do I. How awful. Wine as a mouthwash?”

“Very decadent, but that works.”

They both tried to swish with wine, but broke up in laughter that ended in a kiss.

“Nice. Very nice.” I said.

“Umm. I agree. Why didn’t we do that sooner?”

“We weren’t ready to kiss sooner. We’re still trying to figure out what we each want and how we want to live. My doctor, Jim Sinclair, even suggested I come for a physical soon. He said when people lose a spouse – and both you and I have – it can affect you physically.”

“I suppose that makes sense. He seems a lot more interested in your health than my doctor.”

“We’ve known each other since the RAF. He was 247’s Medical Officer for a while. Patched up the hole in my bum from the Teller mine explosion, though he said Clara did such a good job his work was minor. I think he may have been too modest.”

“You went back and got her in ’47?”

“That wasn’t necessarily on the cards. I’d been finishing my degree at Oxford, and knew I was going back to Canada to do my Ph.D. at Toronto, and I thought I’d like to take a better look at the area we’d been through in ’44.”

“And no girlfriend who wanted to tag along?”

“Aren’t we inquisitive? OK, there had been a girl. Actually a titled young lady.”

“Really and truly?”

“The Hon. Jennifer Richmond to be precise.”

“Her folks didn’t approve of the rough colonial boy?”

“We didn’t get that far. She wanted me as a social asset. Didn’t have a clue what I did in my work, and more importantly, didn’t care that it was important to me.”

“At least you found out. Was she one of the three experiences?”

“Yes, Nosey. Her society friends were all boasting about their sexual exploits and she felt left out, so she wanted someone to assist her to lose her virginity.”

“I can’t imagine how she went about it.”

“She said ‘Martin do you want to fuck?’ ”

“What!” Michelle almost spilled her wine.

“Upper crust English aristocrats can be very direct. Not like nosey working class Franco Ontarians, one of whom better give me another kiss, and soon.”

Michelle didn’t need prompting. We broke the kiss and took a sip of wine.

“Why don’t I get pillows and we can lie back and chat, and fall asleep if we feel like it?” I asked.

“Umm. All right, I suppose.”

“You can have the outside in case you feel you have to make a run for it.” I teased.

I got pillows and lay down on my side, making as much room on the sofa as I could, But Michelle was only 5’ tall, and petite with it.

“Lie on your back and snuggle in close,” I said.

She did, and I kissed her gently.

“You are wicked. I never imagined I’d be doing this with you.” Michelle said.

“Frankly, neither did I. But I don’t think kissing you like this is wicked.”

I kissed her again and said.

“Now wicked is like this.” I slipped a hand under her T-shirt, but only so far as to touch her upper stomach.

“Martin, what are you doing?”

“Isn’t that obvious?”

“Yes. I suppose it is.”

“May I continue?”

Michelle was quiet, so I kissed her again, and she kissed back, even putting her hands to my head to prolong the kiss. As she did so, I very slowly moved my hand under her breast, then around it.

“Oh. I’m not sure you ...”

“Shall I take my hand away?”

“Well, actually no. It feels nice.”

“And rather responsive. Do you want me to be more or less firm?”

“If you are gentle, I think a bit more firm. Oh. Now I feel wicked.”

“Why?”

“Catholic upbringing. If it’s nice, it must be sinful.”

“Michelle. When I talk of sexual pleasure, this is a form of it. Sometimes people focus on what the medics so clinically call ”pene-

tration". I suspect both of us will at some point want that because it is – I'm not sure how to put it – symbolic of joining together. But we may need to find lots of other ways to share pleasure if that proves difficult."

"But you didn't need to do that with Clara or Jenny, or #3."

"Rubbish! With all of them I'd say a tongue was more reliable in generating an orgasm than a penis."

"What! You mean you licked them?"

"You find that offensive?"

"It's just not how sex is talked about. Isn't it a bit dirty?"

"I do like my women well-washed, both front and back. Want to hear a funny story?"

"I suppose it's a dirty joke."

"No, actually a true story. A friend of mine in the RAF told us his family were living not far from an American army base in the south of England. This was before D-Day. To try to give the Americans a bit of home-life, they'd invite several for tea on Sunday. It actually was a 2-way street – the Yanks often brought some tins of scarce things like peaches and condensed milk.

Anyway this one Sunday they had a sergeant from the deep south and he asked where the toilet was. Now at this stage of the War, toilet paper was a really scarce commodity, so my friend's family were using up anything they could find. They went through all the sewing patterns and took the tissue from the ones they no longer needed and made pieces and tied them on a string. When the American – since he was from the South he wouldn't like being called a Yank – returned from the toilet, he said to his hostess "Ma'am, Ah've been all over the place, and that's the first time Ah've seen it marked 'front' and 'back'."

Michelle laughed and laughed. Martin had to hold onto her by moving his hand off her breast.

"I wouldn't have told you that if I'd known I'd lose my handle."

"You can put it back – or try the other side."

"Slip your shirt off, then I can kiss them."

Michelle hesitated, then sat up and peeled it off.

"Lie down again."

"OK. But I'm worried you'll get excited and out of control. Bryan always insisted I give in to him once he got erect."

"I'm beginning to dislike him a lot. First, I believe it's a myth

that men really get out of control. However, it does suit selfish men. Second. I told you I like a willing partner. I'm not Bryan, Michelle.

If you wish to give me pleasure, until and unless we get your bits working, we'll find ways with hands or tongue."

"Oh. I don't think I could, I mean with tongue."

"Then don't. Remember. Willing partner."

I kissed her while gently moving my hand across her small breasts, where the nipples and surrounding pink had become enlarged and puffy as though straining to burst out.

"That feels good," she said as we broke the kiss. Martin moved down her neck with small kisses and then kissed and sucked each breast in turn.

"Ooh. Even better. Bryan never paid attention to them after we were married."

"For a divorcee, you seem surprisingly innocent."

"I think I am. I've never touched a ... penis."

"What! Bryan really must be an idiot."

"He didn't want me looking at him naked either. That's sort of why I found it ... interesting ... earlier when you took off your shorts."

"Shall we go back to our earlier lack of wardrobe, madam?"

Michelle giggled, then sobered.

"You won't ... try anything."

"Sorry. I promise to try EVERYTHING I can that might give you pleasure. On the other hand, I will promise to be very gentle, to try to make sure you know what I'm doing and to give you control of each situation. Will that be OK?"

"I guess so. I hadn't thought of it that way."

"Do you want to be inside? Boaters might be able to see us, though they wouldn't get a very good view."

"I think I'd feel more comfortable inside."

"Let's take our wine in. We don't want it to go to waste."

"You're just trying to get me drunk."

"Just? I think I'm trying for more than that."

"I misjudged you, Martin. You really are very wicked."

"But I need a lot of help to be so wicked. You seem to have that excellent capacity to draw it out of me."

We moved into Michelle's room. There was a camp cot.

“Oh dear, I need the privy. Not very romantic.” Michelle pulled on her T-shirt and disappeared. When she returned, I went out to it too. I came back in to find her naked at the kitchen sink, washing her privates.

“I didn’t feel nice after the privy.” She explained.

I pulled off my slacks – I hadn’t bothered with underwear, and found my own wash cloth and proceeded to wash both front and back too, rinsing the cloth in the cold water.

“That’ll slow me down a bit.” I said.

“From what I see, not too much.”

“Men are rather obvious, aren’t we.”

“As I said, I’ve not much experience.”

“Maybe time to get some. But I’m a bit confused about why you think you can’t enjoy ... intercourse. We need to agree a word. That sounds far too lacking in fun.”

“They took away my cervix. Won’t you hit the end?”

“I don’t know. Have you tried a finger to see if you can touch the end?”

“No. The nuns were very strong against touching yourself. And my mother wouldn’t let me use tampons, only pads. I still have all the inhibitions.”

“My guess is that you will be long enough inside for us to manage some sort of – copulation. But we need to find out before doing anything that could hurt you. Are you willing to try?”

“I guess so. What do you suggest?”

“Lick your middle finger, then gently push it in as far as you can so long as it doesn’t hurt. You probably will find it easier lying on your bed.”

Michelle did this very slowly, and her whole finger went in.

“If my finger were longer, it could go in a bit more I think. I’m surprised.”

“Well, it seems that you are long enough that we could achieve a coupling that is close to normal I think. But I’ve heard that menopause can cause loss of elasticity and lubrication. Are you tight?”

“Quite. But I don’t know what I’m supposed to feel like. I suppose I could let you try your finger.”

“Sure?”

“But be gentle!”

“Of course.”

Michelle was lying on the bed with her legs bent and slightly apart. I wet my middle finger and placed it at her opening.

“Ready?”

“Yes.”

I was able to gently insert my finger, but I noted that Michelle was quite tight and relatively dry.

“We may need to supply a bit more lubrication and do this steadily to gently stretch you so you can accommodate my penis.”

“How do we lubricate?”

“There’s something called KY Jelly, or good old spit. And so far you haven’t been much stimulated.”

“Meaning.”

“I haven’t caressed your ... pussy. Does it feel good when I stroke the lips and the place where they join?”

“Ooh. Very.”

I kissed her while continuing a very light caress. I was able to slip my free hand under her neck and onto a breast.

“Naughty... but nice. Can I see or touch you? I’m a bit curious to look at you.”

“You can do more than look. But be careful to be gentle and go slowly. It’s pretty easy to do damage to men too. The tissues are quite delicate and sensitive. Just a minute, I’ll get our towels and wash cloths. Sex can be a little messy, and there’s no sense in making extra work.”

I came back and spread the towels on the bed. I lay on my side beside her.

“OK. Wow, I’ve not had this sort of chance to look at a man before. It’s not like I expected.”

“Meaning.”

“Well, with Bryan, I could just feel this big sausage pushing into me and then some in and out and grunting, a big push and ”don’t make a wet spot on my side of the bed”.”

“I’m sorry things were like that for you. It’s far from my experience with women. I feel I’ve been hugely lucky.”

“You’re a man.”

“But I like to see the woman I’m with enjoying herself.”

“Martin, so far I’m enjoying myself today. I hope you are. This seems to indicate something. She pointed at his erection. Ooh, it’s

oozing a bit.”

“That’s normal release of some lubrication. If you rub me dry I could get sore if you are too rough. You should be getting wet too.”

“Am I?” She bent her upper leg so I could touch her again. I caressed her again.

“You realize that at least you seem to have enough depth for us to ... what shall we say?”

“The dishonourable Jennifer said ”fuck”.”

“Do you want to use that word? ... I don’t mind using it for copulation. I hate the way ”fuck” is used as an expletive.”

“Then we’ll only use it for us, assuming we can actually achieve a ... union.”

“As I said lubrication can be augmented with KY jelly or spit. I’m more concerned that the surgery and the menopause may mean your vagina is less elastic as well as shorter and we could cause you injury.”

“That’s just a version of my fears.”

“I suppose. But let’s focus on the positive. You seem to be interested, and you’re here with your legs wide open. Most men would give their eye teeth just to have a woman close to them like that.” He leaned forward and kissed her again while caressing her pussy gently.

“Hmm. I like the kiss and I like what your hand is doing.”

“You could do the same to me.”

“Like this. She cupped his balls, then ran her hand up his erection.”

“Feels nice. Try not to set me off too soon.”

“When that happens does the sperm go all over?”

“Depends. Sometimes a foot or so. Several spurts. Generally a little messy.”

“Like the wet spot if you don’t get the Kleenex in place quickly.”

“Several wet spots. If I go off inside you, and we cooperate on separating, it’s much tidier.”

“Martin. This feels so nice, but I’m a bit mixed-up at the moment. For the last year or so I’ve been assuming I’d never enjoy sex again, and here I am enjoying it even though we’ve not yet actually completed things. But I’m a practising Catholic, and I can’t remarry and stay in the Church, nor even have a common-law kind of arrangement.”

“Perhaps we should take a break. I really don’t want to be a cause of more grief for you.”

“Why is something so nice considered sinful?”

“You won’t find me disagreeing. I’m rather in favour of judging each situation on its own merit,” I said, then added “Do you want to talk about us? About what we could share? What we want to share?”

“Yes. I think we need to. Should we get dressed?”

“Do you want to?”

“Not really, but we could get distracted.”

“Yes. Delightfully distracted.” I stroked her breast and pussy at the same time. “But tell me what you think about us.”

“I’ve not given ”us” much thought. I’d thought we’d be casual friends who both had daughters and give each other some advice and support. Now there seems to be this other possibility.”

“Meaning?”

“Well, a pretty intimate relationship, sort of like a marriage. But it’s far too early to talk about that.”

“For me as well. I’m still trying to sort out my feelings about Clara. And I didn’t tell you about Margaret.”

“Who’s she?” Michelle stiffened.

“Relax a bit and I’ll tell you. But I’ll begin with the end – her mother had a stroke and she’s gone back to Scotland.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

I gave a brief outline of my short but intense friendship with Margaret. I concluded

“I think Margaret and I helped each other, but really it was too soon after Clara died. And I think she would have liked children. I’m not sure I’m interested in a new family of that sort.”

“Does that include a merger of the sort we might contemplate?”

“I meant babies. I’ve not really thought at all about how you and I and the two girls might get along together. But we’d clearly have to do so.”

“I’ve not thought about that either. I think Andrea’s already pretty mad at me for the divorce. On an intellectual level, I think she knows that I had to ensure we had a home and some security – Bryan has been talking about a new wife. At school someone even told her I was automatically excommunicated from the Church for being divorced, which isn’t true.”

“Is it remarrying that is the problem?”

“Actually, sex. How we are now probably counts as a mortal sin.”

“I don’t think that, and I don’t believe you believe it deep down either.”

“No. I can’t believe what we’re doing is wrong, though I’d guess some members of my family and friends might be greatly upset.”

“Andrea and Annie may both find our increasing friendship unsettling, especially on top of Clara’s death and your divorce.”

“Can we do anything about that?”

“For Annie, I think it’s best to be very open – within some bounds of our privacy. I don’t know about Andrea.”

“Nor do I. You and Annie seem to be able to talk to each other.”

“But Annie is essentially an adult, and quite good at getting other people to do what she wants while thinking it’s their own idea.”

“I’d like to be able to talk to Andrea more directly. Perhaps I’ve avoided talking to her about my own feelings and life.

On a related topic, do you think you could teach Andrea to sail the Sunfish? I know it’s a big favour, and I know I can’t, and I’d rather she didn’t ask Bryan.”

“Sure. It will give her a chance to know me as Martin, not ”Mum’s boyfriend”.”

“But you’re not!”

“Not what?”

“My boyfriend.”

“Says naked lady to naked man lying beside her.”

“Yes, I suppose you’d be considered my boyfriend.” Michelle said quietly.

“It’s not what you want?”

“Right now I’m not sure what I want. A few weeks ago, I was content to be celibate the rest of my life. Now I think it might be very, very nice to enjoy some fun. And I like being with you. You give me a whole new view on life.”

“Ditto.”

“So it’s confusing.”

“For me also. I’m not ready to say ”this is the person I want to share the rest of my life with”, and at the same time, I don’t want to let the chance of a lifetime slip away for lack of decision.”

“That’s about it for me too. Except I don’t know how to reconcile it with my Catholicism.”

“Would it be so terrible to share some time together, including some physical fun, but keep our own households. At least until we both have time to figure out our lives.”

“Not terrible. Possibly awkward to arrange to be like we are now. And I’ll have to somehow live with what is normally considered sin.”

“It may be a good idea to have a sort of family conference with us and both girls. It can serve to reassure them we are going to do our best to avoid more upset for them. I’m inclined to let them know we expect them to behave as adults, which means telling us about things that are important to them. And I think we can ask for and offer some measure of privacy within that general understanding.”

“Don’t you think it would be embarrassing to be together with the girls around?”

“Yes. But having two houses might make it easier to manage. And I suspect that after a while, we’d find a routine to minimize the fuss.”

“They might expect similar privacy with boys.”

“I’ve actually had a quite positive conversation with Annie about that sort of thing.”

“And?”

“My view is that if she really wants to be with someone, and makes the effort to ensure there are no untoward outcomes, I’d rather she be in her home environment, not the back of some car, or a cheap motel, or wherever.”

“I’m not sure I could be so sanguine about Andrea. And contraception is not allowed for Catholics.”

“I’ll not push my view. It may be suitable for me and Annie, but not you and Andrea.”

“Martin, that is so refreshing after Bryan. He would insist on his view.”

“Why should I? It could be totally the wrong approach to helping Andrea grow up. Some kids need a lot of direction and are happy to be told how they should behave. I think Annie is more independent, but fortunately not impulsive. I’d be concerned if she was not thoughtful about her actions.”

“Has she brought anyone home like that?”

“I think you should let Annie answer for herself. If I want to

have her confidence, I'd better allow her to have control of that information."

"Oops. I hadn't thought of it that way."

"I realized that – and I think I might have been angry otherwise."

"Really. It's that important to you."

"Maybe. Like you, I hadn't thought about it. But, yes, Annie deserves her privacy as long as she uses it sensibly. Isn't what we're asking from the girls the same kind of consideration."

"I suppose so. And I may have to give some serious brain exercise to how to talk to Andrea about things like this."

"For two naked people, this is a very serious conversation, but Clara used to say that you could only really discuss the important things sitting in the bath together."

"Yes. So serious you've gone soft. I'm not very stimulating that way."

"Silly! It'll stiffen whenever there's a chance of some action. I could say the same of you. Look how soft your nipples are. Hmm. But you have got a bit moister down here."

They kissed and petted for a while.

"Michelle, We've reached a pretty good stopping point in our work here? If we put the cork in the wine, and I check the boat bits are properly put away, we could go home in about an hour. Then we can spend a night together in a comfortable bed before Annie comes home."

"That might be nice – but of course rather sinful, even if I can't accommodate you."

"Is that yes or no?"

"Oh. Yes of course."

* * *

We decided to go back to Michelle's house, and arrived around 7 p.m.

"Can you unload while I start something for supper?"

"Sure. But do you really want to cook?"

"I've a macaroni casserole we can put in the oven, and there's some salad stuff in the fridge. And we've the wine we started at the cottage and illegally transported it open back here."

"OK. Sounds good."

I unloaded the waggon. Including putting away some things, I was finished in about 10 minutes and came into the kitchen to find Michelle putting a bowl of salad in the fridge. There was a newspaper on the table showing images from the Ranger 7 spacecraft NASA had crashed into the moon deliberately. I said,

“Fascinating pictures. And the success of their transmission means I’ll have to look into the antennas they used.”

“Yes. That’s your work, isn’t it. Those pictures are a lot nicer than the ones of the race riots that went on for 6 days in Harlem the other week. And less than a month after the Civil Rights Act was passed. Let’s hope we never have any trouble here.

By the way, the casserole won’t be ready for at least an hour, I’m afraid. It was in the freezer, so I’ve got to warm it slowly.”

“Then we have plenty of time to clean up for dinner. Want to share a shower or tub?”

“Naughty. The shower is actually in the tub. We added it only three years ago.”

“Your choice.”

“Shower – I feel in a hurry.”

“For what?”

“Oh ... you know”

“OK. I’ll not tease. I’m a bit in a hurry too, but we’ve both been working hard.”

We ended up showering together.

“Michelle, give me your washcloth.”

“What for?”

“So I can wash you.”

“Oh. All right. I could do it myself.”

I washed her back and front, then moved between her legs.

“Oh, there too?”

“And here. He washed her crack.”

“That’s so ... intimate.”

“Want to wash me. Just don’t get soap in the little hole or I’ll likely be out of action.”

“Yes, you used just warm water on me.”

We finished and dried quickly.

“What now?” Michelle asked.

“You have no ideas?”

“Yes. Lots of ideas, and I’m a little scared of them.”

“Bedroom?”

“OK”

“Maybe bring some towels in case of the unexpected. Do you have any Kleenex there?”

“Here’s a big bath towel, nice and dry. And here’s the Kleenex by the bed.

Martin. I rather liked washing you. It felt nice to touch you like that.”

“I enjoyed washing you too. He kissed her and they pressed together.”

“Your equipment rather gets in the way like this. It would be so nice if I could fit it inside.”

“Is that what you want?”

“Against all the nun’s lectures and the Church rules, I want it now more than I’ve ever done. But I don’t think it’s sexual desire as such. I think it’s because I want to feel that I’m a woman again. And to be with you like that. For the moment more symbolic than sexual.”

“We can try. But let’s be really, really careful not to hurt you. Otherwise it may trigger a psychological barrier. There was a spoof paper by Sir William Osler back early in the century called “Vaginismus” that he published under a pseudonym in a Pennsylvania medical journal.”

“What’s vaginismus? Is that the word?”

“It refers to involuntary contraction of the vagina. In the paper, a gamekeeper and a kitchen maid were caught in flagrante and the surprise caused the maid to have a contraction so strong they were stuck together and the attending doctor – who supposedly wrote the paper – had to administer chloroform to get them apart. I suspect it’s all made up. However, the contractions can, I think, happen at the moment of penetration, and cause pain. Worse, the memory of the pain makes the next attempt even more difficult. We don’t want that.”

“No. It will sound like I’m terribly wanton, but I want you in me.”

“Millions of men would give their right arm to hear a lady-friend say that.”

I quickly pushed her backwards on the bed, catching her by surprise. Before she could react, I lifted her feet and separated them,

and kissed her full on her pussy, running my tongue the length of the slit.

“Ooohh. Ooohh. That’s so strong. Stop! Stop!”

“Do you really want me to stop?”

“I do and I don’t. It felt really marvellous, but almost unbearable.”

“Clara used to say that too, and I got used to ignoring her protests, though I need to get to know when I’m causing you true discomfort or pain.”

“You didn’t hurt me. It was such a new experience.”

“You are wetter than you were before. My finger goes in easily.”

“That feels nice too.”

I resumed licking while my finger gently moved in and out. After a little while I very gently introduced a second finger.

“Is that OK?”

“Mmmmm. Keep your tongue on that part in the front.”

“Your clitoris?”

“I suppose that’s what it is. It feels fantastic, but it’s getting very ooohh. Now please stop – it’s too much.”

I let her legs down and slid onto the bed beside her and gave her a kiss.

“That was different for me, Martin. And very nice.”

“You took two fingers relatively easily.”

“Two! Shall we try ... you know?”

“OK. But perhaps you should be on top so you can control things.”

I lay on my back and Michelle straddled me.

“You can slide your pussy along me to spread the lubrication, and when you are ready, you can reach down and try to put me in. But go nice and slow.”

“Feels nice to slide back and forth.”

“For me too.”

After about a half minute, she raised up a bit, reached between her legs and pointed my very hard penis at her hole and eased down.

“Don’t try too hard.”

“Yes. It doesn’t seem to want to go in.”

“Actually I think the tip is in partly. Does it hurt?”

“No. It just feels a bit blocked. But you got two fingers in. Shouldn’t it fit?”

“You may be unconsciously clamping down.”

“Maybe I’ll try wiggling.”

She did, and suddenly I was inside. Michelle wiggled some more until we were pubis to pubis.

“I think we’ve done it. I believe I can feel the end of your vagina. Can you feel me there?”

“Not really. I just feel a bit full. Nicely so!”

She came forward to lie on me, pushing back slightly to keep me inside her.

“Thank you Martin. It means a lot to me.”

“So now what? Should I try moving in and out?”

“Oh. I feel so silly. I’d not thought beyond getting you inside.”

I laughed. So did Michelle. I gently pushed her up and put my hands on her breasts and caressed them, then moved my hips so I slid out and in very slightly and gently.

“Does that feel OK?”

“Very nice. You?”

“Very nice. I won’t last long.”

Indeed a few seconds later, I came strongly inside her. I let her lie down again on my chest and hugged her to me.

“I think we’ve established that sex is possible for us.” I concluded.

“Mmmmmm.”

“That’s all you have to say.”

“Mmmmmm.”

“Even if I slide out and there’s a wet spot.”

“It’ll be on your tummy.”

“Better hand me a Kleenex then – and one for yourself. I think you’ll find that you are rather wet.”

“Ooohh. Yes. But it’ll wash off. And dinner should be ready soon.”

* * *

We put on pyjamas and nightdress respectively and had a leisurely meal and drank the rest of the bottle of wine between us, chatting about everyday matters and family – we were still working out who was who for each other. Around 11 we decided to go to bed, Michelle curling automatically into my arms.

"It's been quite a weekend." I said.

"Not over yet, I hope. But, yes. Some big changes in my view of life."

"Hopefully good."

"Yes good. But I'll have to come to terms with what it means to be able to have sex, and to enjoy it so much."

"Was it that good? You'll give me a swelled head as well as a swelled ... you know what."

"You just want flattery."

"Why not? We all like to be appreciated."

"You are."

"So are you. I rather enjoyed helping you ooh and aah and squirm as I licked you."

"That was new for me. So intense."

"I think the trimmed hair helps. And it's a lot easier for me."

"So ..."

She was asleep. I gently extracted my arm and rolled over and was soon asleep myself.

* * *

I woke to the noise of a car going down the street. It was still dark outside. Must be still the middle of the night. I reached over to feel for Michelle, and found her lying on her side facing away from me. I slid my hand around one of her small breasts and gently stroked it. She rolled towards me and I felt for her face and kissed her. She kissed me back quite enthusiastically. I noticed her nightdress had ridden up and I could feel the soft trimmed fur of her mound, then, rather a surprise, wetness. I slipped off my pyjama bottoms, and gently pushed on her knee to get her to let her legs apart. Rolling onto her, I found I slipped inside her easily, to a quick intake of breath that made me wonder if I had hurt her, but she pushed towards me, so I began to move in and out, causing appreciative, but wordless vocalizations. For several minutes we kept up a steady rhythm, then quicker until, almost together, we both tensed then relaxed.

I kissed her again, then reached for the Kleenex and gave her one, and pulled out. I snuggled up against her. Wordlessly, we both fell asleep again.

August 3, 1964 – Martin

The sun was streaming in through small gaps between the curtains when I again awoke. The radio was on somewhere and there was some discussion of a naval engagement in the Gulf of Tonkin where a North Vietnamese gunboat had been sunk and two US destroyers were in action. I gradually realized I'd not put my pj bottoms back on. Somehow the bedclothes were pulled back. As I came to consciousness and realized I was at Michelle's house, in her double bed, I became aware that I was being watched.

"Been watching long?" I asked.

"5 to 10 minutes. I never had the chance to take a good look before."

"I'll only let you look if I can look at you too."

"Seems fair." She pulled off her nightdress.

"That was rather nice in the middle of the night."

"Yes. We just seemed to reach a climax together. Actually I wasn't quite awake at first."

"Not a word, just a few appreciative noises. You were already wet."

"I'd been having a rather strange dream."

"Must have been pretty naughty."

"I think so. I don't remember much. But then somehow you were with me, inside me, and I gradually realized I was no longer dreaming."

"The effect was very salutary."

"Now we have to deal with real life."

"But that's part of real life. But, yes, we have to figure out how to fit it into our existing lives."

"I'm sure that's going to give me some ... er ... soul searching. What we were doing certainly is a matter for confession. For a serious Catholic girl like me there's about three or four sins there. But it really felt that it was right, and not just because of the pleasure."

"It makes me a little sad that helping you to find some measure of joy would be sinful. And I can tell you that I am a strong believer in living up to the implicit promise of taking my share of responsibility for any consequences."

"One of the sins – at least according to some people in the Church

– is that there ought to be consequences in the form of a baby. Sex is supposed to be for procreation.”

“You believe that too?”

“Not really. More that I don’t want to have to debate the idea with someone being ... well ... awkwardly righteous.”

“What about that we’re not married?”

“That too.” Michelle said quietly.

“Well, we are both single. So the ”not married” could be remedied if we decide it would work for us. But we probably should get to know each other a bit better first.”

“That’s another no-no in the Church. I’m not single to them, I’m divorced. But I did so mainly to avoid Bryan having too much say in how Andrea lives.”

“I’m sure you know I think that was the right thing to do.”

“Yes. Yes. But it doesn’t change the obstacles to us marrying should we want that.”

“This is a bit premature, but assuming things progress as they have in the last day or so, would you think of us together ... you know ... married?”

“After last night ... OBVIOUSLY!”

“I’m not just good for fixing cottages and testing your sports equipment then?”

“Actually, you’re so good at those things that I probably do want you around all the time.”

“We’re not going to solve the issues of your troubled conscience without some time and respect and ... hopefully ... affection. But I’m now feeling a bit sticky from our ... er ... interactions. So I’m going to take a shower.” I said as I kissed her.

“Last one in is all wet!” Michelle replied.

Monday, August 3, 1964 – Anna

We’d had a nice visit in Quebec and environs. Did a lot of the standard touristy stuff. Had three good meals – Fred insisted on paying, saying you only live once. He’s right. I just don’t have the resources though, and I don’t want to ask Dad. Besides the crepes, there was a place that claimed old Quebec cuisine and I tried a bean casserole called Cassoulet. Like almost everything in Canada, its origins were elsewhere. Then last night we’d found more

traditional fare, and we'd shared a beef Wellington. I'd not had it before. Nice.

Camping was a bit awkward, as there was a little bit of rain both Saturday and Sunday. Today was going to be clear, but the tent was still a bit damp. It'd need to be opened out to dry when we got home.

We didn't start that early. Knowing we'd not likely get another chance, we spent almost an hour having wake up sex. Well, we were both awake the whole time we were doing it, of course. Just we wanted it to last, so we kept stopping and pulling apart and kissing and cuddling, then back to it for a while, and so on. Rather different. And Fred lasted well, not like the first time, which was measured in microseconds. Of course, we had done it each evening and each morning of the whole weekend, so he wasn't desperate to go off. I'm getting so wicked. Pity I won't have Fred to keep me so sinful in a few days time. I'm going to miss him.

As we were driving back, I kept wondering whether I was in love with Fred, or just in love with doing it with him. Honestly the latter. I care about him. Possibly love him. I like being with him. I could spend a lifetime happily with him. But somehow he's not a grand passion. Why not? Or why? Probably if the reason for that were clear, there'd be a very short list of love songs and romance novels.

We were quiet all the way home. The impending goodbyes were weighing on us.

At one point we pulled over in a shopping centre in Montreal to get something to eat and drink. Fred had been driving. He was turning to get out of the car when I called to him.

"Fred!"

As he turned back to me, I took his face in my hands and gave him a big kiss. It wasn't a long, drawn out one, and as we broke, I said

"Thank you – for everything. It's really been important to me."

"Me too."

After that, we were all practicality. No mushy stuff. It would likely have reduced both of us to tears. We'd already decided that there would be no goodbye ceremony. I'd drop Fred off and go home. On Wednesday he was taking the bus for the long trip to Vancouver.

After I dropped off Fred and the camping equipment, I came

home and had a bit of a bawl, then washed my face and made a little supper. Later on in the evening Dad came in. He simply asked if I'd had a good trip, and I answered in the affirmative. Then he gave me a hug and told me he was glad I was home safely. I know he was aware I was upset and out of balance, but I'm glad he just gave me the hug. Love you, Dad.

Saturday, August 15, 1964 – Martin

Andrea and I were on the Sunfish. I had agreed to give Andrea some lessons, starting today.

“Andrea, you seem to have the hang of it. Do you feel comfortable sailing the boat?”

“Yes. It's not hard at all.”

“Well, you proved you could get it back up if it capsized. But there's always dangers. Watch out especially not to get entangled in ropes or stuck under the hull or the sail because of some awkward capsize.”

“Can we do a broad reach and see how fast she'll go?”

“Sure. You have the helm and the main sheet. I'm staying out of the way.”

We sailed steadily across the river, with the only sound the rush of water past the hull and rudder. Andrea asked

“Martin, Do you want to sleep with Mum?”

It was a direct question. An awkward one. I decided the best course of action was to be equally direct.

“Andrea, I'll answer you on condition our conversation is private – between two grown people. You asked a question that's important to you. I'll give you a proper answer on condition that you don't go talking about it to your friends and have my personal life and that of your mother the subject of school-yard gossip.”

“OK. I guess I have to expect that you won't want blabbing about stuff like that.”

“People can be very nasty about other people's lives. They should live their own lives more fully.”

“I'll keep my mouth shut about anything you say.”

“And you can expect the same discretion from me. Now better tack before we get too absorbed in our conversation and have a shipwreck.”

“OK. Ready about... Hard a lee.”

Once we were on the opposite tack, I began.

“Andrea, I’ll tell you that I want to do a whole lot more than just sleep with your Mum. What a silly expression. It refers to something you really want to be wide awake for.”

Andrea laughed.

“More seriously, I like your Mum. More than like her. It’s still early days for both of us in getting used to being single, but still having all the responsibilities of life that we had beforehand. And on top of it, being alone in having to make decisions.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. I saw the two of you, and it kind of worried me.”

“That your Mum would get involved with me and pay less attention to you?”

“I don’t think I had thought of words, but that’s sort of it.”

“I guess there are people like that. Your Mum thinks your Dad’s like that – his own satisfaction before everyone else. However, I’ve only heard her side of things.”

“No. She’s right. He’s like that when I go to see him.”

“I don’t think your Mum’s going to stop watching you like a hawk – bad luck if you wanted to take up with the fast crowd.”

“Yes. I think Annie has it a lot easier with you. You even let her go to Quebec City with Fred.”

“True. But Annie has been quite open with me about her intentions and feelings. And I won’t betray her confidence and tell you about those. I think it’s important that she can talk to me as a friend as well as her Dad. I don’t know if Michelle – your Mum – is quite there yet. She’s had an awful lot on her plate the last couple of years, just as you probably needed her most.”

“Yes, I’ve kind of had to make do, though Aunt Nicole and Granny Lacroix have been pretty good. They don’t let me get away with much. I make a lot of fuss, but actually I know they’re right.”

“Time to think about tacking again, then maybe head for home. You need to practice that round up to the dock.”

We tacked again and made for the cottage.

“So do you think Mum will let you get her into bed?”

“That’s about as direct as it gets! Answer: Yes, though she’ll be terribly red faced to have you find out. So try to be nice to her and play dumb. She wants you to look up to her as your Mum. But like

all of us, she also needs to have companionship and affection. To have someone to share life with.”

“Do you want to be with her?”

“We’re still learning about each other. We only met on Dominion Day – you were there. But I enjoy being with her. I like her as a person, and find her extremely attractive as a woman.”

“Mum thinks that her small bust and the surgery mean she’s not a woman any more.”

“I’ve tried to suggest otherwise, and I think I’ve pretty well convinced her that she’s still a woman. But she’s had a bad hit to her self-confidence.”

“Sometimes I forget that. Martin – I feel odd calling you by your first name still – thank you for talking to me like an adult.”

“It’s easy to treat someone as an adult when they act as one. I’ve been lucky that Blue has shown a lot of sense in that way.”

“Yes. She treats me like a grown up too, but she’s also caught me being a silly little girl a couple of times and given me a quick yank on the leash.”

“You didn’t get too upset?”

“Only for a minute or so. I prefer being grown up to being a kid.”

Monday, August 17, 1964 – Anna

Monday evening, about 7, the doorbell rang. I was in the kitchen, putting away the dishes, so Dad answered. I heard Dad talking with what sounded like a young man.

“Yes?” Dad asked.

“Hi, I’m Allen Sanderson, Sharon’s brother.”

“Martin Tremblay. Perhaps you should come in.”

As they entered the house, I came through from the kitchen. I wasn’t going to miss this.

“Annie, this is Allen Sanderson, Sharon’s brother.”

“Hi, Sharon said she hadn’t seen you for a couple of years.” I declared.

“Yes. I left home and went out to Alberta and managed to get taken on by a seismic crew and they taught me how to be a shooter – the guy who sets the explosive charge. I’ve been making good

money and managing to save a bit, so I wanted to come back to see how Sharon was managing.”

“Not your parents?” I queried.

Allen’s face clouded.

“No way! Dad’s an evil hypocrite and Mum just pretends the sun shines out of his ass. Julie told me Sharon’s pregnant and had VD and I’ve a pretty good guess who did it.”

“What is your suspicion?” Dad asked. I could see he was trying to keep as calm as he could.

“Dad, of course. I more or less caught him bothering her one night, but couldn’t be certain. That upset me so much I left home.”

“Why don’t I see if I can get Sharon on the phone.” Dad suggested. Oh. I hope he won’t say anything to give away where Sharon is!

“She’s not here then?”

“No. A little more than an hour’s drive away with some good people who are helping to get her on her feet. But let me see if she’s at home, and then work out a visit.”

“I thought I might take her back with me to Alberta.”

“Probably not the best timing for that.” I noted. “She’s getting towards her due date.”

“Guess I hadn’t thought that through.”

Dad went to the kitchen phone and – I presume – dialled Aunt Penny.

“Hi, it’s Martin ...” He didn’t use Penny’s name.

“Yes. A young man just showed up here who says he’s Allen Sanderson. I said I’d get Sharon on the phone if I could...”

“Good. Good. That was my thinking too. Will you be nearby to take the phone after Sharon so we can talk too? ...”

“Sure. Here he is.”

Martin beckoned Allen.

“Hi Sis. I heard the situation from Julie. Sounds pretty desperate. ... They sound like really nice people. You sound happier than I can remember. ... Can I come and see you? I’ve driven from Alberta and have to get back in about 10 days, and 5 of that will be getting there I think. ... OK. I’ll get the address from Dr. Tremblay and come tomorrow. I’ll pass the phone back to Dr. Tremblay now.”

“Martin here. ... Allen also said some things that back up our

view of responsibility for her troubles. But let's leave that until later. I might come down myself soon. I've a new friend I'd like you to meet and who I'd like to meet you. ... We'll try not to, unless you tease insufferably. ... You too. Bye."

Dad returned to us in the living room. I'd got cokes for Allen and I and we were chatting. Dad said,

"Allen, I'll give you the address and some directions to where Sharon is living with my sister and her husband. We were a little cautious before we were sure you weren't sent to intimidate her."

"Intimidate her?"

"She won't reveal who was responsible for the baby and the infection. We assume the same person."

"I'm sure it's Dad. He probably played around with one or more of his hookers in the 'fallen women' program he set up. But as I said, I'm pretty sure he was doing something with Sharon, and I know she was unhappy, but she wouldn't tell me either."

"With our physician, Jim Sinclair, she almost told us. She's worried she'll have to testify and be dragged through everything again."

"That's understandable. She probably worries about Mum, though I think she knows what's going on and has decided to turn a blind eye. I can't forgive that."

"But you can hurt Sharon by forcing the issue." I interjected.

"Suppose so. Anyway, I want to see her and find out what I can do to help."

"Sharon needs our support," Dad said, "But that doesn't mean just giving her money, shelter, food, and such. It means showing her what she does well – and she seems a wizard cook and seamstress and gardener – while being gently honest about unrealizable dreams. Not killing those dreams, but showing where they might come true with some attention to reality."

"Yeah. That makes sense. It's what I've had to do."

"Have you got friends in Alberta?" I asked.

"A few. Mostly in the seismic crew. No girlfriend yet – we're out in the bush too much. But I'm saving money, and my hope is that I'll meet someone nice soon."

"Good for you," said Dad. "Now, where are you staying?"

"I've a sleeping bag in the back of my station waggon. Saves money and let's me travel until I'm tired."

"We can offer you a place to put your sleeping bag, and you're welcome to a shower and some food."

"I ate a good dinner at a Chinese restaurant, but a shower would be a good idea."

"Do you need to wash some clothes?" Dad asked.

"That too would be welcome. Can I go get them?"

"Do. Annie will show you where the washer and drier are."

Through the rest of the evening, we learned a little more about the Sanderson family, but it was mainly details on the already-established story. In the morning, Allen was up early. We all ate a quick breakfast, and each of us went off to our respective destinations.

Tuesday, August 18, 1964 – Anna

When I got home, there was a letter from Fred.

August 13, 1964

Dear Annie,

Well, I'm here in Vancouver. For now I'm in a Residence room while I look for a place. I got here on Tuesday and spent yesterday signing all the forms to get my stipend. Unfortunately, though now is when I need money to pay rental deposits etc., it will probably be 8-10 weeks before I see a cheque. Fortunately, I have been saving all summer.

My trip out was tiring. The bus stops a lot. As you know, I spent 2 nights in Calgary with some Hungarian friends of my family. They came in '48, so have been here a while. Back in Hungary they were part of the nobility. Despite that, and the time they've been here, their house was quite empty and less comfortable than ours in Ottawa (or yours).

I had an odd experience as I got off the bus in Calgary. The station is downtown by the Calgary Herald. Anyway, this young Amerindian

girl asked me something as I was going to leave the station. She had rickets, something I've only seen in pictures. I thought she was begging for money, but she was -- in words I won't repeat here -- trying to prostitute herself. She not only had the bent, spindly legs of rickets, but very poor skin and was likely not yet 16. It left me with a very odd feeling.

With all the practical matters I have to attend to, I'll stop for now. I'll try to write more soon. It's probably best if you write to me at the departmental address.

Affectionately,

Fred

Thursday evening, August 20, 1964 – Martin

It was dinner for four at our house. Annie and I made spaghetti, and dessert was fruit and ice cream. As we were finishing, I introduced the reason for the dinner.

"It's no secret that Michelle and I have been spending some time together. We're still getting to know each other. But we wanted to make sure that both of you girls can be comfortable talking to us."

"Sounds serious," Annie said.

"Having friends is always serious," Michelle replied.

"I guess I meant you were going to announce your engagement or something."

"We're not anywhere near that step yet," I said. "There are lots of matters we all would have to deal with."

"One topic is that the Church considers me still married to Andrea's dad." Michelle commented. "I don't think it bothers me too much, but I don't want to upset family, and I don't want Andrea to have difficulties at school."

"I could be out of Catholic school in a year unless Mum pays for me to stay at Immaculata." Andrea noted. "I'd like to go to Lisgar if I can, but Glebe would be OK. And I don't think I'd get

too much trouble from the students at either about our status with the Church.”

“What about other family?” Annie asked.

“I think Mum would probably be pretty upset if I remarried outside the Church,” Michelle said. “For me, damaging my relationship with her is the thing I’m most worried about.”

“Is she worried about you remarrying, or how the Catholic Church views that?” Annie asked as follow-up.

“The latter is my guess. If the Church did not forbid marriage – in fact sex – when a previous spouse is still alive, she’d be fine.”

“At least it’s not like South Africa, where you can’t even be together if you’re different colours. I’m glad they banned them from the Tokyo Olympics.” Annie said heatedly. Lately she’d been reading a lot about apartheid and its evils.

I tried to summarize: “We cannot change the reality of your divorce, Michelle. You could choose to live a life where you never remarry or have a close relationship. I suppose you could seek some form of annulment, but I’ve heard that is time-consuming, expensive, and difficult. Or you could choose to live according to your conscience, which might mean remarriage outside the Catholic Church.

However, for now, you – we – don’t have to set down any decision. We can continue to get to know each other and try to make life more comfortable for us all.”

“I’m OK with that.” Annie said.

“Me too,” added Andrea.

“Thanks,” said Michelle “Whatever eventually happens, I want you all to know I really need and appreciate your support.”

“Amen to that,” was my conclusion of the formal part of the evening.

Saturday, August 22, 1964 – Anna

Michelle had asked Dad to come over at lunchtime to help her with what she said was an electrical problem. He got out his electrical tool bag – an RAF ditty bag – and walked over around noon. He rang the bell and she answered, gave him a kiss on the cheek in greeting and said

“Come on in. Hope you’ve a bit of appetite as I prepared some lunch for us.”

“You didn’t need to.”

“But I did. Happy Birthday”

“Happy Birthday” yelled a whole lot of us from the dining room.

We were sitting at the dining room table – we being me, Andrea and Nicole.

“There’s nothing to fix – at least not that I know about. We just needed a ruse to get you here.” Michelle explained.

“And here’s your special 40th birthday present,” I said, passing a wrapped box. “It’s from all of us.”

Dad unwrapped what turned out to be a Pax M4 camera.

“You remembered me talking about it with Margaret MacKay? But it’s really too much.”

“Dad. You gave me \$40 for my birthday, and I saved half of that, plus I’ve been getting paid, and Michelle and Nicole chipped in too. Also, this is – I hope you don’t mind – second hand because they haven’t been made since 1962. Leica sued the company that made them because the model name is the same as one of the Leicas according to the camera shop man. So it was affordable.”

“Thank you all very much. This is really special. Wow! What a great present. Is there film so we can record this occasion?”

“Indeed there is – right here. It’s not every day you’re 40 – when life begins, isn’t it.” I handed him a box of Ektachrome.

Dad couldn’t wait. He loaded the film and a number of photos were taken by different members of the group so everyone was in at least a couple of the pictures.

“Let’s have lunch!” Michelle commanded.

Later she brought out a cake with candles.

“Happy birthday to you, ...” we all sang. I wonder what kind of wish Dad made as he blew out the candles.

Saturday, August 29, 1964 – Martin

I took Michelle, along with Andrea and Annie, to Brockville for a family barbeque. We loaded up our contribution to the meal and left a little before 10.

“Dad. If you or Michelle want to have some wine today, I’m happy to drive home.” Annie offered.

“All right. Maybe Andrea will join you in front and keep up a conversation so you don’t get sleepy.” I suggested.

“OK. As long as you and Mum aren’t smooching all the way home.” Andrea countered.

“Better not give us ideas.” Michelle replied.

“Guess we’ll have to behave ourselves.” I added.

We arrived at Joe and Penny’s house a bit before noon. There were introductions and greetings, with coffee and some sandwiches. Penny brought in a cake with candles so I got a second birthday celebration and a few small gifts. I used the new camera to get some nice pictures of Michelle.

Andrea was soon off with Joan, there being but a few months between them in age. Annie was talking with Des and Sharon, while Penny, Joe, Michelle and I sat with some cold drinks – Joe and I each had a beer, but the women chose lemonade.

“I’m glad you could come, Michelle.” Penny said as an opening now the chaos had died down.

“It’s nice to get to know some of Martin’s family. He knows mine a bit. After all, Nicole is his secretary. Having faces for the names let’s you think about them when their name is mentioned.

You have a very busy house, especially now Sharon is here.”

“Did you meet her before?” Penny asked.

“No. I think she’d already come here when I met Martin. We’ve really only known each other a short while, and you shouldn’t read too much into our coming together today.”

“We’ll take you and Andrea at face value – part of being a minister.” Joe responded. “Whether the two of you grow your friendship or simply pass some time together, we’ll cheer for you.”

“Well said, Joe.” I chimed in. Then, to catch up on news I said, “Tell us how Sharon is getting on.”

Penny answered. “We like her. She’s a hard worker, and she has good ideas about how to use cloth and old clothes. She’s made several outfits for different people. One of the parishioners paid her \$10 to alter a dress and make it more attractive. And our garden has never been neater. On top of it, I’ll swear her cooking is having us put on weight.

We liked Allen too. A very serious young man.”

“That all sounds good. Has she decided to put the baby up for adoption?”

“At the moment that is our ”official” position, but I suspect she wants somehow to keep the baby.”

“Is that at all possible?”

“Des has talked to us – and thankfully without Sharon present – about the possibility of marrying her and keeping the baby.”

“I was quite impressed with him,” Joe added. “He had been writing out calculations of money he’d need, the pros and cons of marrying Sharon. It was sort of cold and calculating, but at the same time, ..., well,... loving. He didn’t want to give her hopes that would eventually be dashed.”

“How do you and Penny feel about him marrying her?” Michelle asked.

“Given how she’s such a natural home-maker, and she clearly is fond of him, it could work.” Joe said.

“But we do worry that they’d start with such an anchor.” Penny added.

“How did Allen’s visit go?” I asked.

“Sharon really lit up when he came. It’s clear they missed each other.” Penny said. “As I said, he seems a sensible kid. His visit was good for Sharon, though she was a bit cut up when he had to leave again after a very short time.”

“From what he said to Annie and I, it seems their father is the cause of Sharon’s woes.” I said.

“Yes. He and Sharon had some fairly intense conversations, but out of earshot. She clearly won’t formally accuse anyone. But it could clear the air to know for sure who it is.”

“I suppose it has to come from her.” Michelle said quietly. “I don’t know if Martin told you, but my ex gave me gonorrhoea, and consequently an emergency hysterectomy. So I know about being hurt by someone who is supposed to be your main security and support. Shall I tell Sharon about myself?”

“Only if you want to.” Joe said.

“I was going to say the same.” I added.

* * *

“You’re looking well, Sharon”. I said.

“I’m feeling pretty good, but the baby is starting to kick a lot.”

"I remember that feeling. Someone running around on your bladder." Michelle said.

Sharon laughed.

"I met Michelle on Dominion Day." I said.

"Are you also widowed, Mrs. Corcoran?"

"Call me Michelle. No. Divorced. And I had gonorrhoea thanks to my ex-husband."

"Oh. He infected you? Did Andrea get it too?"

"No this was later, at least as far as I know. I found out when I had a serious pelvic infection and an emergency hysterectomy."

"Dr. Sinclair said untreated, the infection could cause serious problems."

"Yes. Not nice at all. As I understand you also know."

"I got pregnant AND "the clap" I think it's called colloquially."

"Do you still feel you can't say who it was?" I asked gently. "We know you don't want to make a formal accusation, but it might help you to put the bad things behind you to have your friends know."

"I'm afraid I'd be forced into legal stuff and have to live it all again. Des wants me to say, and he said more or less the same as you – that it would help to tell what happened, even if I didn't go to the police."

"Allen seemed to think it was your Dad." I said quietly.

"He's not wrong." Sharon said almost inaudibly. Michelle put her arms around her. They sat quietly for a while, both women with tears on their cheeks.

"If you ever want to do more than tell us like this, you know how to get in touch. For now, let's look to the future." I said as calmly as I could.

"Do you want to go down to the river?" Sharon asked.

"Sure. Michelle?"

"Good. Why not bring Des and Annie?"

We all trooped down by the river. A laker went by going upstream. Someone waved from the deck and we waved back. The women walked ahead, Des and I some paces behind.

"Have things started to settle down for you, Des?"

"I'm working as plumber's apprentice, and I think it'll make me a sort of career. It's not what I see as my ultimate dream, but it will provide a solid base, and from that I can maybe do some of the recording things I'd like to do."

“Your Mum said you were thinking of a recording studio.”

“Yes, there are bands that want to make their own recordings and not have to get a contract with a big record company. I think there may be a market for a small but well-equipped studio. At some point, I’d like to discuss how to build some good audio amplifiers.”

“Write to me, and we’ll go back and forth. I’ll likely need to look at the recent journals. What is your time frame?”

“Oh. I can’t see getting set up for a couple of years at least. But I’d like to plan well, and if there is an opportunity to build my own equipment, start to build it.”

“What about your own life?”

“I’ve been thinking about Sharon. I like her, and I’m sure you can see she’d make a great home-maker. There’s the worry that with a new baby right away, we’d be starting behind the 8-ball. However, I’ve done some calculations, and we can probably live decently but not in a fancy way on my plumbing pay. There’s the backup of the \$10,000 coming from the Stedmans. But I’m planning to put that aside for unforeseen expenses.”

“The baby rather forces the decision.”

“Yeah. If the baby is adopted, I don’t think Sharon and I would get together. She would always feel I’d let her down. But I worry I’m not prepared for all the responsibility.”

“Only you can, and should, decide that. But I’ve seen people make good marriages with less than you have going for you.”

“Thanks, Uncle Martin.”

* * *

When it came time for eating – which was around 4, there were really too few chairs. Michelle got a tray and put two plates on it, and squeezed in beside me in a big arm chair. She was small enough to fit. We talked as we ate, mostly in semi-whispers.

“Thanks for talking to Sharon. I think it was you who got her to tell who caused her problems.” I said.

“It’s not something that one ever wishes.”

“No. That’s for sure. Let’s hope it helps her to move on.”

“I think she will. She seems to have a new family here. But she has a long way to go. Though maybe she and Des will become a

team. The way they look at each other – see them now, but look discreetly – speaks volumes.”

“Des has been writing out plans and calculations to see what they can afford. He’s not dreaming in colour at least.”

“I think there are two concerns.” Michelle said. “First, the baby’s arrival is forcing them to decide much too quickly. Unfortunately, the pressure on Sharon is to give the baby for adoption as soon as it’s born. Second, I suspect, but can’t be sure, that she is worried that she might marry out of need rather than love, and/or that Des is doing it out of pity rather than true feeling. That could be destructive to a marriage.”

“We could be in a similar boat if we try to sort out a new life too quickly.”

“Do you worry about that?”

“No. I can’t say I worry. I try to ask myself questions that are like those you just stated. More to be sure of what I want than to create worries.”

“Do you think Des is being too ... mechanical ... in writing things down?”

“No. I don’t think I told you how Clara and I decided to marry. We were in Paris”

“You went there unmarried?”

“Sorry. Does that upset you?”

“No. Just seems a bit ... premature.”

“I also didn’t mention that there was only one bed in the farmhouse in ’44 when the mine blew us in the ditch and Annie in a bush.”

“What! You did it then?”

“A little less loud please. There are ears around.”

“Sorry. But did you?” she whispered.

“We were, I think, in shock. We can talk more about it later. But somehow we ended up together. And when I went back 3 years later – we’d been writing regularly and had got to share a lot of ideas – my dancing friend Jane in Oxford who was fifty-something at the time guessed that we’d have to decide if we wanted to share a bed, and told me to take some condoms. And we decided to take a few days in Paris, found we really enjoyed being together, but we knew we had very different lives. So we decided to each write down what we must have, what we thought we should have, and

what we would like to have in the best of all worlds if we were to marry. When we compared lists, they were surprisingly similar, and somehow everything else we had to sort out seemed easy.”

“Maybe writing things down is a good idea.”

“We can try it if you like. It’s mainly a way to focus the conversation. At least that’s how I see it.”

“Yes, it would be a good way to organize one’s thoughts. I’ll start writing some lists. Shall we compare lists next week sometime.”

“Sure. Over dinner and a bottle of wine. But it has to be before I go to Washington with Annie for Labour Day with my parents there.”

“Wednesday?”

“OK”

Saturday evening, August 29, 1964 – Anna

Today all four of us went to Brockville for a family barbeque. I’d asked Sharon how she was feeling. She’d said,

“Big! And I’ve still got two months to go. But I’m doing OK. I like it here, with the kids and the parishioners. They’ve been very kind and not asked a lot of questions. Certainly no awkward ones.”

Des was looking at her protectively. Human affection is a funny thing.

Later on, Dad and Michelle talked to Sharon. I gather Michelle told her how she’d lost her womb to gonorrhoea that her ex had infected her with. Michelle had hinted at this to me, but Andrea had told me at least a version of what had happened to precipitate her divorce. Apparently, Michelle’s revelation made Sharon comfortable enough to quietly let them understand that their guess that her father had impregnated her was correct. Things would have to be left at that. It was going to hurt her all over again to inform the authorities.

We’d eaten around 4, and there weren’t really enough chairs. I saw Dad and Michelle in a big arm chair. Michelle was small enough to fit. I saw them sharing some words – likely private by the way they were keeping their voices low. They were obviously also looking at how Des and Sharon were looking at each other.

Then I saw Michelle’s eyebrows go up. Probably got an unexpected answer to a question, maybe about Mum and Dad during

and after the War. Dad probably had a few surprises for her.

* * *

Driving home, I had Andrea with me in the front of the car. The radio was tuned to CFRA and playing 'Can't buy me love' by the Beatles.

"Keep chatting to me, Andrea. I don't want to fall asleep." I said.

"What do you think of the Beatles?"

"Not bad. But I won't be screaming in the street trying to tear my clothes off, like the teenage girls in New York."

"You think their music will last?"

"I think some of it will. Possibly this tune. They've a knack for catchy tunes. Some of them probably will be rearranged and redone by others and used in different ways. So some will last. Others will be here today, gone tomorrow."

"Guess so."

We let the music play for a bit.

Andrea said, "Mum and Martin look like they've switched off. They're snuggled together. What did you think of them sitting together over dinner?"

"Meaning?"

"I thought they looked kind of ... comfortable. Like they were a pair. If you'd asked me a week or so ago, I'd have told you I'd be upset. But today I felt kind of good about it. And how they are now."

"Yes. They seem OK together. But we'd better try to let them find their own way. And they need to sort out all the memories, good and bad, which will take some time."

"Suppose so. Do you think we'll end up stepsisters when it all gets worked out?"

"Maybe. Do you think we'll get along OK?"

"Can't see why not? Can you?"

I could!

"Oh. Borrowing the other's favourite brooch. Leaving undies all over the place. Using the shampoo up and not replacing the empty bottle. Squeezing the toothpaste from the middle not the end. Plenty of ways to get World War Three going."

Andrea laughed. “You’re right. There’s loads of cowpats to step in. I hope we’ll stay friends no matter what happens to those two in the back.”

Was it an omen that the radio started to play the newly released ‘It ain’t me babe’ by Bob Dylan?

Monday evening, August 31, 1964 – Anna

Andrea phoned on Monday just after supper. Dad and Michelle were going to try to make some lists of things they wanted out of life and compare them. They’re planning to do the comparison Wednesday, and Andrea asked if we could do something together to let them have some time to talk by themselves. I suggested she sleep over, which was enthusiastically received. She had to ask Michelle, but soon called back to say she could come.

After this, I wrote to Fred. Told him about our Brockville trip and about plans for Washington DC. A bit of news about Sharon, and some snippets about the work I’d been doing. Like Fred, I signed off ‘Affectionately’. It was about right. I’m sure now that we weren’t – aren’t – in love with each other, though I miss him a lot, and I suspect he misses me too.

The problem is, I’ve rather come to like sex. Perhaps more the comfortable lying together and chatting as much or even more than the ... well ... sticking it in. But I don’t want to go looking for it. I want a nice, comfortable, safe boyfriend who wouldn’t be an obstacle to my education.

Wednesday evening, September 2, 1964 – Martin

I got to Michelle’s around 6. Sort of wondered if what had worked so well for Clara and I would work a second time.

“Martin, I’m kind of nervous. Can we look at the lists before we eat?”

“Sure. I guess it could be awkward if we have very different items and they conflict.”

“How shall we proceed?”

“Let’s get a drink of something – have you any dry sherry? – and trade paper.

How about at the kitchen table? Clara and I modified our lists as we compared them.”

“Really? Were they different?”

“They weren’t different, but we realized that there were elements from each that we wanted to include, actually making the lists more similar.”

“That was fortunate.

Here’s the sherry. Can you pour for us?”

I poured a modest measure in each of two small glasses.

“Enough?”

“For now. I don’t want alcohol muddying my thinking. Here’s my list.”

“And here’s mine,” I slid it across to her. I toasted, “Best of luck.”

“Best of luck.”

We each read the lists in silence.

My list

Must

- friendship and partnership
- respect for each other’s work and interests,
- respect each others’ opinions and beliefs
- responsible with money
- merge families somehow

Should

- be able to spend time apart as well as together
- still share many activities

Fairy Godmother

- none -- unrealizable dreams cause unhappiness

Michelle’s list

Must

- absolutely faithful, not look at others
- respect religious beliefs
- treat Andrea and Annie as own children while respecting their existing up-bringing

Should

- wait for annulment before marriage or publicly together
- share religious beliefs

Fairy Godmother

- that the above happens quickly

I felt a cold wave pass over me. The evidence of Michelle's Catholicism, or rather her wish to stay part of the Church, had been before me all along, but now the list seemed to make my participation a condition of our partnership. I guess I wanted things to work like they had with Clara. But Michelle was someone else, someone different.

Michelle broke the silence.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"Before we started, I wasn't nervous. But now I'm a bit concerned we may not be on the same wavelength."

"In particular?" she asked with some tremor in her voice.

"I've come to care about you – and Andrea too, I might add – and for me that means I want to have the door open to becoming a family. If I understand correctly the process for an annulment of your marriage to Bryan could take a long time, with especially emotional costs as well as money ones. Am I right?"

"Yes, the Church can be slow, and may turn it down."

"Where would that leave us?" I asked.

Michelle shrugged.

"I don't really know. It just feels important to me. I'm already having some misgivings about ... well, you know. I really like ... well, sex. And I've actually not gone to confession since we ... er ... found I could still have intercourse. I can't see how I could tell the priest I'd had sex outside of marriage. Actually, that I have a lot of difficulty feeling sorry for that, and in confession you have to resolve not to sin again."

"We shouldn't have discovered that you can have a sexual part to your life?"

"I'm very confused about that. It seems so right, but all my upbringing says it's a sin. Knowing I like sex almost makes things harder."

"Michelle, I can respect your beliefs, and it's likely that a lot of them I share, but I think you know I don't share the Church viewpoint on sexual morality. We've skirted around the issue of my

talks with Annie about life and men and such. I don't know if I told you, but I made sure there were condoms in the house and that she knew where to find them."

"You made it easy for her to have sex if she wanted to?" Michelle seemed quite surprised.

"Yes. Do you think that is wrong?"

"Again, all my background says yes. But Annie seems so well-balanced and self-assured. I can't see her becoming promiscuous or ... well, the other words are not nice. But the idea troubles me."

"And you definitely wouldn't want Andrea – when she's a bit older – to have the same options?" I asked, though more as a statement than a question.

"Of course not! But ... Oh! It's so confusing."

"We're not doing very well with this. I'm so sorry. Maybe it's too soon in our friendship."

"But Martin, we need to know these things. You were right in that. You and Clara both. It's just that it's turning out difficult for us."

"So you aren't ready to call it quits for us?"

"That would be awfully painful just now."

That was a start, at least. I said so.

"Yes. For me too. But there are some other things that bother me in your list."

"What things?"

"The not looking at others. I'm not talking of infidelity. I watch people all the time. If there's a pretty woman, I like looking at her."

"But that would make me feel bad."

"Why?"

"I guess because of what I don't have."

"If I don't look, or pretend not to look, it isn't going to give you something you don't or can't have. When Clara and I went to Paris, we went to the Folies Bergère, where the girls wear no tops – well, actually I think they wear costumes that expose but also lift up their breasts. Clara was worried that she didn't have a figure like the showgirls. I had to point out that I didn't get to enjoy touching and playing with the showgirls. I feel the same about you."

Given your experience with Bryan, I can understand the need for fidelity. But to me fidelity is about being a team. You don't go doing things that diminish the team. I've known couples who say really

negative things about each other, but swear they "never touched another woman / man". That makes my blood boil. Whatever the faults in the other person, you either work them out together or else the partnership is – to me anyway – as good as dead.

My view of fidelity comes from the partnership, not from some rule book."

"You never had catechism?" Michelle asked.

"I suppose a little bit in school here. My parents were surprisingly tolerant, as I realize now. But also there was a lot of discussion around the dinner table and after about the world and life. I now really appreciate how that taught me to think through situations. On the other hand, it can make me over-think them. And I sometimes find that I lack a good compass in judging how other people view a situation."

"That's so different from our house. We had church every Sunday, and plenty of religion classes. The rules were there, and you memorized them, confessed every transgression, and said your penance and your rosary."

"Does that put me on the road to hell?"

"According to some of the Church teaching, I suppose it does. But Martin, you are clearly a good man. You've done things that show great charity and love and good sense. That's what makes it so hard for me to reconcile our ideas. Or perhaps how we behave in response to things, because I feel we share a lot of the same basic ideas about good and evil."

"Am I correct in thinking you care about me? I know I care about you – want the best for you."

"Yes. I'm so afraid that just as you've come into my life, you will now disappear from it."

"I don't want that. But I'm pretty concerned that we might find the differences in our approach to life – particularly love and sex and marriage and religion – will quickly poison the good feelings."

"Yes. We're not walking the same road yet."

For a few minutes we were silent. Each of us sipped the sherry awkwardly.

"What SHALL we do about us?" I finally asked.

"I don't know. I don't want us to stop being friends, but I don't want to be untrue to myself – or have both of us pretending we accept something or some things we don't."

“That sums up my feelings too.”

“The girls probably think we’re wearing out the bed springs. Andrea was giving me all kinds of knowing looks.”

“Probably best to ignore the looks, and be as direct and truthful as we can. That is, we are two people whose lives have taken a detour and we’re trying as best we can to find our way back to the right road.”

“That’s well said. Yes. I can use that metaphor and I think Andrea may accept it.”

“She’s an OK kid. I like her. If you and I split up – oops, that assumes we are together – well, if we stop seeing each other, I’ll miss my conversations with her.”

“If we do stop seeing each other, would you mind if she talked to you sometime?”

“Not at all, but it’s easier if I’m on good terms with her mother.”

“Thank you for that Martin.”

“I’m reluctant to suggest it, but maybe we need to be a little less in each others’ lives for a while so we can figure things out. Clara died only at the beginning of this year, and you haven’t been fully divorced for very long either.”

“Maybe, though I find our time together very reassuring.”

“If the annulment is important to you, you should start the process.”

“If I’m honest, Martin, I want the annulment so I can have a place in the Church. Bryan annulled any partnership we had, though the Church and some members of my family wouldn’t recognize that.”

“Michelle, I think that you’ve been through a few rather quick changes in life that affect how you see yourself. I’ve lost a partner, but I haven’t altered how I see myself or how I think I should behave. I’m rather aware that I’ve shown you that your view of yourself as, well, a non-woman is just not true. Worse, I’ve shown you that you can enjoy your body as it is now. And that new viewpoint is only a few weeks old. Surely we should expect you to be a bit unsettled.”

“That does make sense. Do you think time will change my attitudes?”

“I don’t know. And I don’t necessarily think your attitudes are the issue. That is, I don’t think your need for faith in your life is wrong for you. It’s how you are trying to fit into the Church’s rules and into the life that divorce has imposed on you that seem to be

the problem. But if you remain unhappy about the apparent lack of agreement between our views on religion and behaviour – and I really don't think there's a big difference between us – we'll have a lot of trouble building the kind of partnership I want, that I think we would both need in the long term."

"I didn't have that sort of partnership with Bryan. Hearing you talk of how you and Clara seemed to work together makes me want more than I had before, so we agree on wanting the strong partnership."

"But possibly we're not in agreement on what the rules of the partnership should be."

"That's what's upsetting."

"Well, we're not shouting at each other or crying. I'm OK with letting more time pass, and we can abstain if you want."

"On one hand, that's exactly right. On the other, I really think I'll find it hard to abstain."

"We're definitely in agreement on that, but I don't want regrets. Regrets and recriminations will surely kill any chances we have together."

"Yes." Michelle admitted sadly. "We'd better behave ourselves for now. And over the next few weeks, I'll try to work out my feelings about the Church. Do you think it would help if I talked to someone?"

"The nun you mentioned – the one who had been widowed."

"If she's still alive. I don't think so, unfortunately. But you have the right idea. Someone who knows the Church but has an understanding of life outside the cloister."

"Do you think someone like Joe might be helpful?"

"Maybe. Though wrong religion."

"I sometimes wonder if true religion has much to do with the name on the church sign. To me, it's always seemed that there are people who are somehow holy no matter what label is applied."

"You think Joe qualifies as holy?"

"Perhaps 'holy' is the wrong word for him. But he has a real spiritual presence that I've rarely seen in ministers and priests. A way of being genuine in his Christianity, while being a real human being too."

"I sensed that too. I'll think about it. But I'll see if Sister Catherine is still alive first."

September 2, 1964 – Anna

Wednesday evening

Andrea came over for supper. We changed our mind about going out to a movie because she said she didn't feel great. A bit headache and cramped. I know that feeling, and commented.

"Getting your monthly?"

"I've not had it yet."

"Maybe getting a cold?"

"I hope not."

We watched a little TV, nothing very serious. I don't even remember what it was. Maybe Don Messer's Jubilee or some reruns of Dennis the Menace or I Love Lucy.

Suddenly Andrea jumped up and ran to the powder room. After a minute or two she called to me.

"Annie. Can you help me? I don't know what to do."

I went to the door of the powder room.

"I think you were right about my period. I've blood all over my panties, and it's got on my skirt."

"Did it go through your skirt?"

"I don't think so. But I'll have to try to wash it."

I'd check where she was sitting, but for now we needed to get things under control. I said, "First. I think you'd better rinse out the panties in cold water. And I'll get a laundry basket for your skirt and bring you a dressing gown. My menstrual supplies are upstairs. We'll look after everything up there. For now mop up with toilet paper, but flush it in small batches. We don't want a blockage. Then make a pad of paper and wedge it at your ... opening."

I checked the chair on the way upstairs to get a dressing gown. Fortunately no blood. I went back down with the gown and brought Andrea back to the main bathroom.

"For now, toss your panties in the tub and I'll drape your skirt over the shower curtain rail. We need to deal with your menstruation, unless this is a hemorrhage. But I suspect it's not."

"What do I have to do? I don't have any Kotex, nor a belt for them." Andrea was close to tears.

"I've tampons. They're less messy."

"Mum says they are for married women."

"They're all I have, I'm afraid."

“Guess we’ll have to use them, then. But you’ll have to show me how.”

I got out a tampon. I had the standard Tampax this time, with its applicator. I had her wash her hands, and suggested she try always to do so. I got Andrea to show me the paper pad. It was bloody, but not soaked. I passed her a lukewarm facecloth and had her use some toilet paper to dry a bit, then guided her on insertion of the tampon. She got it in one. No problem. I showed her how to wrap up the applicator and not toss it in the toilet.

“Does it feel OK?”

“I can’t really feel it. But the cramping has gone.”

“Usually does when the flow starts. Let’s wash your clothes.”

We did this with cold water and the blood came out OK. We hung things up so they’d dry. Fortunately, she had a change of skirt for the morning.

“Your first period is important. Here’s a little present of a fresh pair of panties.” I gave her one of the pairs I’d bought recently. She grinned and gave me a big ‘Thank you’ and a hug.

“And you’d better have the rest of this box of tampons. Also my treat as a first-timer.”

“By the way, you shouldn’t leave them in more than 8 hours, and sometimes I use a napkin overnight and pin it to my panties. But I don’t have any right now. Or you can use a wad of toilet paper in an emergency. To get the tampon out you pull gently on the string. If you’re a bit dry, they may stick, and you can wait an hour. But you don’t have to take them out to go to the toilet.”

“I hope Mum doesn’t make a fuss.”

“Me too. But really, it is easier if you can use puss-plugs – oops, that’s what Marcia calls them.”

“Neat. Does she have a name for napkins too?”

“Yeah. Man-hole covers. Pretty crude.”

We laughed. We got into our PJs and went back downstairs and made some cocoa then decided it was time for bed.

Friday, September 4, 1964 – Martin

“You want to take over after the border?” I asked Annie as we drove down Highway 16.

“OK. You take us to Hill Island and through the border, then I’ll take us to Syracuse where we can have some coffee, unless you want to stop before.”

“We’ll see what time we make Watertown. May be good to stop for gas and a toilet.”

“Good thinking.”

We had left Ottawa just after 6 a.m. in rain showers and the threat of a storm. It was even a bit foggy. I was taking two vacation days. I’d only taken a couple this summer. I guess without someone to share the vacation, I didn’t feel much like it. Annie had just finished her summer contract the day before.

We got near Prescott about 7 am, and we could have crossed the border there, but Hill Island – the Thousand Islands Bridge – was generally quicker. With 401, we’d be there in a bit more than half an hour, if we weren’t slowed a bit by the messy weather. The day would be a long one, maybe 14 or 15 hours on the road. Pieces of the Interstate system were in place, just like the Queensway in Ottawa, but the route was far from complete.

A while later, we were in a mercifully short line for the border crossing.

“Where do you live?” asked the border agent.

“Ottawa.”

“Citizenship?”

“We’re Canadians.”

“Purpose of your visit?”

“To visit my parents with my daughter.” I said, and the agent looked at me.

“Whereabouts do they live?”

“Washington. My father is in the diplomatic service there.”

“Any alcohol or tobacco?”

“No. Just some magazines and a couple of books as gifts for my folks.”

“Fruit or vegetables?”

“No. We’re aware of the regulations.”

“OK. Have a safe trip. And it’s not on your likely route, but a good idea to stay clear of Philadelphia due to the riots there.”

I put the car in gear and pulled away gently.

“You didn’t mention the cake I made.” Annie complained.

“I was afraid they’d confiscate it because it’s so good.”

“Ooh. Flattery.”

“Besides, it does have dried fruit. I didn’t want to tempt fate.”

There was a parking area not far down the road, and I pulled in and we did what Annie’s friend Marcia calls Chinese Fire Drill to change seats. Where does she get those phrases? Annie put the car in gear and pulled away again.

“A little later we each should try to get some shuteye in the back seat.” I commented.

“Yes. It’ll be a long day. But we should have both of us awake where we need to navigate.

Dad. Do you think you should have asked Michelle along? It would have been nice for her to have met Grandma and Grandpa.”

“Things are a little delicate just now.”

“Oh. Sorry. I thought things were going great guns. Though I did notice you came home to sleep on Wednesday night.”

“Well, I likely would have done that anyway. We’re far from ready to announce that we’re as good as married, and I don’t think it would be a good example for Andrea. Or you for that matter.”

“Hmm. I suppose. And you said ‘delicate’.”

“Yes. You know Michelle is Catholic, but also divorced.”

“Like all kinds of bossy single Italian men in red outfits telling real folk how to live?”

“You have a dim view of the Catholic Church.”

“Not really. Just the hierarchy and how it looks down on women.”

“Anyway, Michelle wants to stay in the Church, but that isn’t possible if she remarries without getting her first marriage annulled.”

“Wouldn’t that make Andrea illegitimate? Henry VIII and all that?”

“I didn’t ask about that. But I suspect not. Personally I find it all a bit strange.”

“You could just live together. I know it’s a bit on the edge, but”

“I think that’s out too. Also breaks the rules.” I said.

“Not nice. So what do you think you’ll do?”

“For the time being, slow down, take some time to figure things out.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier for her to leave and join another church, like Uncle Joe’s?”

“You and I can think that, but we don’t know Michelle’s thoughts and feelings.”

“When you first introduced us, I thought she figured men weren’t going to be a part of her life at all, especially after the hysterectomy and stuff.” Annie said.

“Yes. She did think that. Between the surgery and her already slight figure, she felt she wasn’t really a woman. It surprised her when I said I thought she was attractive.”

“Well, she is! Very!” I think that even as a woman, Annie could see that Michelle had that pixie quality that was appealing to a lot of men. Probably me included. I continued,

“Anyway, I think realizing that she is a nice-looking woman is also troubling her now. But beyond giving her time to decide what she truly wants, I don’t know what to do. If we ignore our differences – sweep them under the carpet – then I fear we will soon end up unhappy with each other.”

“That would be sad. But so is losing each other.”

“Hence our dilemma.”

“So you’re going to keep seeing each other?”

“Yes. But perhaps not quite as often. And as far as I’m concerned not so much one on one. I think it may be easier to stay friends that way. And no matter what happens, I do want us to stay friends. Michelle has also asked me to keep in touch with Andrea even if she and I don’t keep seeing each other.” I added.

“I can understand that. She wants to give her some sort of male presence in her life. I don’t think Andrea’s dad is much of a man, even if he is some government pooh-bah.”

“I won’t disagree with you.”

“You missed a bit of drama on Wednesday night, actually.”

“Really. What happened.”

“Oh. Andrea got her first period. At least Michelle had told her about that in general terms, but hadn’t provided her with any ... er ... supplies.”

“You had some didn’t you?”

“Of course. But I use tampons, though I sometimes have napkins around, but not this time, and apparently Michelle doesn’t think they are appropriate for unmarried women according to Andrea.”

“I didn’t know that. Though Margaret commented about that view of tampons too.”

“Anyway, together we decided that tampons it would have to be, since any improvised napkin would be too messy – she was having a bit of a heavy flow. I hope that doesn’t cause you any more friction with Michelle.”

“She didn’t phone to mention it.”

“Maybe Andrea didn’t say anything. I gave her a few days’ worth of puss plugs – I mean tampons. Marcia uses that name, and it’s kind of stuck in my mind.”

“If I recall, Marcia is pretty good at nicknames for things.”

“Yes. She has an even better one for menstrual napkins.”

“Am I to be included in the circle of those in the know?”

“Man-hole covers.”

“I might have guessed. What we scientists call an ‘operational definition’.”

Annie laughed. “Exactly!”

“We’ll worry about Michelle’s reaction later. But that’s an example of the type of mis-alignment of our views. I can’t see why Andrea’s choice in that regard should be an issue. So it adds to the distance between us, unhappily.”

“Pity. Guess all we can do is give her time as you suggest.”

Annie switched the radio on, then I guess she realized it would be a distraction to try to fiddle with the tuner while driving, so she asked me to find some music. I caught a pleasant slow-tempo tune I’d heard lately.

If I fell in love with you
Would you promise to be true
And help me ... understand
'Cos I've been in love before
And I found that love was more
Than just holding hands

If I give ... my ... heart ... to you
I must be sure
From the very start
That you would love me more than her
...

“Who’s playing that?” I asked.

“Dad! That’s the Beatles.”

“Really. I associated them with much more noisy offerings.”

“They have quite a range.”

“Indeed. That piece will, I think, last. And be picked up by others.”

“The other side of the record has another quiet tune called ‘And I love her’”

“Oh. That’s the Beatles too.”

“Yep. But they also do things like Twist and Shout, Long Tall Sally, She Loves You, and Roll Over Beethoven.”

“You like them.”

“I actually like the slower ones, or rather the melodic ones. Like this one they’re playing now – ‘I’ll be back’.”

We were quiet for a while as the music played. It was a good tune to drive to. I guess the station we’d picked up was playing a whole set of Beatles tracks. Well, it kept the miles counting down.

Monday. Labour Day, September 7, 1964 – Anna

It was Labour Day. Spelled Labor Day here in Washington.

We’d arrived safely on Friday around 6 pm. 12 hours on the road, but better than we’d anticipated. Grandma and Grandpa had a nice apartment not too far from the Zoo in the NorthWest quadrant. Apparently one didn’t live anywhere else in DC if you were white.

I’d not been to Washington before, so Grandpa gave me a drive round on Saturday, showing me the main sights. Dad and Grandma decided to enjoy a quiet conversation over a pot of tea.

Yesterday Dad and I went to the new Aerospace museum the Smithsonian had set up. Today we went to a barbeque one of the diplomatic staff was putting on. I wondered if I’d fit in. It turned out that one of the guests was a temporary scientific attaché for the UK embassy. He’d studied physics – correction ‘read physics’ – at Oxford. I knew the lingo from Dad. And I had some names to drop, since Dad had worked with Dr. Bleaney, who was still around. And though Dad never met him, Lindemann – Lord Cherwell, who’d been Churchill’s science policy guy – was at Wadham, though only nominally by the time Dad was there. I don’t think Dad thought

Cherwell had good ideas. I'd read C P Snow's 'Science and Government', so I held my own in the conversation. I got the guy's card – he seemed willing to provide information and contacts for grad. school, though I got a bit of a feeling he was more interested in my breasts than my brains.

I chose to drink no alcohol, and I told Dad and Grandpa before we went to the party. Diplomatic parties tend to be pretty boozy. I said I'd drive us back, and we took our car. Dad drove there. The party was on the Virginia side, in Arlington. Some pretty nice houses in well-treed streets. The temperature was in the 80s, rather warm, but no rain. People were able to circulate in the garden.

In the midst of it all, I had a minor attack of the lonelies. No Mum. No Fred. Went to the bathroom, as I was feeling a little bloated. Well, I had been eating a lot of different things this weekend. My period wasn't due for a week. Seemed I was a bit constipated. All the sitting in the car maybe. Felt better after the bathroom visit, got a glass of orange juice and found a nice bench in the garden where I was joined by a friendly cat. The cat wouldn't be friendly if I didn't like them generally, but this one seemed very happy to lie on the bench beside me and be stroked slowly.

After about 10 minutes a young woman my own age came along.

"There you are Max."

"Your cat?" I asked.

"As much as he belongs to anyone. I'm Cassandra, the black sheep of this diplomat's family."

"I'm Anna Tremblay." I thought I would try out my real name for once. "Robert Tremblay of the Canadian Embassy is my grandfather. How are you the black sheep?"

"I'm studying drama, working with a small independent and financially destitute theatre company that is putting on some controversial plays that embarrass my parents."

"In other words continuing the normal cycle of human offspring." I tendered.

"They wouldn't agree, but that's sort of what's happening."

"Are you any good? In drama, that is." I thought I'd go for broke and see if she had any sense of judgement.

"Not nearly as good as I think we should be. And that includes me. But we are probably good enough to carry the productions we're attempting. And likely better than 90 percent of the theatre

companies on this side of the US.

What about you?"

"Half way through a physics degree in Ottawa."

"Normally guy stuff. You must be the only woman in your class."

"Yes, but you really can only go out with all of them at once or none of them, or they can't be colleagues."

"So you've not had a chance to enjoy the exquisite pleasures of a good fuck." I was beginning to see why she was the black sheep. Well, maybe I'd play the game.

"I've been lucky to have had a very good friend who was also very good at that too." Well, in for a penny....

"Good for you. I almost took you for a goody two-shoes. And in the theatre I've found I have to teach every director that 'communicate' is not spelled C O P U L A T E."

I laughed. Cassandra was a lively spirit. But Grandma was heading towards us. I'd rather not discuss my sex life in front of her.

"Here comes my grandmother."

"Oh. Miriam. I know her. I was lucky enough to talk to her about her wartime experiences in London. She knows Janet Murrow who used to broadcast from England during the Battle of Britain when they were both there.

Hi Mrs. Tremblay. I've been talking with your granddaughter, who my cat seems to have taken a fancy to."

With Grandma present, things drifted off into small talk. Pretty soon it was time to go before the drunks became obnoxious. I drove us back to the apartment and we had a nice cup of tea together and essentially said our goodbyes so we could leave early in the morning.

Monday. Labour Day, September 7, 1964 – Michelle

"Hello Michelle, I haven't seen you since graduation – almost 20 years."

"Hello Sister Catherine. Yes, soon after I finished I think you moved to a different school and I lost track – and got busy with being a young adult, I'm afraid."

“Actually I moved to an administrative post with the Grey Nuns, and then here to the retirement house in Pembroke.”

I had contacted Immaculata and been given the phone number where Sister Catherine was living. It turned out that Labour Day was a good day to visit, and I’d driven up to arrive after 2 p.m.

Sister Catherine continued “So you are now Michelle Corcoran?”

“Not by choice, I’m afraid.” I gave a short description of my situation, and the circumstances and reasons for my divorce.

“And you wanted to talk to me for some reason?”

“Yes. I remember you as the most ... real, I suppose, of the nuns. You had been married and widowed, and you seemed to have a better understanding of life outside the convent. I felt it might be helpful to talk to you to try to come to terms with my current situation.”

“I’m not sure what direct help I can be. But I can listen and ask questions. However, you and God are the ones with the answers.”

“Yes. I realize that.”

“So what is your situation? Not as you’ve described the facts, but as it affects you.”

“Well, as I mentioned I am divorced, largely because I felt that was a protection for my daughter. She’s just 14, and I don’t want her father to have too much influence on her, nor to expose her to some of his way of living. It was a great shock to learn his real life.”

“I can appreciate that. And concern for your daughter ...”

“Andrea”

“is important. I know how a mother frets over those things. And the pain when the caring fails.”

“I”

“You knew I was a widow. But my husband and daughter died in a car accident. He was drunk. An alcoholic. A beautiful man when sober, but he came from that part of the Irish tradition where drinking is considered a man’s right. Except some people are not capable of enjoying a drink.”

“I’m sorry. We never knew.”

“And I didn’t want you to. A teacher can’t trade on pity. Anyway. Back to your situation.”

“With the hysterectomy and my ... well ... obvious lack of bosom, I felt that I was no longer a woman. And I didn’t believe that I had the ... parts ... to well, be with a man.”

“And now you’ve met someone you think you’d like to be with?”

“Yes. He’s a very kind and gentle man, well-educated. He’s a widower with a 20 year old daughter. We like being together, and it came as a shock that he found me attractive as a woman.”

“We see our faults rather than our beauty in the mirror.”

“Yes.” This was so on target it made me quiet for a while.

“And now you have the problem that the Church says you cannot remarry without an annulment of the first marriage?”

“Yes.”

“Is your gentleman friend ...”

“Martin. It will be easier to use his name.”

“Is Martin prepared to wait?”

“I don’t think so. But to be fair to him, I’m not sure I am either. Well, ..., if I want your true feelings, I should admit we already discovered we like to be ... with each other. But now we’re taking a break to sort things out.”

“You are still quite young, and have been through a lot of difficulty. Am I correct in thinking you wanted to know if the surgery had prevented a full married life?”

“That was a big part of it. I essentially told Martin I could not be a partner to him, and he very gently showed me otherwise. I hope I don’t scandalize you, Sister Catherine.”

“No. I was married. I know the delight that there can be when the physical and intellectual and emotional all unite. Even today I recall it with a certain sense of loss. Now THAT would scandalize my colleagues here.”

“It was a sense that you would feel that way which led me here today.”

“Thank you for that, but I fear it is precisely why I may be a poor counsellor, at least from the perspective of the Church.”

“I’m wondering if the Church will make me decide between the possibility of a proper married life – which I never had with my ex-husband – and living a celibate life for many years. Forcing that choice on me doesn’t seem to fit with the message of charity and caring that Christ represents.”

“Officially, in my habit, I have to give the party line. Strictly, that would mean that you are already on or over the excommunication line.”

“And unofficially?”

"I cannot believe Christ would shun any person who wants to live a good life."

"With the ecumenical discussions in the Vatican Council, I've even wondered if I would cause less scandal by joining another church. I didn't mention that Martin is not a Catholic."

"Would he convert?"

"We haven't talked about that. However, I think he would feel it to be hypocritical. He has a very practical and tolerant view of religion. He's never belittled or criticized my beliefs. In fact he's been forceful in pointing out that we need to ensure we each respect the others' beliefs and work. It's one of the things I really like about him. But it's at odds with some Church teaching."

"Yes. Though there have been murmurs of change. The time scale of change for the Church is unfortunately in centuries."

"To give you an idea of Martin and his family, I should tell you about a young woman they have been helping. She was made pregnant and infected with a venereal disease by a family member, and tried to escape her situation by implicating Martin's nephew. When he got the symptoms of the disease, the situation unravelled for her, but Martin and his daughter took her in, got her treatment, then Martin's sister and her husband – who is a Methodist, now United Church, minister – more or less hired her as a nanny and gardener and now parish bookkeeper. It turns out she is a good cook and sews and gardens, and loves that. But it was Martin and Annie who started the ball rolling."

"Will the baby be adopted out?"

"Possibly. Though I think the girl and the nephew are considering marriage. They worry that their motives may be pity and necessity rather than a wish to truly spend their lives together."

"Wise."

"Joe – the minister – has a lot of practical Christianity. Apparently he introduced the girl to the congregation and told them to treat her respectfully and not rush to judgement. Some of that may have rubbed off on Des, the nephew."

"Like father, like son."

"Actually Des was born after his father was shot down over Holland. Joe is his stepfather. And Martin married a Flemish widow – Annie was her daughter, and a fine young woman."

"Some non-Catholics make it very hard for the Church to argue

that we are the only way to heaven.” Sister Catherine laughed, and so did Michelle.

“Sister Catherine, I think we can change the subject now. I haven’t made any real decisions, but I see the choices more clearly, and appreciate that.

Now tell me what life has been like for you since Immaculata.”

Between tea and biscuits, Sister Catherine told me about her life in the Order since she left the School. I was much calmer as I drove back to Ottawa, where I joined Andrea at my parents’ house where we all had dinner.

* * *

Later that evening, as we were preparing for the next day by making sandwiches for lunch, Andrea asked “Mum. Can I have a couple of dollars to buy some menstrual tampons?”

“What! Why do you want them?” I was surprised more than angry or upset, I think.

“I didn’t want to make a fuss after you and Martin ... well ... seemed to have cooled things off. I know you were upset.”

“Not really upset, more sad, but we are trying to sort out what we want.”

“Well, Wednesday night my period came.”

I hugged her.

“Was it a big mess?”

“No. I needed to wash my panties and a small spot on my skirt, but Annie was marvellous. She gave me a brand new pair of panties – told me it was a present for my new status as a woman – and some tampons for a few days. But I’ll run out tomorrow.”

“I don’t like you using those. They are really for married women.”

“Why? That’s what Annie uses. She didn’t have anything else.”

“Well. They ... Oh. I think this is another of those Catholic upbringing things that are giving Martin and I such trouble. Though they could break your hymen and when you marry your new husband might suspect you are not a virgin.”

“Phooey. I wouldn’t want a man who wouldn’t believe me.”

“I suppose I’ll have to agree with that. It’s how Martin’s pragmatism conflicts with my instinctive reactions. Are you comfortable with the tampons?”

“Yes. They seem a lot less trouble than the belts and pads my friends use. Annie’s friend Marcia calls those ”man-hole covers”.”

“Andrea!” but I was giggling.

“Yes. And she calls tampons ”puss plugs”.”

“Worse and worse. What did I do to deserve such a daughter?”
I hugged her again.

“Here’s \$2.”

“Thanks Mum.”

Saturday, September 19, 1964 – Martin

Despite my intent to limit how often we got together, I agreed to dinner with Michelle’s family on the Saturday two weeks after Labour Day. Annie had already arranged to spend the evening with some friends to celebrate the engagement of a former high-school classmate. I arrived around 5:15 to pick Michelle up. Dinner would be at 6:30, and we wanted to give time so Michelle and I could talk over any topics for which we might want an agreed answer. Our situation was delicate enough without obvious differences of statements.

“Hi there,” I said as she answered the door.

“Hi yourself. Seems a long time.”

“Yes, it does.” I decided not to say more.

“Did your trip to Washington go well? I didn’t have a chance to ask when I called with the invite. Andrea was in a panic about something or other.”

“Yes. The visit was very good. We hadn’t seen my parents for the better part of a year, since the funeral in fact, when we couldn’t really relax. The drive to Washington is pretty tiring though. Fortunately Annie is a good driver.”

“And good company, I suspect.”

“That too.”

“She has a great skill in making people feel comfortable. That’s a credit to you and Clara.”

“Thank you for that. It’s true. She can draw people out and get them to participate in things.”

“Did she tell you what happened with Andrea the night we compared lists?”

“Yes. I was not sure how to raise that with you.”

"Truthfully, I'd not prepared well. Andrea was due to start her period sometime soon, so I should have given her some sanitary napkins in case. Somehow, given I've no longer any need, I didn't pay enough attention."

"Apparently you would have preferred that she not use tampons."

"I think that was a silly extension of Catholic upbringing taken a bit too far."

"Possibly. Though 'silly' is not quite the word I'd use. Maybe 'over-enthusiastic'."

"Thank you. Anyway, Annie helped Andrea feel comfortable about what happened. She didn't suffer embarrassment and awkwardness. I even learned some new terms."

"Yes, I've been told about Marcia's colourful nicknames."

"Really. Most men are woefully ignorant, and most women today are pretty private about their periods."

"Clara was always quite open with me. It surprised me at first."

"Bryan just used to complain because I wasn't available to him."

"It's not impossible – just messy."

"True. But he didn't like mess."

"Do you miss the monthly cycle?"

"Nope. In fact, it's one of the few things I find positive about the hysterectomy. However, I could use a puss-plug," she said smiling.

"How? You just said the hysterectomy eliminated the need." I was at a loss for the meaning.

"For the menstrual kind. Surely you know there is another?"

"Oh. Thought you didn't want that either."

"I went to talk with Sister Catherine, and I think I need it."

"When?"

"Now ... if not sooner."

* * *

Michelle and I arrived only just in time for dinner. Nicole commented that she was beginning to wonder where we'd got to. It was fortunate Michelle had short hair and a simple skirt and blouse. Our detour to the bedroom had been enthusiastic and lasted a bit longer than either of us intended, so we hadn't much time to dress and tidy hair afterwards.

“Hi, Je m’appelle Bernard, et celle-ci est ma femme Charlotte,” said Michelle’s father.

“Nous nous sommes rencontré pendant le barbeque le premier juillet, mais nous ne sommes pas directement introduites,” I replied.

“Il y a beaucoup de monde. Loads of people.”

“Dad. Better speak mostly in French or mostly in English or we’ll get confused,” Michelle interjected.

“Doesn’t bother me,” I said. “When Clara and I got married in Ghent, we had English, French, Flemish/Dutch, German and Yiddish all going on at once.”

“Clara was your late wife I believe?” Bernard asked.

“Yes. She had a farm about 20 miles from Brussels.”

“Nicole said you met because of a German land-mine.”

“You could say we were blown together – literally – into the ditch. And our daughter Annie ended up in a bush. That was 20 years ago – Sept 7, 1944.”

“I’m sorry about your wife. She was quite young.”

“We’re still getting used to not having her in our lives, Annie and I.”

“Have you found it difficult to have to take over the cooking and cleaning and washing?”

“That actually has been the easy part. It’s wanting to tell Clara something, and realizing that you can’t. But the difficult days are getting less frequent. I think it must be harder for Michelle, since she has to deal with Bryan still.”

“Did I hear my name?” Michelle jumped in. She had been talking to her mother and Nicole, who had come with her fiancé, Stephane Orr. Stephane was just now coming in the door, having been sent back to the car for Nicole’s indoor shoes, which had been forgotten.

“We were discussing whether widowers or divorcees have the more difficult experience,” I explained. “I said divorcees.”

“A table!” Charlotte called. “Martin, est-ce que vous pouvez vous occuper avec les breuvages?” She still used ‘vous’ with me. Hopefully that would change.

“Certainement, Mme Lacroix.”

“Charlotte!”

“Charlotte.” I agreed.

I had already noted wine, beer and soft drinks on a sideboard, along with openers and corkscrews and glasses. Bernard had shown

Stephane where to sit at the table. The ladies were bringing things from the kitchen. I asked the men what they would like. Both chose beer, and I obliged by opening a bottle for each of them and putting it with an upside-down glass on the bottle beside each of them.

The ladies put their dishes on the table and sat, so there was just one place left for me between Michelle and Nicole.

“What would each of you ladies like?” I asked.

“Vin blanc, s’il vous plait,” said Nicole.

“Same please,” said Michelle.

“Oui, certainement,” said Charlotte.

I opened the white wine, put glasses in front of the ladies, and poured.

“Here you are.” I said, then poured myself a small white wine. I thought of opening the red, as I knew the meat was beef, but wasn’t feeling like drinking much tonight.

The meal was roast beef, but not – given the household heritage – with Yorkshire pudding, nor Brussels sprouts. I ate quietly, listening to the chatter around the table, which centred on Nicole’s wedding plans for the following June. For some reason, the conversation had switched largely to English, though I had not said anything for a number of minutes.

“I don’t think we should have a huge wedding.” Nicole said.

“That will please me,” Bernard said. “Michelle’s wedding to that asshole Corcoran cost me a bundle.” Clara and Annie would take me to task for that use of language, but nobody here reacted.

“I don’t remember asking you to go all-out.” Michelle countered.

“On veut faire ceux qu’il faut,” Charlotte interjected. “Our position in the community and that of the groom’s family demanded it, at least at the time.”

“Shouldn’t it be about the couple getting married?” Nicole injected some common sense.

“Of course,” said Bernard. “But we didn’t realize that at the time. And I think for Stephane and Nicole, I’d rather they had a good start rather than a party for a lot of freeloaders who aren’t there for them.”

“OK by me,” Stephane said. “I’ve very few family here, and only a couple who I really care about from New Brunswick. That is, my Mum and my sister. My Dad abandoned us when I was 3, and my Mum was an orphan. My Dad’s family thought she wasn’t good

enough for him, so I don't have anyone there. But I'll make sure Nicole is looked after. We've been putting away money for a down payment on a house."

"Good for you, my boy. And rather than spend big on all the silliness of a fancy wedding, I'll pay the tickets to bring your Mum and sister here."

"Wow. That's generous M. Lacroix." Stephane exuded gratitude.

"Did you have a big wedding with your first wife? I mean your late wife." Charlotte asked me.

"Actually we had two weddings, one in Ghent and one here. They were both held in private houses, though the Belgian relatives of my wife did indulge in the coach and horses to take us to the city hall. That was the civil wedding, held on a Saturday morning.

Here in Ottawa, we held the religious ceremony in my parent's house. Clara only had three-year-old Annie for family. My brother-in-law Joe Baker who is a United Church minister officiated, though he wasn't yet married to my sister. Then we went skating on a neighbours back-yard rink. It was rather unusual, but very friendly and comfortable."

"So you didn't splurge?" Nicole asked.

"There wasn't much to splurge on. In Belgium, food was relatively scarce and many things, if not rationed, were not available. And while I was not poor, I didn't have pots of money because I'd just finished my studies at Oxford and was on my way to Toronto to work on my doctorate. Clara was widowed with an infant child and trying to rebuild her life."

"I didn't realize. You mean Annie is not your, er, natural daughter?" Nicole asked.

"No. She was a few months old when a mine blew us all together in 1944. But she is definitely my daughter and I'm her Dad."

"That's for sure." Michelle said. "And she's a fine young woman. Andrea could attest to that too. Annie handled a very delicate problem for Andrea a couple of weeks ago with great... aplomb would be the word."

"If Clara was from Belgium, was she not Catholic?" Charlotte asked.

"Nominally," Martin answered. "But I think the horrors she saw in the War made it difficult for her to be devout, to believe all the doctrine, though she had a strong sense of right and wrong and of

helping others.”

“The Church – and other denominations – have a lot of people who want to tell others how to live.” Charlotte responded.

This caught me a bit by surprise. She went on,

“Je suis tellement fâché avec Mme Robichaud. La semaine passé, elle m’a dit que je ne peut pas parler avec Michelle parce qu’elle est divorcée et par consequence excommuniquée.”

“She said you shouldn’t talk to Michelle?” Nicole asked.

“Oui. I shouldn’t talk to my own daughter. It’s made me uncomfortable to go to church.”

“One of the girls at Andrea’s school tried to tell her I was excommunicated because I was divorced.” Michelle said.

“Beyond the nasty ignorant people, there are still the Church hierarchy who seem to have no sense of sympathy for people trying to live a good life.” Nicole chimed in. “If they treat Michelle like that, I don’t want to be married there!”

“Where would you like us to get married, Nicole?” Stephane asked.

“Anywhere that everyone is happy for us and we can welcome all the people we care about and they’ll be comfortable. Clearly my own sister, who I love and care about, isn’t considered someone that people in the church I’ve been going to since I was a kid want to see. That makes me want to puke.”

I kept quiet. This was a family matter, and it was being worked out. The process would likely be painful for some of the people around me now, but nothing I said without being asked would be welcome.

“Thanks for being on my side, Sis. I mean that sincerely. The holier-than-thous have been making me feel like I don’t belong. Let’s find you a nice place to have a truly warm and friendly wedding.” Michelle said.

“I think my Mum and sister will be OK with that. We were – I think Martin used the word ”nominally” – Catholic. But I couldn’t see that the Anglicans and United Church folk were so different or so bad.”

“Maybe you should talk to Joe Baker, Nicole. Martin and I and the girls went down to Brockville and had a very nice day with Joe and Penny and their family. They have a great way of welcoming everyone.”

"It's a bit far away, though." Nicole said.

"Yes, I guess it is. And it's a pity his church isn't on the St. Lawrence. But if it were, he'd not have time for anything but weddings."

* * *

We picked up Andrea from Bryan's apartment, so she was with us as we drove home later, and we could not talk about matters that I, and I guessed Michelle, wished to discuss. However, when we arrived at Michelle's house, Andrea jumped out, saying

"I'll get the door, Mum. You and Martin can say goodnight without an audience."

"Night Andrea."

"Night Martin."

"That was nice of her." I commented.

"She's probably peeking through the curtains to see if we're smooching."

"Well, when we say goodnight, we'll let her see a very innocent kiss."

"OK. But before we do, we should arrange when we can discuss ..."

"What's behind your change in attitude about ... what happened earlier, and the dinner-table discussion of weddings and such."

"Yes. Precisely. I don't want to rush the conversation. I was sort of surprised how Mum and Nicole felt."

"No rush from me either. Shall we aim to get together for coffee sometime in the week? Maybe Wednesday."

"That suits me. Shall I come to your place. I think I can leave Andrea doing homework or watching TV, and I'll tell her she can call if anything comes up."

"Yes. I can ask Annie for some privacy – for talk, not ... the other."

"OK. Thanks, Martin. It was a nice evening."

"Thanks to you too. It was nice for me too." I kissed her, a simple but nice kind of kiss, as it became. She jumped out and was gone. I watched until she was in the house, then started the car and drove away.

Saturday, September 19, 1964 – Anna

I'd got quite a few assignments – start of 3rd year. Knowing how things went, I spent a good bit of the day working on them. They weren't finished but I had them under control. Even typed some of the standard stuff. What did they call that ... oh 'Boiler Plate'. Wonder where that name came from. Fred had told me a British expression for things gone wrong 'a cock up' was actually a printing term and not a sexual reference. Still, given how few people knew, probably not usable in Canada.

Dad, despite his intent to limit how often they got together, had agreed to dinner with Michelle's family tonight. I had already arranged to spend the evening with some friends, Marcia and Jane among them, to celebrate the engagement of a former high-school classmate named Betty Jameson. We'd occasionally been in the same crowd, but I didn't know her well. I found a card. The invite said 'no gifts'. Whew. My bank account was already under siege with tuition and books. Dad had kindly said he'd offer a bit of top-up if I needed it, but I sort of wanted to see how far I could get without. At least the profs who'd hired me in the summer liked how I did the library research, digging stuff up efficiently. They'd offered me 4 hours a week to continue doing that. Not great pay, but better than zero.

Anyway, Dad left early – he said he needed to make sure he and Michelle had stories straight. They wanted time to sort things out without too much interest from the outside.

* * *

The engagement party was OK. There was booze, which I ignored, but some people – mostly ones I didn't know – got a bit under the influence. I hope they didn't drive later. I excused myself around 10. The noise and smoke were increasing, and Jane and Roland were leaving too. They walked me home.

"Are you finding it a bit lonely without Fred?" Jane asked.

"A bit. But we knew that he was going away all summer. And I want to go to grad school too."

"You're doing physics if I recall correctly?" Roland queried.

“Yes. I want a research career, and I don’t like the smells in Chemistry and the general mess in biology. I guess I could have done engineering, but found I was attracted more to physics, being somewhere between math and other sciences.”

“I nearly did math or economics, but the more ... er ... reliable possibility of a career pulled me into accountancy.”

“How are you two reconciling Arts and Accountancy?” I probed.

“Jane’s possibly the most practical artist type I’ve ever known.”

“And Roland talks to me about my work. He’s made some useful comments that I think are improving it. More importantly, we seem to be suited to each other.”

“Oooh. Serious!” I teased.

“Yeah!” they both said together.

“Sorry. I shouldn’t tease. From my friendship with Fred, I know how important it is to have someone you can share things with and talk to.”

“Thanks Annie” Roland said.

Wednesday, September 23, 1964 – Martin

The doorbell rang. I answered it and let Michelle in. She took off her shoes and pulled some slippers from a shoe bag.

“Maybe we’ll need to keep a pair for you here.” I said.

“Another item for the discussion.” She kissed me and hugged herself to me.

“Good job Annie’s gone over to Marcia’s for a while.” I said.

“Oh. I hadn’t thought.”

“Come into the kitchen and we’ll have some tea or coffee and talk. I don’t think we’d better ... well, you know.”

“No, we need to talk. How have you been?”

“I’ve felt all right, but went to have a physical this afternoon. Jim Sinclair says my blood pressure is a bit high. Says I need to reduce salt and do more exercise, else consider some pills. I don’t think I’m ready for pills just yet.”

“If you can avoid them, so much the better.”

“He thinks some of the stress of Clara’s sickness and dying, as well as the recuperation and getting life back in order may be part of it. In any event, he’s suggested I arrange to drop by once a month near the end of the day and he’ll monitor things.”

“Wow. Wish my doctor were like that. Think I said that before.”

“I think I told you we go back a ways to 247 Squadron in '44.”

“Yes. You did. But I think my mind was on other things.”

“Tea or coffee?”

“Tea. Unless you’ve coffee made.”

“No. Hadn’t started yet. I’ll put on the kettle. I got some apple turnovers. They remind me ... oh, it involves Clara and ...”

“Martin, I know it may make me feel awkward if you mention her, especially things you liked doing with her. But that is one of the things we must talk about. If you simply keep those things to yourself, they may become more precious – and I may become less valued. You know I already have plenty of things that make me feel ... inferior. Well, two in particular”. She pointed at her breasts.

“Yes, I can sort of understand. Annie and I decided not to suppress our mention of Clara. Though I like your you-know-whats a lot. They’re cute and respond to my ... er ... ministrations.”

Michelle laughed.

“And we shouldn’t hold back from talking about Bryan, or other people. Even if it is awkward, and I know sometimes it will be. Now, what of those turnovers.”

I related the story of buying them in Den Bosch when Clara and I had gone to see David Stedman’s grave in Uden.

“You didn’t stay in Uden?”

“No. Too small. Den Bosch had some hotels.”

“Did you share?” Michelle asked mischievously.

“Yes. But Clara had her period, so we were pretty innocent then.”

“Must have been hard – emphasis on hard – for you.”

“Naughty! But truthfully, it wasn’t difficult for me to be with Clara. If you’d asked me beforehand, I would have said otherwise. But somehow we knew that we’d find a way to enjoy ourselves, and despite having been together in '44 for less than 24 hours, we were incredibly comfortable with each other” There was an awkward pause.

“Michelle, I know that I want to find that kind of ... fit, I guess ... with someone. But maybe that is imposing too much of my past on you. You can’t be Clara, and I like it that you are your own person. But friendship and partnership are pretty important to me, as you know.”

“I didn’t have that friendship in my marriage. In fact, I just never had that kind of thing in my life, I guess. But since we’ve been seeing each other, I’m finding the idea important to me too, addictive even.”

“You seem to have changed directions on the Church rules about divorce and remarriage.”

“I don’t think I ever really ”changed directions”. Until my marriage – and my life – fell apart and I more or less had to divorce Bryan, I’d never considered all the Church rules. I’d thought I’d be with Bryan, you know, ”til death do us part”.

The Church has been a familiar place for me. I like the ceremony of the Mass. I like sitting in a church and using the quiet to organize my thoughts. Like other Catholic kids I learned the rosary, but actually that has worn a bit thin. Ritual prayers exist in lots of religions – the Jews and Muslims have them too. But I think they take the place of contemplation, of examining one’s life and working out what is positive and what needs fixing.”

“I suspect my views are similar. Actually I like churches for the peace and quiet to think – I definitely share that sentiment with you. And I also don’t like a lot of mindless repetition. But I wonder – does the church have to be a Catholic one?”

“That’s the question that was lurking around the dinner table last Saturday,” Michelle admitted. “I don’t know if I’m ready to jump ship. In fact, I think more that the Church has left me.”

“In Holland and Belgium, you might literally jump ship – they call the nave of a church the ”schip” or ship.” I said.

“Anyway, you heard the dinner discussion. I haven’t told you much about my visit to Sister Catherine. She didn’t, of course, counsel me to change denomination. But she did underline that there are many non-Catholics who lead good lives, spiritual lives, even holy lives. Thinking about what she and I said to each other convinced me that I should get on with living my life now, and not see my best years spent chasing an annulment.

But Martin, I have to tell you, I’m pretty certain there will be days or weeks where I think I should go back to the Church. I might blow hot and cold about this. And I’m fearful you will get fed up and tell the silly bitch to get lost.”

“Getting your anxieties out in the open is the first step to bringing them under some sort of order. It seems you want to have church

in your life. You'd prefer if the Catholic church accepted you as a divorced woman who wants to have a partner, which doesn't seem to be on the cards. That leaves the possibility of lots of anguish trying to find an appropriate church and a way of living to allow both the spiritual and the physical life you seem to want."

"Yes. The Church can give me the spiritual bit if I forgo the physical. It seems wrong that the doctrine says one cannot have both if one happens to be the victim of the kind of person I sadly got involved with."

"There's also the intellectual and social sides of life."

"I didn't mean to ignore those. Am I right that the intellectual side is extremely important to you?"

"Yes. Both that and a happy social life. I like a good mix of all the parts. Balance. As I told you, Jenny couldn't see how I loved to explore ideas and work things out. Clara could, and I would guess she was less capable of understanding what I do than Jenny. Yet she tried – and I think succeeded – to get me to explain what I was working on. It was helpful to me – forced me to learn how to explain my work to the non-specialists we need to pay for it!"

"Do you think I'll be able to help like that?"

"Your own work is technical too. I figure we'll manage on that front. It's not that one needs a full course of lectures. I'm thinking of the summary like that for a novel that goes on the dust cover. You know, just the direction of the work and a few interesting tid-bits. In a football game, the cheerleaders don't have to understand the intricacies of the plays."

"But I don't just want to be a cheerleader."

"Nor do I want you to. That was just a way of saying that appreciation doesn't require deep expertise. I think we all like to feel the things we take as important are at least recognized as such by the people we share our lives with."

"Do you think we are going to share our lives?"

There was a pause.

"That's the big question, isn't it?" I said.

"Sure is. A bit frightening, especially after everything went wrong for me with Bryan. And while you and Clara seem to have had a pretty good experience, I'm sure you don't want to have another loss if ... well ... we mess up."

"I've probably been trying not to admit that even to myself."

“Then we’d better do what you suggested a couple of weeks ago and take things slowly. But I think we might indulge ourselves on occasion, as we did on Saturday.”

“Sort of enjoy the present without pushing ahead too fast on anything permanent? Is that what you mean?”

“Yes. Though I’m sure I’ll find it uncomfortable to not have a plan for the future.”

“Maybe we should explore plans, even if we don’t make them concrete yet, and talk with the girls about how we feel, that we’re trying to figure out how we should live our lives, but make it clear we don’t want to act too fast until we’ve had chance to find our equilibrium.”

“”Equilibrium” is a rather long word. But it is more or less the main concern, especially given it’s not just us, but both our daughters. So, yes, I can live with taking it slowly.”

“That will also allow you to make sure you don’t do anything that will upset any arrangements you have with Bryan for support for Andrea or yourself.”

“I actually don’t get any alimony, just child support. Fortunately, I had a job, but my lawyer did negotiate that I got the house clear title. Bryan got the better car and when we sell the cottage, he’ll get the first \$7,500, if it makes that, and I get the rest. That’s why I was doing some fix-up, otherwise I’d let him worry about it.”

“Perhaps the side-effects of our doing fix-up will have greater consequences.”

“I realized that just as you were saying it. And I’m too far away to give you a kiss.” Instead she squeezed my hand.

I commented “In any event, it won’t hurt to know where we stand, and that includes us going over our financial state together. Nor to share our thinking with the girls. They are old enough to speak for themselves. I don’t want them controlling what we decide, but I don’t think they’ll do that. It’s more that things will go smoother for all of us if they have a voice. You know, if we do decide to be together, there’s all sorts of questions about where we’ll live, what type of accommodation we’ll want given that the girls are more or less grown up, and so on.”

“It seems a lot of work compared to just jumping into bed and enjoying ourselves. Or sitting having tea and turnovers like this.”

“Agreed. Though somehow these turnovers just aren’t quite as

good as the ones I remember in Den Bosch. But maybe they always taste better as we remember them.”

Wednesday, September 23, 1964 – Anna

It wasn't late when I got home from Marcia's. I'd been over for a cup of tea, mainly to get a bit of a break from the assignments and ... well, to avoid going a bit crazy.

When I came in, Dad was clearing up some teacups too.

“Michelle come by?” I asked.

“Yes. I'd got some apple turnovers. Kind of a reminder of what Mum and I had in '47 in den Bosch. But somehow they didn't taste quite as good. There's one left if you want.”

Somehow I did want. Marcia put out some rather ordinary ginger snaps, and I'd had one. The apple turnover was pretty good.

“I don't know. This seems OK to me.” I said with my mouth half full.

“The Dutch ones were fantastic – or else it was Mum's magic.”

“Probably a bit of both – doesn't food always taste better when you're with someone you like?”

Oops. Maybe that's why these didn't taste so great – Dad and Michelle were on the outs?

“Sorry. Maybe I shouldn't have said that if you and Michelle are”

“No. We're getting along fine. Things seem to be, if not settled for Michelle, at least more positive. I'm much more confident about things than I was over Labour Day. And I think you are right. The apple turnovers here were good, but the den Bosch ones were really good, and they also were a memory of Mum. Maybe I don't really want to have it ... diminished by having a similar memory with Michelle.”

“It's never quite simple, is it?” I philosophized.

October 11, 1964 – Anna

Michelle and Andrea came over to our house for Sunday dinner. They would go to the Lacroix's for Monday Thanksgiving dinner of turkey. Today we'd had decided to keep things simpler with

spaghetti and salad. Pasta was almost becoming our standard shared meal. Dad had opened a bottle of Chianti.

"Are we ready?" he asked.

"Sauce has been simmering for hours." I said.

"Spaghetti is ready to drain. I just checked it and I think it's what is supposed to be 'al dente'." Andrea was in charge of the pasta.

"I'll help you drain it." I offered, grabbing a colander and placing it in the sink.

"I'm just about to toss the salad." Michelle said from the other side of the room.

"Then I'll pour wine. Andrea, do you want to try a little, even if it is illegal?"

"Martin!" Michelle objected.

"Sorry. If your Mum says no, then I guess not."

"Oh. A small glass might let her know what it's like and under my eagle eye."

"Thanks Mum. Yes. I'd like to try a little."

"I've put out water glasses, and there's Coke and ginger ale in the fridge too. Just help yourself."

We moved in a sort of wave to the dining room and sat at the table.

"Shall we say grace?" Michelle asked.

"Certainly. Will you lead us?" Dad responded.

"Bless us, O Lord! and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord."

"Amen." We all replied.

"That is short and to the point. Wadham had a preposterously long one, thanking all the benefactors of the College down to the bequest for strawberries for the summer garden party." Dad said.

"Really. How long was it?" Michelle asked.

"Generally over a minute – and all in Latin of course. One of the students on a scholarship from the College was selected each week to do the job. Sometimes they'd go for the record."

"What does that mean?" Andrea asked.

"Shortest time. I think it was 31.5 seconds. A fellow – not a Fellow with a capital F, but one of the guys – named Collins had a stopwatch because he was involved with race horses at home, so there'd be a whisper to him to bring the watch because 'Jones is

going for the record'. I forget the actual name of the student – Jones will do – but he made 31.5 seconds, and the Warden yelled in his deep voice. 'Well done Jones. Very fast. Congratulations, and 5 shillings fine for irreverence.'"

We all laughed. I'd not heard that story. Dad continued.

"I forget which college had the shortest. It went Benedictus benedicat, meaning 'May the Blessed One give a blessing.' if I remember correctly."

"You didn't study Latin?" Michelle asked.

"No. We moved to England in '38 and my parents thought I should concentrate on modern subjects as I'd have to do too much catching up to the British students in Latin and Greek."

"I did a couple of years of Latin. Andrea's struggling with it now."

"If I didn't have Church Latin, I'd be in trouble," Andrea commented.

"Well, the spaghetti's getting cold, and we have said grace. Let's have a toast and dig in." Dad suggested.

"What do you want to toast?" I asked.

"How about 'Us'?" Dad suggested.

"OK. To Us." I responded.

We all raised our glasses and took a sip of the wine. Andrea made a bit of a face.

"Don't like it?" Dad asked.

"It's not horrible, but I think I prefer ginger ale. But I'll drink this small amount and see if the taste grows on me."

A little while after we started eating I decided to try to satisfy my curiosity.

"You said 'to us'. Should we read anything into that?" I asked.

Dad and Michelle looked at each other. At the same time they both said

"Well"

"You go first Martin."

"OK. Er. Well. Michelle and I haven't made a secret that we enjoy each other's company. And we've been open with the fact that we're still sorting out our feelings from events of the last couple of years, as are both of you girls. We're not ready to do anything quickly, but we would like to think about what might be good ways

for us to share time. And we want the two of you to be part of the thinking and planning.”

“Like planning a wedding?” Andrea asked.

“We’re not ready for that yet.” Michelle cautioned. “Clara only died at the beginning of the year, and I only got the divorce finalized this Summer. We need to sort out our feelings and make sure we’re working out all the important issues before we do anything that’s hard to undo. We’ve realized we like spending time together, and that there may be a future for us that we don’t want to throw away. At the same time we should not rush, and we want to make sure you girls know how we feel. But we think it’s time to consider how we could possibly sort out houses, cars, money, and so on.”

“You shouldn’t worry too much about me,” I said. “I’m old enough to be leaving home, though I like being here – it’s comfortable and familiar.” I didn’t mention a lot easier on my bank account. “Also it’s your lives and your friendship and love. So I’ll fit in with what you decide, which knowing you both – Dad a lot and Michelle a bit – I think will be done carefully. And best of luck to you. You both deserve it.”

“I feel I’m a bit of the ‘three’s a crowd’,” Andrea said. “Though Martin has been very good in talking to me as a grown up. I’ve a few years to go before I can properly leave home, so I guess it’s good that you are talking to us.”

“Assuming we do end up combining households, we want both of you to have a home to come to.” Dad said. “But as yet we’ve not even started to discuss what that home would be like or where it would be. Part of the reason for this dinner and others we’ll likely share in future are to allow things to be talked about.”

“So we’re not doing a merger yet?” I asked.

Dad responded “Not yet by a long shot. Just consider houses. We’ve two. Do we choose one and sell the other? If we keep one, do we redecorate so the place is ‘new’ in some way. Or sell both and start in a fresh place? Neutral territory.”

“Lots to think about,” said Andrea.

“Yes. Until Martin just said it, I hadn’t thought of where we’d live if we did end up together. I’m still struggling to work out how to manage my feelings about the Church.” Michelle said softly.

“We went to St James United today,” Andrea said.

“How was it?” Dad asked. Michelle replied

“Well, there’s not the Latin, and the liturgy is different. But people were friendly. I thought of going to Trinity Anglican, but the Anglicans are still debating remarriage of divorced persons, and I’d have to worry about that there too. And that church is too modern for me – I remember when it burned down except for the basement hall on Ash Wednesday 1947.”

“That would be not long before Clara and Annie and I came to Ottawa. That explains why it looks quite new.”

“They cleared the debris and put pitch on the floor to waterproof it so the basement church hall was usable. They were conducting services in the former basement church hall within a week of the fire.”

“Clara and I were at St. James for our first Christmas in 1947 – you too Annie. You were very well behaved, partly because Mum gave you some paper and a pencil to draw, and you drew the church.

Michelle, do you think you could be comfortable worshipping at St. James?”

“I still feel troubled about leaving the Catholic church – it’s almost as hard as getting out of East Berlin like those 30 or so people did last week– but as I’ve said to you before, it’s more that the Church seems to be leaving us. How do you feel Andrea?”

“I’m OK with that church. Though it might be difficult at school if they find out I’m going there.”

“Yes, I’ve been thinking about that.” Michelle responded. “I’m not sure what to do, but I do know that as a baptized Catholic, they more or less have to take you as a student. But I do worry there will be a fuss, or else nastiness for Andrea from other students.”

“Maybe you should have a talk to the principal?” Dad suggested. “Andrea should probably complete this year at least, then could move to grade 9 at Glebe or Lisgar.”

“Yes. I’d better talk to Sister Mary Christine and explain my situation.”

“Andrea, do you think you can act as a regular Catholic student for the rest of the year.” Dad asked.

“No problem. Like Mum, I feel the Church is leaving us, not the other way round.”

October 15, 1964 – Michelle

My interview with Sister Mary Christine took place later in the week, after school hours.

She began, “Good afternoon, Ms. Corcoran, how may I help you?”

“Sister Mary Christine, I’m not sure if you know that I’m divorced. My ex-husband had some, ... er, ... interactions with prostitutes, gave me gonorrhoea that led to a serious infection and an emergency hysterectomy. I would not, as a Catholic, have chosen divorce, but I wanted to minimize his legal influence over Andrea.”

“I had not been aware of that, Ms. Corcoran. My sympathies for all you have been through.”

“I’m getting my ... equilibrium ... back. But it is about Andrea that I am here today. Both she and I have had comments made to us of a very uncharitable nature because of my divorced status. Comments that show ignorance as well as a lack of Christianity.”

“I am sorry to hear that, Ms. Corcoran.”

“In any event, I am coming to feel that the Church has abandoned me, though I have been quite devout. At present I am trying to decide how to move forward and how I should live my life. But I do not want any decisions I make to hurt Andrea.”

“I am happy to hear that. What is it you wish of me?”

“Well, at the end of this academic year, Andrea can only continue here at Immaculata if she pays fees. Given my financial situation, that will not be possible, so she will move to the public system.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Possibly we can arrange a scholarship.”

I answered, “It may be better for her to move, given the comments that have been made. And while I have wanted to stay with the Catholic Church, I have started to consider whether I should look to other ways to fulfil my spiritual needs. But my own problems are not and should not be construed as those of Andrea, except as they influence the behaviour of other students, and that is what I am hoping we can avoid.”

“How do you mean?”

“I have talked to Andrea, and she is quite happy to participate in all the regular religious activities of Immaculata, and to do nothing to cause any friction. Essentially, we would prefer that she be regarded as a regular Catholic student, which by baptism and back-

ground she is. It is simply that ignorant and uncharitable comments from what are, to be blunt, bullies, should not be tolerated, and anything you can do to minimize difficulties for Andrea would be most appreciated.”

“To the extent that student actions are visible, I can and will punish bad behaviour. The more subtle nastiness is, I’m sure you understand, very difficult to detect, let alone deal with.”

“Certainly, Sister Mary Christine, I appreciate anything you can do? Even my mother has had people at her church say she should not talk to me because as a divorced woman I am automatically excommunicated.”

“That is so un-Christian!”

“I agree, and simply to avoid as much trouble as possible, I have asked Andrea to say and do nothing that will give others occasion to behave badly like that. And in my own life, I plan to behave as discreetly as possible. But I do have to build a life, and unfortunately many of the people who seem to be giving me the support I need at this time are not Catholics, but are very moral and Christian in spirit. Besides, I lead a very quiet life.”

“Have you begun annulment proceedings?”

“No. I’m not sure that I believe it is appropriate to say there never was a marriage. It would feel that I was having to use a lie to suppress the truths of both the marriage and my husbands betrayal. However, I may eventually choose that path. In all conscience, I truly considered myself married to Bryan. So I find the idea of an annulment to be a fraud. It’s been a huge upset for me. I’m still trying to find my feet. I’ve a few friends and my family has been wonderful.”

“Mrs. Corcoran. I can only hope that you will find solace and I will keep you and Andrea in my prayers.”

While I wondered what those prayers might be, I simply said,

“Thank you Sister Mary Christine. You have my phone number if there are any ... difficulties arising for Andrea. I will endeavour to make sure she behaves properly and is discreet about my views, or indeed her own if they are at odds with school policy. We have, in fact, already talked about this, and I believe she understands. However, she is quite young to be having to deal with such serious adult issues.”

“Thank you for coming in, Mrs. Corcoran.”

October 15, 1964 – Martin

I answered the phone that evening after supper.

“Martin Tremblay”

“Martin, It’s Michelle.”

“How’d the meeting go with the principal?”

“Not much to say. But cordial and respectful. Could have been much worse. I think things will be OK as long as nobody picks on Andrea.”

“Let’s hope for an unexciting year then. Andrea has enough to put up with figuring out how she should behave to you, her Dad, and me. She’s a good kid. Adding bullying from stupid people is one thing too many. For you too.”

“Thanks for that, Martin. Of course, my troubles are nothing compared to those coloured kids in the southern US.”

“True. Did you note that Martin Luther King got the Nobel Peace Prize. Some southern gentlemen – and I use the term sarcastically – must be unhappy.”

“I hope they are. There’s a lot of evil there. I hope we never get that here.”

“We do have the FLQ, sadly. Though it’s not the extreme idiots who worry me as much as so-called leaders who breed divisions in our society. The ones who will sow discord and suspicion with speeches and pronouncements that seem to be reasonable but are founded on prejudice and hatred.”

“Now, on a more pleasant note, Andrea goes to Bryan on Saturday morning and will come back Sunday night. I don’t much like her spending time with him and whoever he’s with at the moment, but I don’t want more upset and anger. So I’ll have the house to myself. Perhaps we can take advantage of that.”

“Hope the neighbours aren’t too nosey!”

“We’ll be discreet.”

“You won’t be too noisy?”

“Martin! Well, maybe a few appreciative noises. What time will you come?”

“I should do a bit of yard tidying, then could come for lunch.”

“I’ll do some raking and tidying too. Otherwise the place will look abandoned and junky.”

“See you Saturday.”

“Till then. Bye.”

Saturday, October 17, 1964 – Martin

Saturday was quite mild and dry. I got up quite early and had the leaves raked and bagged by 10 a.m. I puttered about the garage and yard and got several things put away and ready for winter. Blue was doing laundry, and I managed to get my work clothes in the last batch, then showered and dressed.

“Blue, I’m going over the Michelle’s.”

“OK. I’m off this afternoon to Jane’s. We’re planning to go to a movie. I’ll have dinner with her. Marcia may join us.”

“Will you be upset if I don’t come back tonight? Andrea is with her Dad this weekend.”

“No. Go ahead and enjoy yourselves. I have the phone number if anything comes up, but I doubt it will.”

“Thanks. I find all this very awkward.”

“But I really appreciate that you and Michelle are trying to be careful and caring, Dad. It gives me a big sense of trust. If you were trying to hide everything, it wouldn’t work, but I’d worry about what might be going on.”

“That’s what I feel too. It’s just ... well, strange.”

“Go and have a good time.”

“I aim to do that. Bye.”

* * *

About an hour later, I found himself lying next to Michelle. Both of us were naked and relaxing after a pleasant time together. Michelle asked “Martin, Do you ... er ... ever compare me to Clara when ... you know?”

“I’ve noticed a few things. You lie on my left – that is, if I’m on my back in the bed. Clara was always on the right. There’s lots of other things that I don’t yet know, like where you put your toothpaste and brush on the counter, and how you squeeze the tube.”

“I sort of meant” I think I knew where this was going, but I didn’t want to focus on her ... er ... sports equipment.

“Well, also, you are so small, I can’t kiss you while we’re ... well, when we are in the missionary position and I’m on top. With Clara

I used to be able to kiss her. Sometimes we'd talk and kiss. It made things last."

"I hadn't thought about that. Bryan was taller and heavier than you. In fact, he was sometimes a bit much for me. That's one big reason I like it better with you, but of course you also try to make it nice for me."

"Thanks."

"But what about my ... oh ... men say 'cunt'?"

"Truthfully?"

"Yes. Truthfully."

"It's been bothering me that I can't really remember very well how it felt with Clara. In fact, that sometimes I can't remember how she looked, like her eyes, their colour and gradations. Or how she felt exactly. Sometimes I get a sense of panic that I'm losing memory of her, on top of losing her."

"I've heard others say that. Don't let it get to you, Martin. And we'll make sure we keep photos around. Maybe print some of the colour slides you mentioned you have."

"Thanks. I should do that."

Anyway, there's the general matter of trying to remember. But to your specific question, I don't think a lot different, but your general ... layout, I suppose, your smallness and where your arms and legs and other bits are."

Michelle giggled. I continued,

"Sometimes I think I can feel the end of your vagina, because of the surgery and your size, but that may be imagination."

So, I notice that you are smaller and ..."

"Especially my tits, or non-tits."

"They're definitely smaller, but possibly more responsive. I really like that. And I like running my hand over your fuzz here. It feels really nice."

"I've noticed how you touch and stroke it. I like you doing it too. It's taking me some time to get used to the fact that you find me attractive, especially like this, with this awful scar."

"It's more red than anything else. We should rub in some cocoa butter. I've read somewhere it's supposed to promote healing. Besides, it smells like chocolate. That would be nice when I kiss you there. And rubbing in cocoa butter would probably lead to more fun and games."

“Very naughty. But I’m willing to try that, since it’s pretty simple and I can’t see it causing any problems. And I like the smell of chocolate too.

But, Martin, I’d love to be able to kiss when we’re doing it. Do you think there’s some way?”

“We can try different positions. That would be fun anyway, as long as we keep a sense of humour about it. I came across this Playboy magazine – don’t ask how! – and it had this cartoon that was really quite good. Two ambulance attendants are carrying a stretcher into the Emergency Room and there are legs and arms sticking out everywhere on the stretcher. One of the ambulance guys is yelling ”Doctor, doctor. It’s another case of the misprint on page 110 of the sexual positions book.””

Michelle laughed, then said “Hmm. Thinking about that is making this hard again.”

“Michelle, Do you want it again?”

“Let’s try some positions – you won’t go off too fast, so we’ll be able to take our time and talk about how each feels for us.”

“Oh, a scientific experiment. Our excuse if the neighbours complain.”

“Right now I don’t care if they do. But how can we get me at the same height?”

“Me sitting on a chair with you on top might work.”

“OK. Put a towel on that chair in case I get sloppy wet.”

Martin sat and Michelle half climbed onto him, but he had to lift her a bit because she was so small.

“Oh. That feels quite nice, and with a bit of bending we can kiss.” She kissed him.

When they broke the kiss, Martin said

“But your feet are almost off the floor. I can only move a little in and out.”

“That’s OK. I think this position will be for affection – we can call it an FF for a friendly fuck – more than wild climaxes.”

“Of course, if the chair were higher, you’d be stuck. I’d have you just where I want you.” He kissed her as he lifted up a bit on the chair.

Michelle wiggled and tried to get off, but Martin lifted up a bit more.

“I’m stuck on it! You are wicked. I suppose I should worry that

I can't get off, but it feels rather special. And if I can't get off, you have to put up with me there." She kissed him again.

"I'll let you off. Do you like entry from behind? Doggy style."

"Never tried it."

Martin lifted her off and got her to kneel on the bed.

"Oh. That feels a bit different."

"Do you like it?"

"It rubs the front in a very interesting way, but not my clitoris."

"I can fix that." He reached under her.

"Oh. When you do that and move, it's pretty strong. I think I like the sensation for its difference from other ways, but it seems less ... intimate. Probably I'd like this better without your hand and going firmly but gently for quite a long time. In fact, it might be very nice, because it feels like it's building up slowly but strongly. I think enough for now though."

Martin pulled away.

"Try lying on your back and raise your knees." I said. I moved so I was on my side and could come inside her. "How does that feel?"

"Nice. And I can be very lazy."

"Me too. And I get to play with these." I put a hand on each breast.

"Oh. Very nice. I can't kiss you, but I can certainly feel you both inside and on my chest."

"Experimenting is fun. And this lazy way can last a while. We can take a rest every so often. Talk a bit."

"Hmm. I could get really spoiled."

"You deserve a bit of spoiling."

"Yes. I do. But I hope you enjoy it too."

"Oh. No. No fun for me at all." I said facetiously as I started to thrust vigorously.

* * *

A little while later we were sitting at the kitchen table having soup and a sandwich of ham with lettuce.

"Michelle, I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but should we talk about what we would do if we did decide to become partners?"

"You mean marry?"

“Actually, I used ”partners” for a reason. You were married to Bryan, but I don’t think you were partners.”

“Too true. But my good Catholic upbringing means I think of marriage.”

“Actually, so do I. But my experience and my thinking are all biased towards partnership first.”

“I’m glad you force me to consider that. I think it’s the right viewpoint, and it makes me a bit sad that it isn’t more in people’s minds. Though I think Nicole and Stephane seem to go in that direction.”

“Yes, I like Stephane. And of course, I’ve known Nicole for a couple of years now. We owe her a lot – or she’ll get a lot of blame if we break up.”

Michelle’s face clouded.

“I hope not, Martin. You’ve made it awfully easy to enjoy our time together, and I don’t just mean in bed.”

“Bed won’t work unless there’s other things. And to some extent, vice-versa.”

“Hmm. That’s a new thought for me.”

“What do you think should be top of the list for the ”other things” we need to work out?”

“Well, so many marriages fail because of money?”

“Good point. I’ve not asked you, but are you reasonably good with money?”

“I’m far from perfect, but I think I do OK. What about you?”

“Always been careful. Probably too much so. Never been interested in gambling. Oh. I liked the horse races in England. Dogs too. But mostly as a spectator sport, including watching others gamble. In the RAF there was always something going on. We even had a couple of guys who ran a book. One of them had been a ”Licensed Turf Accountant” in civvy street.”

“A what?”

“Licensed Turf Accountant. It’s the official name in Britain for a bookie. They’re legal there, though not in the services. Les was in the trade, and his buddy Harry was a wiz with numbers, so calculated the odds they needed to offer. I’ve seen him run his hand down a column of numbers and write down the answer. Checked myself, and it was correct.”

“Wow. Pretty good.”

“Exceptional! The column was Pounds, Shillings and Pence.”

“Oh. That funny English system. I never understood what it meant.”

“If we stick together, you’ll get a chance. I’d love to show you Oxford and London, and some other parts. Also some bits of Belgium, France and Holland.”

“Yes. You were there, and that’s where Clara grew up and Annie was born,” Michelle said wistfully.

“Don’t envy the dead, Michelle. It’s a fools task, because you really are only jealous of what you see as good. There’s always another side that isn’t so nice. Clara had a really nasty time of it in the ’40s. Many did, and a lot never survived.”

“Yes. I almost forgot that. But I would like to see the places you’ve been.”

“We’ll have to arrange a long enough leave that we aren’t too rushed. But maybe that really IS getting ahead of ourselves.”

“Yes. We were talking about money. If you want, I’ll tell you my situation, but it seems a little mercenary.”

“You mean, which of us is the gold-digger?” I asked.

“Sort of. A friend told me she had a cousin who came to Canada to work on a farm in Alberta, but on the way met a woman who was coming to work somewhere in Ontario. They each thought the other was rich, and didn’t find out until after they married in Toronto.”

“Priceless! Well, let’s make sure we know how poor we both are.”

“Oh. Martin. I don’t think I’m poor, but I’m not rich. When the divorce was going through, we had this house valued at \$18,500. There’s about \$5000 left on the mortgage – it comes up for renewal next August and I’d like to pay off a chunk of the principal then if I can save a bit. However, Andrea does need things, and I find there are always expenses I hadn’t planned for. I’m getting better, but not perfect. Still, I’m keeping my head above water and saving a little.”

“That’s the important thing. Old Mr. Micawber and such.”

“Mr. Micawber?”

“Back to the Sterling. It’s from Dickens’ David Copperfield

’Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen [pounds] nineteen [shillings] and six [pence], result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.’ ”

“Oh. I see. I’ve not read much Dickens. Just *Oliver Twist*.”

“Will you be able to pay off the \$5000 next summer?”

“Oh no. I’ve about \$1500 saved – a few hundred in the bank and the rest in Canada Savings Bonds. There’s the cottage that you know about, of course, but it has to sell for above the amount agreed with Bryan or he gets all the cash. And Andrea has a savings account for her education. It’s about a thousand but of course I won’t – likely can’t – touch that.”

“Nor should you. I’d better tell you about me. We – I guess now it’s I – own the house clear. I’d guess it’s worth about the same as yours, since they’re pretty similar. I’ve about a thousand in Canada Savings Bonds and about the same in chequing and savings accounts in the bank. Then I have a few investments with my stockbroker totalling about \$20000. Annie has a bit of money, mostly from a scholarship, and I do give her a bit of support for University tuition, and she is fairly careful with her earnings, though her jobs haven’t been the best paid.

There’s also some jewellery that I found in the kit bags of the two men who got killed by the mine that brought Clara and Annie and I together.”

“Oh. You’re rich! That’ll make me the gold digger. But what about this jewellery. Who did it belong to?”

“Don’t know. I gave two rings to the family of one of the blokes – the father and the aunt. They said any more would get them into trouble – the father had been ”had up” as the English say, I recall he said for shop lifting.

The other had no family but for a wife who’d run off on him, so his pay was being sent to his mother, and she was killed by a bombing raid just before he died. I tried to talk to the wife, but she was too busy at 10 in the morning wanting to get back to bed with her boyfriend. She could not have been older than you, but was fat and looked 60. Awful woman. So I decided to keep the jewellery in case anyone came forward with a plausible claim. I suspect whoever it belonged to died in a concentration camp or similarly, then the German thieves got killed by our lot. Jack and Jim went to look at a German column we’d shot up. I suspect that’s the route it took. Anyway, it’s in the safety deposit box. I gave a couple of pieces to Clara – they’re back in the bank too – but always on condition that I’d replace it for her if the real owners showed up.”

"That's reasonable, though it's unlikely they will."

"I tried through friends – David and Esther in Hatfield – to see if the pieces were known, but there were no leads."

"I'm curious to see it sometime."

"Next time I'm going to the box, I'll let you know. It's sort of a pity to leave it in the dark there."

"Yes. I'm intrigued as to what it's like."

"Anyway, back to money. I'm rather pleased you seem to be reasonably careful with it. I'm pretty sure I'd find it hugely difficult to put up with someone who was a spender and a waster."

"No. That's not me."

"I think it would have been obvious already. But I don't want you thinking I'm a penny pincher. I'm neither Scot nor Dutch."

"Meaning?"

"Copper wire. Invented when a Scot and a Dutchman spied a penny at the same time."

"Oh. Groan! But good one. No you aren't tight fisted."

"I like to make the money go as far as possible. Clara was like that too, but probably more out of necessity."

"I'm probably more careful now than I would be if Bryan and I hadn't split. I've had to be careful just to pay the lawyers."

"Yes. That must have been insult on top of injury."

"You had to pay for a funeral – I'm sure that money would have had a happier spending otherwise."

"True. Anyway, it looks like we've enough, and from what you told me of your job, I already know the range of your salary, and you probably know mine."

"More or less – the civil service scales make it pretty transparent."

"So we aren't rich, but we probably qualify as well-off, assuming you don't owe some loan shark a lot."

"No. There's only the mortgage, and the bank was none too pleased to assign it to me."

"Yes. Banks are horribly old-fashioned about women and money. If we do get together, I'd like to ensure you have your own accounts and enough in them that should anything happen to me, you can function without strain until things are sorted out."

"You'd do that?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"I have to get my head around the idea that partnerships really mean that you plan for both of you."

"Do you get much from Bryan for Andrea? I think you said you get no alimony."

"He pays \$125 a month child support, and that will go on until she's 21. It's better than most divorced wives get, I think. But it's not much to raise a teenage girl with. He may also be pushed to pay some toward her education, perhaps even after she's 21."

"If we married, I think that the child support would continue. Since he's still alive, I wouldn't be able to adopt her."

"You'd do that if you could?"

"If we married and formed a family, I'd prefer we were a unit. Yes. Though I hadn't really given it much thought. More an assumption I suppose. We had to formalize Annie's adoption so she could use Tremblay rather than Joos."

"Why isn't it more like 'juice'?"

"The Dutch / Flemish pronounces double oh like the letter O in rose, and the J more like a Y, and the S is hard, not like Z. So 'yohss'. Though some Flemings I've heard speaking seem to say it more like 'yoos'. That is, just the J is changed. Well, perhaps half way to 'yoos'. It's not easy to capture the exact sound."

"Plenty to think about."

"Yes. Lots. Maybe we should start to clear away old stuff. If we do it together, we'll learn about each other as we find the treasures and can talk about them."

"Oh. That's a good idea. And it always needs to be done anyway. Some of the treasures need to be buried at the dump!"

"So true. I'm forever behind on clear out. And we are all – well, not just Annie and I – pack rats in my house."

"Good job you don't gamble. I'm sure Andrea and I are bigger pack rats."

* * *

After lunch, we went into the basement and brought up some cardboard boxes that were stored there on simple shelves.

"These are various things we put away over the years. I suspect there's lots of junk, but also some stuff I should not throw out." Michelle said.

“OK. Let’s see if we can find the treasure and toss the rubbish. Do you have a box or bin for rubbish.”

“There are a couple of empty cardboard boxes in the garage. Can you get them?”

I got the boxes, by which time Michelle had opened those we’d brought up.

“Oh, this one seems to be all Andrea’s baby stuff.”

“Is any of it of sentimental value?”

“I don’t think so. And we haven’t looked at it in years. The clothing and toys can go to the Salvation Army. But I think the bottles and such should be tossed.”

“I’ll mark this box Sally Ann. We’ll put the trash in the grocery bags.

OK. Well, that box was fast.”

“Oh. This one seems to be Bryan’s high school stuff.”

“Why don’t you transfer stuff to that box, just in case there’s anything that pertains to you?”

“Good idea.” She started doing this.

“Here’s some of my stuff. You were right not to dismiss it too quickly. But I’m not sure I want these old notebooks. The yearbooks I’ll keep, but this, and this, and this.” She tossed some notebooks and papers in one of the paper bags.

“You’ve emptied another box. Good work.”

“I should have done it years ago.”

“I’ve some stuff to go through too.”

“After dinner?”

“No, I think one lot of junk a day’s enough. Maybe tomorrow.”

“I could come after church.”

“Would you like me to come with you?”

“Do you want to?”

“I suppose if people want me to be involved in the liturgy or that sort of thing, I’d rather not. But going to the service and spending some time listening and contemplating – I suppose some would say praying – is not unattractive. As I told you, I generally like churches for the atmosphere.”

“I think people will say hello by way of greeting, but beyond that I think you’ll find the congregation will allow you to worship or simply be there in any way you want that does not intrude on the service. And I can’t think you’d be the cause of any disruption.”

"Then let's go together. Do you want me to come by here and pick you up?"

"Er. ... Awkward moment. I thought you might stay over."

"I thought of that too. But we'd better let Annie know where I am. It's not fair to have her wondering."

"True. Does that embarrass you?"

"A bit. It would have given me much more embarrassment a couple of months ago, but Annie and I seem to be talking to each other. It's a bit unorthodox, but it does avoid misunderstanding. Shall I phone her?"

"Yes. Go ahead. You know where the phone is."

I dialled my home number. Felt a bit odd doing that, as I didn't do so much since Clara died. Hmm. Odd thought.

"Annie. It's Dad. ... Yes, everything's OK. How about you? ... Good. Thought I'd better let you know I'm thinking of staying over with Michelle, then we'll probably come over around noon tomorrow and do some tidying of various stuff in boxes. You're welcome to join in that. In fact, it might help to clear stuff. We've been doing it over here today. ... I've wondered if that movie would be good. Burton and Taylor together, but "Who's afraid of Virginia Wolff" is a bit heavy. I was thinking of taking Michelle to "A Shot in the Dark". Something silly and fun. ... Well, I'm glad to hear you enjoyed it. I'll take that as a recommendation. See you tomorrow – or if you won't be there, leave me a note. ... OK. Bye."

When I returned to the dining room where the boxes were laid out, most of the mess was tidied up.

"So you've decided to take me to a movie?" Michelle said.

"Yes. I actually hadn't asked you yet, but do you think the Peter Sellers film would be enjoyable?"

"Sure. I like the Pink Panther stuff. What about dinner?"

"It's at the Elgin. We can park not too far away, eat at Sharpy's on Sparks Street – I've not tried it yet – then walk over to the movie. Or I suppose we could use the car between."

"No, I'm OK to walk. Let's do that."

Thursday, October 29, 1964 – Martin

I answered the phone just after supper.

"Martin. It's Penny. I've some not very good news."

“What’s happened?”

“Sharon had her baby, but it was badly deformed and died within an hour. It’s all very sad.”

“Yes, and I think she had come to terms with having the baby.”

“Well, we still weren’t sure about adoption. Both she and Des were interested in marrying, but Sharon didn’t want a marriage out of pity, or rather one that could be interpreted that way. And Des didn’t want the possibility she was not marrying him for himself. So they were both in a quandary.”

“What will happen now?”

“She’s pretty tired. The hospital will give her a couple of days to make sure she is OK. We’ve told her that she can stay with us for the next few months, in fact until she’s decided what she wants to do.”

It occurred to me that without the baby, Des and Sharon could decide to marry without the concerns Penny had voiced. But now was not the time or place to say that.

“Thanks for that, Pen. I think she’s basically a good young woman who’s been dealt a very bad hand.”

“Yes. We don’t want her out on the street. She has some talent around the house. Also in the garden and with sewing and things like that. Also good at bookkeeping. But I’m sure she needs time to come to terms with all that’s happened in the last few months.”

“Let me know if I can be of any help – and I mean it. No excuses if you need a bit of money or a hand to do something.”

“OK. But you’ve your own life to rebuild. How are you doing with Michelle? I rather liked her.”

“We seem to be getting along well. She’s having to deal with the Catholic doctrine concerning marriage and divorce, and that’s giving her a bit of angst. We went to St James United last Sunday.”

“Together?”

“Yes. Together.”

“Wow. Martin Tremblay in a church.”

“Come on, Pen. You know I’m not anti-church. I just never joined one in particular.”

“Sorry. I shouldn’t tease. It doesn’t fit with the role of the minister’s wife. And I’m sure it’s a big step for Michelle.”

“I think so. She wants a real life, and some folk have been unkind about it. In particular to her mother and to Andrea that a divorced

woman was automatically excommunicated, which isn't so. Though sex or marriage of a divorced person does cross their line."

"Oh dear. When it's to the kids, that's especially nasty."

"Michelle went to see the Principal at Immaculata and explained things. I suspect Andrea will complete the year – all the way to June '65 however – then transfer to a public high school."

"Another disruption for her, sadly. She and Joan got along well. She'll be welcome here any time."

"Similar idea might be for Joan to come here if she wants a weekend. I think Annie had some of Clara's things – shoes particularly – that she thought might be OK for her. Annie is a size bigger. We were going to bring them down and forgot."

"We'll think about it. If I mention it out loud, there'll be an almighty campaign to let her go."

"Say hello and good wishes to Sharon from us."

"Will do. Bye."

"Bye."

Thursday, October 29, 1964 – Anna

Dad answered the phone just after supper. I was in my room writing a letter to Fred. When I realized the call was over I came downstairs.

"Sharon had her baby, but it was deformed and died almost immediately" Dad said.

"That's really sad." I responded.

"It may be for the best. A very poor start in life for a child. And a chance for Sharon to start over."

"Yes. I suppose. I wish her well."

I went back to my letter. Fred seemed to be doing OK on his studies, which for now were largely getting ready for comprehensive exams. I told him the sad news. Added a discreet indication that I wouldn't be having a baby, in case Fred were concerned the precautions had failed.

Saturday, October 31, 1964 – Anna

Dad was helping Michelle and Andrea give out candy to Trick or Treaters over at their house.

At home, Jane and I had been joined by Julia, one of Jane's friends from Fine Arts. We'd dressed up as Macbeth's witches with a cauldron made out of a large pumpkin on the porch containing the candy. Jane even got some dry ice to make it smoke. Must have been pretty convincing. Some of the kids looked really scared. Jane and Julia had done a fantastic job of designing our costumes, which were really made of scrap cloth, as well as some pretty nasty-looking make-up.

We'd invited a few classmates for a small party later. I didn't want any extras – particularly people I didn't know – coming into the house. Dad said he'd be home sometime before 11 anyway.

We shut down the candy cauldron around 7:30, just as Roland and Mark, Julia's not-quite-official boyfriend showed up. I'd invited Chandra, one of the graduate students who I'd worked with during the summer in the lab. Not because I wanted him as a date, but he was fairly new in Canada from New Delhi and didn't know about Halloween. He thought the witches costumes were a blast.

While we'd been handing out candy, a pot of chilli Jane, Julia and I had started earlier was simmering. There was some garlic bread we warmed in the oven, and a simple salad. We told Roland to bring some pop, and asked Chandra and Mark to bring desserts to share. We'd expected something like ice cream or store-bought pie. But Chandra brought some rice pudding. It was terrific. He'd made it himself. I don't know why it seemed so much better than any rice pudding I'd had before, but it was. And Mark brought a funny chocolate pudding from the Betty Crocker cookbook that looked like a cake but had this hot chocolate syrup underneath. He'd prepared it at home and had it all ready to go, so we put it in the oven while we ate our chilli. Marcia and Constantine came for a little while, but for some reason I didn't get much chance to talk to them.

Chandra enjoyed the chilli. We'd made it pretty spicy, but it was clear he found it mild to his palate. I'd asked him when I invited him if he could eat ground beef. He said he wouldn't eat beef in India, but here he did, especially in something like chilli, which somehow he'd already learned about.

It was a pretty nice meal and easy conversation, and our party broke up around 10:30. In fact, as my guests were leaving, Dad came in. He had a taste of the desserts before we tumbled into bed.

Saturday – October 31, 1964 – Michelle

Martin was helping me and Andrea give out candy to Trick or Treaters. At his home, Annie and two friends were apparently scaring the kinds who came round by dressing up as Macbeth's witches, with a cauldron made out of a large pumpkin on the porch containing the candy. Martin said they were even going to get some dry ice to make it smoke.

Around 7:30, the small fry were back home and the older, greedier kids were the only visitors, so we decided to turn off all the lights in the front of the house and retire to the kitchen for a well-deserved cup of tea. Of course, some of the leftover candy found its way onto the table.

"Was this the first year you didn't dress up and go out?" Martin asked Andrea.

"Yes. I figured I was too old for it. And seeing things from the other side tells me I was right. You could see at the end they were just trying to get the biggest haul they could."

"Sometimes we have to be in other's shoes to see ourselves."

"We have a resident philosopher," I quipped.

"Did you go out Trick or Treating?" Martin asked.

"When I was little. Yes. Then the War came along and the materials for costumes and also the candy wasn't as available. We sort of just stopped. You?"

"When I was little, yes. I was in England by 1938 when I was 13, and they don't Trick or Treat. I think Halloween is celebrated in Scotland, but not by Trick or Treat as far as I know."

"Have you been to Scotland." I asked.

"In 1946. In the summer. I wanted to see as much as I could of Britain before coming back to Canada."

"Did you like it?"

"What I saw of it, I mostly liked. Glasgow was very grimy, and I suspect still is. A lot of poverty. Jim Sinclair worked there for a while. Says he saw a lot of pretty sad things. If they cleaned it up, it could be a very nice city."

"Who's Jim Sinclair?" asked Andrea.

"My family doctor. But I knew him first as the Medical Officer – MO – of 247 Squadron that I was in. Actually, he may have served several squadrons at the same time."

“But you weren’t flying airplanes?”

“No. I was called a Wireless Mechanic. Mainly fixing radio-telephones or R/T that the pilots used to talk to each other and to the ground.”

“So that’s how you got into the radio work you do now?” Andrea added.

“No. I’d been studying physics at Oxford. When Penny’s husband – David Stedman, Des’ father – was shot down, I felt I couldn’t stay a student and not do something for the War effort. I went to the recruiting office and volunteered to be a Wireless Mechanic. They treated me as if I was being a primadonna, but the fellow at the desk said he’d put in my application if I could fix their radio – they called it a ”wireless” of course. He thought I was just boasting, but I fixed it, and eventually ended up in 247.”

“Was it safer being on the ground?”

“Probably. But still there were things like the mine that blew up the truck. And we took a pasting at Eindhoven on New Years’ Day 1945. In 20 minutes we lost about 140 planes there.”

“That seems like a whole air force of planes.” I said.

“We had a lot then, but as I said, we got pretty badly shot up, though 247 had only one or two killed. Most of us got bruises diving into trenches. Often 4 or 5 of us trying to dive into a two-person foxhole. We were pretty lucky overall with that attack. Other times, some pilots would come in during the morning, go out on their first sortie after lunch and not come back. One guy came in, transferred to a Typhoon, took off and was shot down not 20 minutes after he landed on the ’drome.”

“A lot more scary than Halloween.” Andrea summed up.

It gave me a strange feeling as I watched us – I could sort of see myself in the picture too – learning about Martin and Annie and their history and perhaps becoming part of it.

Saturday, November 7, 1964 – Martin

Michelle had just arrived at our house after taking Andrea to Bryan’s apartment, where she would stay until Bryan or someone else in the family brought her back the following evening. It was just after 10 in the morning.

“Coffee or tea?” I asked.

"Tea please."

I put on the kettle. Annie clumped down the stairs and came into the kitchen with a towel round her head, but otherwise dressed in sweater and slacks.

"Hi Michelle."

"Morning Annie."

"Kettle's on. Do you want some breakfast?" I asked Annie.

"I'll have some toast, but I can handle it. Also an instant coffee for myself."

"What are you guys going to get up to today? Oops. That could sound wrong."

Michelle and I laughed. It wasn't worth getting worked up about.

"I want to start on Christmas cards for people in Europe." I said.

"And I have some letters to write and some photos to organize." Michelle added. "What about you, Annie?"

"I've some assignments to do, and I've got to write some letters. By the way, Dad, can you leave any cards open that I should add a note to? And I've not answered Fred's letter that arrived Monday. I've been rather bad about that."

"Other boys?" Michelle teased.

"Hardly. I'd like some companionship, but I don't want to date anyone just now until I figure out what I want to do with the next few years."

"Sounds serious." Michelle replied.

"Same for us, isn't it?" I interjected.

"I suppose so. I just didn't think someone Annie's age would be thinking like that, but it's equally important at any age."

"Going out later?" I asked.

"Probably over to Marcia's. But I've those assignments to work on first."

A half hour later, Michelle and I were seated at the dining room table. Michelle was pasting photo corners into an album and installing photos. She had some silver ink and was writing on the black construction paper of the album.

"Here's a photo of you with the Sunfish. That was a red letter day."

"No kidding. By the way, are you also writing on the back of the photos in case they get separated from the album or fall out?"

“Good idea, I’ll go back to where I started today and do that. This is a new album – new start!”

“Yes. Sometimes I stop and think and it’s a bit of a jolt. Clara was still alive last year at this time – very sick of course, but we worked on the cards together.”

“Now you have to write the cards yourself, even though I’m here.”

“I’m preparing a common letter to include to save rewriting a lot of the details. Do you think it would be very wrong of me to duplicate it at the office? I suppose I could try a printers if they have a mimeo machine, or even a spirit duplicator.”

“That’s a good idea. You just have to write a short personal note.

But I’d go to a printers. No use having some stupid tongue wagging at the office.” Hmm. That was good advice. It would be unpleasant to have to apologize for petty stupidity.

We worked for a bit. Then Michelle stretched and got up, and came round to my side of the table and hugged me. She suddenly stiffened as she saw an envelope addressed to Margaret Mackay.

“You wrote a card to Margaret?” she accused.

“Yes. Why not?”

“You’re with me now!”

“Yes. Of course. But why should I not send a card to Margaret as someone who is a friend. I knew her when I had not even met you. If her mother had not had a stroke, things might have been different.”

“But it makes me feel you aren’t sure of me. You know the song ”I only have eyes for you”. That’s how I think things should be.”

“Oh dear. That’s going to be a source of trouble, I fear.”

“Why?” Michelle was almost crying.

“Because I don’t think that anyone should be the one and only person in my life. That doesn’t diminish your place or my feelings for you. But you know, it occurred to me that we’ve not yet properly said ”I love you” to each other. Yet I know I do love you and I think you love me. Maybe we need to ... well, confront that. We’ve both been hurt by life, and you managed to get a very poor view of yourself.”

“Maybe, but I want that ”one and only”. Bryan let me down.”

“I’m not Bryan!” I said hotly. “I don’t want to let you down. And as far as I’m concerned you are unique and ”one and only”. But

I won't pretend that I don't notice that a woman is attractive. And I know I wouldn't want to cut off my communication with someone who I shared some nice times with, though I'm not seeking to repeat them."

"You're sure you wouldn't try to get Margaret into bed with you if you met at a conference? You'd get to play with her big breasts."

"Michelle, I want to be able to share my feelings with you. It would be really nice to talk about what I feel. Just talking can be a great help to understand oneself. Having to watch for the cow-pads all the time could be tiring."

"You haven't said you wouldn't want her," Michelle said grumpily.

"Look, if we are going to be partners – truly – I'll take the risk of you going home in a huff. Margaret came into my life briefly at a time when I wasn't really ready to restart my emotional life. On that point, so did you. Things have progressed a lot faster than I expected.

But Margaret is a good woman, and like you struggling to figure out how to live her life, at least she was. I'm not in love with her. In the abstract, if we had an opportunity to enjoy each other, well ... I can't say the idea is unattractive. But that's in the abstract. You are now part of my life, and I hope you'll stay part of it. And she has to live where she is now, and find ways to put companionship and love in her own life. For both you and her, her bouncing the mattress with me could create some serious awkwardness. Especially when I want a partner I can talk to about how I feel and about good experiences I've had."

"As usual, Martin, what you say makes sense. But it makes me mad as hell that you'd even look at another woman."

"You're not alone. I've seen women on the street jabbing an elbow into their husbands when a pretty woman goes by. But I think that's a lost chance to share something."

"How? What would I get out of you ogling other women?"

"Ogling" is a bit fierce. But don't you notice good-looking men?"

"No. Oh Well, ... I'm not being honest ... yes."

"I'll sharpen my elbows."

"But it's not the same ..."

"Why?"

“You’re a man.”

“Meaning.”

“Men are known to run around more than women.”

“Is there any good evidence that is true? You can’t ask people easily if they are having an affair outside their marriage. Or even if they’d like to have one. I’m sure one would get lots of lying. It may be that with the risks of pregnancy, women are less inclined to follow their urges. With this new pill that could change. My experience is that women like sex at least as much as men.”

“Let’s go back to what I’d get out of you looking at other women.”

“Suppose we’re walking down the street and you notice I’ve been looking at someone. You could ask ”What do you find attractive?” as a way to learning what I like. On the Sunfish day, you were absolutely convinced I couldn’t find you attractive, when I was practically wetting my pants for you. In fact at one point I noticed there was a small wet spot in my underpants.”

“Really?” Michelle mused quietly. “At the time I thought I’d be kind of repulsive to you. It’s still a surprise to realize you really do find me ... well, sexy.”

“And I do. You know, I don’t have a good idea what you find attractive in a man. So I’ll watch for a chance to ask you the same sort of question.”

“But I wouldn’t Well, maybe I would. Maybe I do, but just don’t admit it.”

“Don’t you ever talk to Andrea about things like that? In some of the chats I’ve had with Andrea, I’ve learned about her thinking. Not much about what she finds physically attractive in a man, but some of the behaviour and attitudes of some men that upset her or that she appreciates.”

“I probably don’t talk to Andrea about that enough. You seem more able to do that. I’m actually a bit jealous of your ease of talking to Andrea, and to Annie.”

“I just ask. And do it in as friendly and warm way as possible. Mostly people give me an answer.”

“When we were in Brockville at Penny’s I saw that in your conversation with Sharon.”

“I hope she’s doing all right. I feel ashamed that I rather think the baby’s death is almost a blessing for her.” I said.

“It’s hard to think that a baby dying could be helpful, but I think

I agree. Can we send her a card together? Maybe now – just to let her know we’re thinking of her.”

“Sure. I’ve this card which isn’t specifically about Christmas.”

I started writing it, then passed the card to Michelle.

“Here’s a ball pen for you to add a line or two. I’ll use my fountain pen and I’ll write the envelope. We can go out and post it, though I don’t know if there’s a pickup today, but we could find some lunch somewhere? It’s none too warm, but there’s no rain.”

“Sure. Or we could pick up some fixings at the supermarket and bakery.”

“OK. Either is good.”

“Can I ogle the girls?”

“Only if I can stare at the boys.”

“Deal! As long as we talk about why we find them attractive.”

“Deal!”

Saturday, November 7, 1964 – Anna

Dad and Michelle went out after they’d worked on letters and photos together. Well, at the same time, Dad on letters and cards, Michelle on photos, though I learned later that they’d jointly written a sympathy card for Sharon, then gone to post it. They came back with stuff for lunch. I got a side-benefit of that!

They’re getting more involved with each other – they forgot to ask if I wanted to add my name and good wishes. In some ways that’s a good sign, but in others maybe I’d like to be kept in mind.

Together they prepared a stew for dinner which went well with the rolls they’d picked up at the bakery while they were out. I’d kept at the homework projects, and joined them at the table for supper.

“How’s the work going?” Dad asked.

“Not bad. I’m trying to get ahead. But I think I’d better take some time this evening and write to Fred. Also add some notes to the cards you’ve been putting together.” I’d probably go to Marcia’s for an hour or so if she were home.

“I’ll leave them out on the sideboard.” Dad replied.

“What are you two doing this evening?” I asked.

“We’re going to continue box sorting. Maybe watch a bit of the hockey if they put on the Toronto-New York game. But the CBC

probably will air the Black Hawks vs. the Canadiens.”

“I hope it won’t run too late. I need my sleep.” Michelle commented.

“You’re going back?” Annie asked.

There was a long pause

“We haven’t really talked about it, but I think we feel a bit awkward about Michelle staying if you are here.”

“Well. It’s pretty obvious that you two are comfortable together. I won’t be upset if Michelle stays, or if Dad goes over to your place, Michelle.”

“I think it may be our own reticence.” Michelle said. “Actually, I should probably also admit that I find the photo of Clara in the master bedroom a little ... oh, I don’t know what to say. It’s important that you keep pictures of Clara, and not hide them, but if I’m in the bedroom, I ...”

“Yes. It already occurred to me that it might feel strange, but I didn’t know how to bring up the subject.” I responded. “I’ve wondered if we should collect a few of the photos together. Dad, would one wall here in the dining room work, do you think?”

“I’d be fine with that. I ... well, ... should have realized that it might be uncomfortable for Michelle.”

“But it would be good to have some pictures that are important to both of you where they can be seen. I know that you want to keep Clara in your thoughts, and if I get in the way of that, it won’t make me any closer to either of you.”

“Will you mind seeing them on the wall in here?” Dad asked.

“No. It may be me being silly, but I find it awkward in the bedroom, you know, if ...”

“Understandable,” said Dad. He was clearly uncomfortable with this conversation. I was having to try to keep a straight face. Poor Dad.

“Why don’t we put up the photos after supper, Martin. We can see the TV as we work and watch it more closely when the play is on. Unless you really like watching the talk between periods.” Michelle suggested.

“Good idea. And Annie can put in her 2 cents from time to time.”

That’s more or less how it turned out. Marcia was going out with Constantine, so I ended up staying home. From what she said, it

was a pretty casual friendship, but they enjoyed a coffee and baklava from time to time. She didn't tell me much about him. I think he'd not continued on after high school and was some sort of manual labourer. Still, as long as he treated her OK, I wouldn't criticize. I'll have to ask her sometime how they met. And let her know she shouldn't be uncomfortable if he was an ordinary working type.

Monday evening, November 9, 1964 – Martin

The phone rang shortly after supper. I picked it up on the wall phone in the kitchen.

"Hello"

"Hello, Dr Tremblay – er, Martin – it's Andrea."

"Hi Andrea. What can I do for you?"

"I'll have to keep my voice down. I don't want Mum to hear. Can you still hear me?"

"Yes. What's the matter?"

"I don't quite know what to do. Dad has a girlfriend, Rachel. She has two boys, 13 and 15. We were staying over at their house on Saturday night. In the morning after I had my shower, I came back in the room I'd been given – it normally belonged to the younger boy – and I found them holding up my underwear. Well. My bra. It was really creepy. They made some dirty remarks about my size."

"OK. I think I have a pretty good idea. Did you tell anyone?"

"No. If I tell Dad, he may think I'm trying to interfere with him and Rachel. If I tell Rachel, she might side with the boys. Or tell Dad and have him think the same. I can't tell Mum. She'll go crazy and there'll be more trouble for everyone, but especially for her."

"Do you get along well with your paternal grandparents?"

"I don't see them much. They live in Sault Ste. Marie."

"That's probably why I've not heard about them."

"I couldn't think of anyone else to talk to. You've talked to me as a grown-up."

"Thanks for the confidence. However, in this case, I'll tell you I'm not completely sure how to proceed. The best person to talk to your Dad about this – and he's the one who has ultimately to sort it out – is likely one of his own family or else a close friend. And my guess is that he should talk to the boys in private first, sort of

man to man. They have been pretty stupid, probably not realizing it's nasty to do what they did and thinking it's a prank, but their behaviour needs to be corrected, and quickly."

"What should I do?"

"I think you have to talk to your Dad. Is his friendship with Rachel serious?"

"They shared a bed on Saturday night, so I think so. All very "family this" and "family that" in conversation, so I suspect he may be planning to marry her. I've had no chance to get to know her. She talks to me like I'm a little girl she's trying to keep happy."

"She's probably scared of you, or at least your reaction."

"Oh. I hadn't thought of that."

"Anyway, we have to make sure the boys treat you correctly. Would it help if I or possibly Annie were there when you talk to your Dad about this?"

"It would make me feel better if you were there."

"If you give me his number, I'll phone and we'll see when might be possible."

Andrea gave me the number, and we concluded the call. With some misgiving, I dialled the number. Bryan answered

"Hello"

"Hello. Bryan Corcoran?"

"Yes."

"My name is Martin Tremblay. I'm a friend of Michelle and Andrea."

"Oh. The new boyfriend!"

I decided not to take the bait.

"I'm calling because Andrea asked me to."

"Andrea!?"

"Yes. She has a small problem that she didn't want to talk to Michelle about. She wants to avoid stirring up any trouble between her parents."

"What's it about?"

I decided a straightforward summary of what I'd been told would be the best.

"Apparently when Andrea came out of the shower to the room she was using on Sunday morning the two boys of the house were examining her underwear. And they made some rude comments I gather."

“Shit! Sorry. Perhaps she’s making it up to put a wedge between me and Rachel?”

“No. She told me she definitely wants to avoid having you think that. But I think it upset her. She used the word ”creepy”.”

“So. What am I to do about it?”

“I don’t know how well you get on with the boys, or if you want to.”

“Hell, man. I’m likely to become their stepfather.”

“Oh. Andrea had not told me anything about that.”

“We were trying to see how the kids got along. This could mess things up.”

“It rather depends if their behaviour is well-established or just a silly kid prank.”

“Yes, I suppose. But still, what do I do about it?”

“I think Andrea wants to talk to you, probably to reassure you that she isn’t trying to create trouble. Then, possibly you could talk to the boys in private. It could be an opening to get a dialogue going with them. They might be glad if they could just apologize to Andrea without their mother knowing.”

“The older one is a bit of a smart guy. He hasn’t had enough discipline since their father took off, and Rachel tries to spoil them. I suspect he’s the one behind this, and the younger kid just went along.

I’ll take care of it. Leave it with me.”

“Shall I tell Andrea what you said? I think she would want to talk to you, so perhaps you could call her yourself.”

“I’ll talk to her. It’s really none of your business. I’m kind of mad she went to you.”

“She’s a good kid. But also almost a woman, and from what she’s said to me about other things, feeling a bit confused about the world.”

“She talks to you about things like that?”

“A bit. I’ve a daughter of my own, now at university. She and Annie talk a bit too. We’re somewhat separate from you and Michelle, so perhaps she feels a bit more at ease talking to us.”

“I’ll try to pay a bit more attention to her.”

“Thank you for listening. I hope it works out for everyone.”

“Goodnight Mr.”

“Tremblay. Martin Tremblay. Goodnight.”

We hung up. I wondered if I'd done the right thing. There'd now be a secret from Michelle, at least for a while, and she would resent it if she found out.

Monday evening, November 9, 1964 – Anna

I heard the phone ring shortly after supper. I was up in my room, and Dad picked it up on the wall phone in the kitchen. Guess it was for him, as he didn't call out to me.

When we had a cup of tea later he didn't mention the call, but he did look a little pensive. I wondered if there were some trouble with Michelle, but given the various ups and downs, decided to wait and see.

I'd had a letter from Fred.

November 2, 1964

Dear Annie,

I'm always behind on writing to you. Things are settling down here. As you know from the last letter, I've got an apartment now. More a room with a cooking alcove and a tiny bathroom. It's in the basement of a house just off Cambie Street not too far from Broadway, so pretty central and still good for getting to the University on the bus or possibly a bike in good weather.

I hope this won't upset you, but I've been out with a couple of girls here. Nothing serious. I think I need to avoid being a hermit.

I met one girl, Alicia, at an introductory seminar for new grad students. She's doing a Ph.D. in English. Having a bit of a tough time, as she suffered a skiing accident last winter and has some persistent pain. When she is feeling OK, she's very sharp and good company. I sometimes wonder if she has any social interaction outside of me. I'd be happier not to have that burden.

....

Affectionately,

Fred

There was a bunch of everyday stuff in the gap before the ‘Affectionately Fred’. I wasn’t quite sure what to make of his story of Alicia. Knowing Fred a bit, I think he was a bit smitten with her. Oh well, bite my tongue and let him get on with his life. And start getting on with mine.

Wednesday, November 11, 1964 – Anna

We went to the Remembrance Day ceremony at the War Memorial. Dad even wore his RAF cap and medals. That was a first. He didn’t go and stand with the Legion group. He’s not a smoker and, while he enjoys a drink, not a drinker either. Michelle and Andrea came along too. We found a good place to stand near the corner of Sparks and Elgin near the Langevin Building. It was cloudy and drizzly, near freezing, but there was a crowd of about 5000, about a fifth of them wearing medals, though most of those were clustered closer to the front of the monument.

I guess the ceremony is pretty much the same every year. Still, it’s quite powerful. There were some Great War vets there, outnumbered by those from World War II and some from Korea. Geez. Two and a bit generations. I wondered if I’d be involved in a war sometime. The Americans seemed to be getting more and more into a bloody mess in Viet Nam. I’d read ‘The Quiet American’ by Graham Greene – also seen the movie with Michael Redgrave, but I thought that missed the whole point of the book. Probably watered down because the hero gets the American agent murdered over the young Vietnamese mistress. That wouldn’t go down well with the movie censors. Probably why they changed the story. Still, Vietnam seemed to be like quicksand.

Pearson and Governor-General Vanier stood either side of the Silver Cross mother. A signal gun started the ceremony. Poems and prayers were said. The Last Post was played. Wreaths were laid.

As the ceremony drew to a close, I heard Michelle say to Dad.

“Oh. There’s Bryan with a woman and two boys. I guess that’s Rachel and her sons.”

“Yes.” Dad mumbled. He seemed uncomfortable.

As the dignitaries were starting to depart and cars were being brought up, I saw the Prime Minister walking towards the area where we were standing. He looked up and made eye contact with Dad. I saw him nod and Dad nodded back.

“Did the Prime Minister just acknowledge you?” Michelle asked quizzically.

“I knew him at the High Commission in London. Fixed his radio at Christmas in ’41 in fact. One of the staff who had transferred to Paris remembered me for that when Clara and I enquired about getting her immigration documents. She didn’t break any rules, but – you know – made sure the paperwork didn’t get stuck somewhere.

I’ve also met him more recently at a reception a couple of years ago when my Dad was given a long-service award, so he knows me with the beard.”

“I guess I really don’t know as much as I’d like about your past.” Michelle said. Nor did I. Sneaky Dad. He replied.

“Same for me. Going through the boxes has helped, but some of the photos and things are just that – photos and things. We need to tell each other what they mean.”

“When you were hanging the pictures in the dining room, I did get a bit of chapter and verse. But there’s always things left out or overlooked.” Michelle said.

“Yes. Hard to avoid.”

“If you think of extra information, do include me,” I interjected.

“Oh. The crowd has ears.” Dad commented. “But I’ll try to include you too. Andrea also if she wants.”

To Michelle he said, “And we should do the same with some of the photos and mementos you’ve been sorting. People forget to tell others – they assume that they know. I once met a fellow who was child number 17 of 18. His family forgot to tell him his grandfather had been responsible for some of the biggest bridges and other civil engineering in the Netherlands. He found out by reading a plaque, then checking the old newspapers. Everyone just assumed he knew, but he came along when the oldest daughter was nearly 21, so he just wasn’t there when the stories were told.”

We kind of got carried along with part of the crowd down Elgin.

Dad had parked near Dominion Chalmers church. However, we'd not gone far when we nearly bumped into Bryan and Rachel, though I didn't realize who they were until the man said,

"Oh. Hello Michelle. This is Rachel McNeil and her sons Ralph and Stephen."

"Bryan." Michelle acknowledged coldly. "This is Martin Tremblay and his daughter Annie."

"Hello Martin. Good to meet you." They shook hands, having to doff gloves to do so.

"Hello Michelle, Martin. I'm Rachel." Rachel intervened. "I realize that meeting like this is awkward, but perhaps it will enable us to communicate when we need to share information about the kids."

"Yes. That's sensible. Thanks." Michelle responded politely, if still a bit stiff.

"You're a veteran?" Bryan asked Dad pointing to his medals. "I was a year too young to serve in the Second War, and Korea was a bit late."

"RAF," Dad answered. "My father was with the High Commission in London when war was declared and we got stuck there. It was easier to join the Brits. Some managed to transfer to the RCAF, but I never saw the need. We often shared bases with the RCAF, like at Eindhoven."

"You flew planes?" Ralph, the older boy asked excitedly.

"No, I was what they called a Wireless Mechanic. I kept the radio telephones going that were used to direct the pilots onto targets. Our squadron had rocket firing Typhoons."

"Neat! They did lots of damage to Nazi tanks." Ralph commented.

"Less than the news reports claimed, I think. Sometimes the Germans fired back." Dad said quietly.

"Yes. I guess so." Ralph went serious.

"I'm glad you called the other night Ralph." Andrea said. "I think it cleared up what could have been awkward."

"Thanks Andrea." Ralph replied.

"We should be getting out of the way of the crowd." Dad suggested.

"Yes. Bye for now." Rachel took charge of her group.

We rejoined the crowd and walked on. Once out of earshot of Bryan, Michelle asked Andrea “What was that about with Ralph?”

“Oh. Ralph and Stephen were horsing around, and I kind of came along in the middle of it. A bit embarrassing for them. He phoned to apologize for any upset, and I think we’ll be OK. Things are kind of awkward right now.”

“How are they awkward?”

“Well, here we are with Martin and Annie, and Dad comes along with Rachel and Ralph and Stephen. I should think it’s obvious, Mum.”

I giggled and I saw Dad struggling to suppress a smirk. Michelle pouted until Dad put his arm round her and said “I don’t see any blood or bruises, just a situation ripe for a comedy sketch.”

“You’re right.” Michelle brightened. “And Rachel is too – it will be easier to phone and talk if we need to about anything important now we’ve met.”

Now. This raw weather suggests we need some soup. I made some last night, so let’s get back to my house and have lunch.”

Saturday, December 5, 1964 – Martin

Michelle phoned in the morning.

“Martin, we need to talk about Christmas to avoid any mix-ups.”

“What’s up?”

“Nothing desperate, but with different households, we should make sure we know who is going to be where and who is giving presents to whom. Or is it to who?”

“OK. I get the picture. First, are we spending Christmas together?”

“I hope so. I already asked Mum, and you and Annie are welcome to Christmas dinner there. I’ve talked with Bryan – actually Rachel. Despite the fact she’s the “other woman” of sorts, I find it easier to work out arrangements with her.

Anyway, the plan is that Andrea will go to them for Christmas Eve and they’ll bring her over to my house – or possibly yours – between 1 and 2 on the afternoon of Christmas day.”

“What about presents?”

“Andrea is planning to get presents for Bryan, Rachel, Ralph and Stephen, as well as me. And she’s thinking of you and Annie?”

"I think Annie has a book in mind for her. She doesn't have to get me anything. I'm sure her allowance will be sorely taxed as it is."

"Actually, she's making you a work, you know, carpenter's apron, and Annie a monogrammed lab-coat. I shouldn't spoil the surprise, but hopefully you can put on a good act."

"It won't be an act. Those are good presents for us. But what can I get for her?"

"I was going to ask you about that. She's been agitating for a record player, and it's a bit more than I wanted to spend. Do you think you could help out and we'll give it to her together?"

"Sure. I'll go halves with you."

"Oh. That's much more than generous. And Rachel says she'll arrange for her and Bryan and the boys to get some records for her."

"Now I've got to think of something for Annie. But I think she'd like a new slide rule. The one I'm thinking of getting isn't cheap, though not as much as a record player, so you could come in with me on that if you wanted." I said.

"Maybe I can add a pen or something?"

"Actually I've heard her wondering if she should get one of those mechanical drawing pencils that just holds a lead. The lead is about 4 inches long and under an eighth thick and the pencil has a little sharpener in the top."

"Some of the cartographers use those. I'll ask where they get them."

"We seem to have things taken care of."

"Should we have some small things for your family?"

"I've presents for my folks, but maybe some candy or treats. I'll get some if you help me wrap them. We can prepare some extra small presents like that in case there are unanticipated guests."

"I hope you'll let me contribute to the cost." I noted.

"Gladly."

"What about us? Are we exchanging gifts?"

"I'd wanted to ask about that too."

"Michelle, I think we should keep our gifts to each other small and symbolic. We know how we feel about each other, and I hope we'll get some chance to try to figure out where to take those feelings over the holidays. It will be a time when we probably meet more of each others' friends."

“Yes. But about presents. How about we decide a maximum of \$10 for each of us?”

“Good idea.”

Saturday, December 5, 1964 – Anna

It was essentially the end of term. Was I ever glad I worked ahead on my assignments. Particularly thermodynamics. I had a hard time with all the differentials. It was kind of a different dialect of maths – one I didn’t know. Anyway, time to start reviewing for exams. Not hard with the temperature in the teens Fahrenheit and the snow flurries.

Michelle phoned in the morning. I heard Dad talking to her. Sounded like they were planning Christmas. Different from last year when Mum was sick. Correction, dying. Oops. Now I’m dropping tears on my mechanics notes. If I’m not careful I’ll cause a nutation in the picture of the gyroscope. Ha ha. Except it isn’t. It’ll be nice to have Michelle and Andrea around. Maybe keep away the blues about Mum and ... well, not so much Fred as what he was able to provide in companionship and ... the other.

I’d already a book in mind for Andrea – ‘The Stone Angel’ by Margaret Lawrence. I’d already bought it in the university bookstore. Actually was reading it now. And it’s not so big a deal that if she isn’t able to get me anything I’m going to be upset.

Studying was a bore, but I wanted good marks. One of the Profs who I worked for last summer said it’s the 3rd year marks that often are looked at for grad school and scholarships because the decisions are made before final 4th year marks are available. Makes sense – also makes work for me.

I’ve invited Marcia to come for dessert. I need to ensure I get some sort of break. I’ve told her she can bring Constantine if she wants. She’s still a bit embarrassed by his not being in college or university. I think she’s being silly. He’s a nice guy, and she could do a lot worse.

Wednesday, December 9, 1964 – Anna

It was after supper. Dad was sitting in the living room by the fireplace in his favourite chair, reading some journals and making some notes. I decided to come down and study with him. I was feeling a little down.

“Dad, do you mind if I bring my books and study here?”

“Not at all. Is it cold up there?” It was still in the teens, temperature-wise.

“A bit cooler than here, but I felt like some company.”

“Anything wrong? I’ve noticed you’re a bit quiet the last week or so. And I think you said you were going to vote in the City election, but then didn’t bother.”

The election had been an interesting contest. Charlotte Whitten, the incumbent, had polled third and Don Reid would be the new Mayor. Maybe the potholes would get fixed – Ottawa was called ‘The Pothole Capital of Canada’ because she was stingy with the road maintenance budget. Maybe they’d get filled, maybe not. Dad was right. I hadn’t bothered to vote. Hadn’t done much except study and read a bit of the Margaret Lawrence. I was starting to bore myself. But to answer Dad,

“Oh, it’s nothing WRONG – capital letters. Just feeling a bit like my nickname. Blue.”

“Remembering Mum. ”

“Possibly. More that Fred isn’t writing so much, and he’s been going out with some girls in Vancouver. I’m not the jealous type, or if I am, I’m jealous of him, not the girls.”

“Nobody’s asked you out?”

“I’ve kind of discouraged it, though a couple of fellows have shown some interest. Actually, I’d rather pal around with a group just now. While I’m sure I could enjoy well, you know what, I don’t want it to be just a physical thing. So I’m kind of in limbo just now. And exams coming up is never great for morale.

I also overheard one of my profs talking to another prof, saying he didn’t think women should study sciences or engineering. Said we only end up getting married and wasting the opportunity.”

Dad bit his lip, then shot back

“Perhaps he needs to be reminded that Dorothy Hodgkin will get the Nobel in Chemistry in a few days.”

“The trouble is he may – you know – downgrade my mark.”

Now Dad looked very annoyed, though I could see he would keep the lid on it.

“I’ll have to think of a way to let those men overhear someone suggesting their grant applications be downgraded. You know we get them to review at the lab?”

“I didn’t actually, but it doesn’t surprise me. Though I can’t think how you’d get that across to these men. Or if they’d listen. It’s a bit discouraging. On the other hand, the people I worked with during the summer were wonderful. I learned a lot.”

“Annie, I think you should keep a copy of any work you submit. If you need some money for photocopying, do ask. It may be important if you get any bad marks that could be the result of this stupidity that we have a copy of the work. And I think you can arrange to look at your exams, which you should do if you suspect anything amiss, or anyway to see what you got wrong. In the meantime, I suspect that the University really wants women students. It may be worth my writing to Father Guindon.”

“But that might come back to hurt me.” I didn’t want to have that.

“I think I can write in such a way that it could be me that overheard the remarks and as the father of a woman student I was unhappy it came from one of his staff. We can’t ensure that bad attitudes will change overnight, but leadership from the top would help.”

I actually saw a copy of the letter over Christmas a few weeks later. Dad must have arranged a hand delivery, I think.

Dear Fr. Guindon,

Recently one of your science professors was overheard to make disparaging remarks about female students in science and engineering. The core of these comments was that educating female students was a waste since they only ended up getting married and not using their education. As the father of a female science undergraduate, and a scientist myself who has had a number of important collaborations with women colleagues, I find this attitude outdated

and disturbing, and am grateful that it appears to be a minority view. Indeed, we have the recent Nobel Prize announcement for Chemistry to provide a good example of a woman scientist at the top of the field. However, even one professor can hurt a woman's career by unfair marking.

As with attitudes towards race that we are seeing exposed now in the United States, it is difficult to change minds overnight. However, the voice of leadership can be a powerful force in the right direction, and I am hopeful you will be able to communicate the need to welcome all students based solely on their abilities.

Yours, Martin Tremblay, Ph.D.

Good for Dad!

There was a kind of joke – all the better because it had a lot of truth in it – that Father Guindon was ‘the best politician in Ottawa’. In a Christmas letter to all academic staff, he commented on the tragedy of divisiveness – racism in the USA, tribalism in the Congo, religion in the Middle East and Ireland, language in Quebec, and even discrimination against women right here. He wished them all a merry Christmas and the gift of blindness to everything but merit when grading student work.

Chandra was teaching a couple of sections of an intro course, and he'd also heard the prof being nasty about women students. Chandra didn't say much, but he noticed a lot, and showed me the circular from Fr. Guindon as we were clearing up for the Christmas break. Dad was rather pleased when I told him about it. His letter appeared to have been received and acted upon.

Thursday, December 17, 1964 – Martin

Knowing Annie had her last exam today, I'd prepared spaghetti and meatballs because it was one of her favourite meals. As we ate the last of our pasta, I asked her

“How do you think you did on the exams?”

"I think OK. I'm most worried about the exam everyone found easy. I find that when it's a tough exam, I generally do much better than most of the other students, but when it's easy, I'm just one of the bunch."

"Too true. To change the subject, what do you plan to do for the next week?"

"First, sleep a lot. I need to catch up. Then I want to write some letters. We sent cards, and it was a good idea to include a mimeographed letter, but I think I need to write to a few people."

"Fred?"

"Yes, Fred in particular. Also Tante Wil. I've been wanting to learn more about my Flemish past. When I graduate, I'd like to take some time in Belgium and see where I came from. I hope you don't feel that's disloyal."

"No. You should do that. You might even see if you couldn't spend a year or so doing graduate work there. It's a pity Ilya Prigogine is now in the States, though I've heard he may go back to Brussels."

"I think Fred would like me to go to Vancouver."

"Would you prefer that?"

"I'm not sure. Lately I've felt very mixed up. Fred too, I think."

"How so?"

"At some sort of introductory gathering he met a graduate student who was starting a Ph. D. in English. She had a skiing accident last year and is still suffering some persistent pain. According to Fred, this kept her quite socially isolated. But some fool medic gave her a morphine-like drug and Fred thinks she's addicted. He wrote that she could be very friendly then turn very nasty."

"So he's stopped seeing her?"

"Yes. But he was concerned she'd get depressed and possibly suicidal if he just said he didn't want to see her any more."

"What did he do, then?"

"From his letter, he played the jerk so she'd drop him. It seems to have worked, but he doesn't feel very satisfied."

"I've little knowledge of addiction, but I think it must be very hard to deal with, either as addict or someone who tries to help them."

"I guess there must have been at least someone in my classes who was an addict or on their way to becoming one. But I wasn't likely

to have associated with them. I'm pretty much against bad habits like smoking and drinking, though you and Mum showed me that the occasional drink can be a pleasant part of life. In the case of someone given a drug to help them that then comes to control their life, I wonder how I'd react."

"Fred may feel that there is nothing he can do to help, and the effort and its consequences can only harm him and possibly others. It's got to be very frustrating to have no way to help properly."

"I got the feeling that he also felt the girl was getting manipulative."

"That does seem to be part of addiction from what I read and hear. I hope it never touches your life, or that of anyone you love."

Saturday, December 19, 1964 – Anna

Dad's got a cold. Hope I don't get it. It'll be a drag on him having fun with Michelle. I'm assuming they have fun, of course. They're pretty discreet, but sometimes I see a wonderful contentment on Michelle's face. I think I know where that's coming from, though of course I can't be sure. Good for her and Dad.

I'd had a couple of good nights sleep after exams were over. I'd also called Marcia Thursday after my chat with Dad about the letter from Fred about his possibly drug-addicted ... friend. Nearly thought 'girlfriend'. Hmm. Anyway, good job I did call, as I'd almost forgotten it's Marcia birthday sometime this week. I can never remember the exact day, just that it's about a week before Christmas. But turns out it was the 17th, so I was able to wish her well. It's a big one too – 21 – there'll be a party tomorrow afternoon that her parents are throwing.

Dad decided it was lemon and honey and stay in bed. It was cool with a little snow in the forecast, but I decided to do a bit of Christmas shopping – well, window shopping, to blow some of the cobwebs out of my head from the past term. I looked in on Dad and he seemed to be asleep, so I crept out. It was just a bit below freezing and snowing a bit. Made things fit the season. I enjoyed my outing, and made a few appropriate purchases.

I got back just before 4. Already getting dark out. 2 days to the Solstice.

The phone rang and I heard Dad in the bedroom. As I came up to my room with the few small items I wanted to put away – out of sight of potential recipients – I heard him talking thickly. Must be Michelle.

Saturday, December 19, 1964 – Martin

I'd developed a cold. My head felt thick and nose blocked. After breakfast I phoned Michelle.

"Hi there."

"Hi yourself. How you doing? You sound a bit muffled."

"I've a cold, so I'm going to suggest we not get together today. Nor anywhere else until I'm over it."

"I'll miss you. I've started to get used to being together."

"Me too. Maybe we can chat on the phone later. I've been thinking a lot about us. You're pretty important to me."

"You too for me. I'll do my shopping and some chores and give you a call a bit after 3:30 if that suits."

"I'll try to look after myself and get some sleep before then. Bye."

* * *

The phone rang at a quarter to four. I was in my study, where I had a phone. I'd put it at the edge of the desk so I could reach it from the chair where I was reading C P Snow's "Corridors of Power" that had come out the previous year. I was still in pyjamas and dressing gown.

"Hello"

"How you doing now?" Michelle asked.

"Bit early to tell, but I've been taking it easy. Drinking lots of fluids, especially lemon and honey."

"Liquids are good, but it's likely rest that will be the cure."

"Hopefully by Christmas. I'm sort of looking forward to a big family occasion with your folks. Last year was pretty hard."

"Was Clara able to be part of anything? Or was she already too sick?"

"Annie was marvellous. We didn't try to make Christmas dinner. Clara didn't have much appetite anyway. Instead we bought a

whole lot of things we could take out of the cupboard or the fridge whenever she felt like it. Also so we had some things around if people came to see her. But because we knew it would be her last Christmas, there was always a sadness.”

“Martin, I hope this doesn’t sound weak, but I have to struggle to appreciate what you and Annie have been through. And less than a year ago, you had to say goodbye to Clara.”

“That’s something I wanted to talk about with you. Nothing dramatic.”

“Oh.”

“Oh dear. The ”Oh” isn’t what I wanted to hear.”

“Why not just say what you are thinking.” Michelle said.

“It’s usually me who says something like that. Well, when we did the Christmas cards we had that ... contretemps about my sending Margaret a card. And I mentioned we hadn’t really said ”I love you” to each other. Then we got distracted going out shopping.

So I wanted to actually make sure you heard me tell you that I love you, because it’s true and I am terribly grateful that you came into my life.”

“I can say the same. Martin. I love you, too. Yes, gratitude is the right word. Though I suppose that isn’t considered terribly romantic.”

“Do we – you and I – really care about popular conventions of love?”

“No. We’ll do things the way we think works for us.”

“Glad we’re on the same page.

However, the other side of things is, as we were saying just now, that Clara hasn’t been gone very long. For both me and, I suspect, Annie, the world is not quite turning as it should. Or it doesn’t feel to be doing so. My guess is that for you and Andrea things are still unsettled too, even if on the surface they look fine.”

“True, but what are you trying to say?”

“Nothing that I can frame as a decision or make a statement that things are a certain way. Simply that first off, I love you, and second, that I don’t want to lose you, but, and I guess there’s always a ”but”, that I don’t have a very clear idea where we go from here. That isn’t like the person I used to be. I’m basically a guy who believes in the partnership of marriage, so I feel we should be moving toward that. But turning Annie’s home base upside down –

and probably Andrea's too – doesn't seem right or appropriate just now."

"True. It might be a wrench just now. Martin. We've managed to build a pretty comfortable friendship – well, more than friendship – and the girls seem OK with us being ...er ... together. I get that feeling that we should be somehow making plans too. But we're doing pretty well, and I'm happy to take it a day at a time.

Do you think it might be a good idea to tell the girls that we'll not be making any big changes until Annie graduates? Or some such point like that."

"That's about a year and a half away. My "sensible married guy" feelings say that's too long and very bad for our – especially your – reputations. But I do admit that it is a reasonable suggestion."

"I can think of some less reasonable activities your cold is inhibiting."

Saturday evening, December 19, 1964 – Anna

Right after I came back from shopping I heard the phone ring and dad talking. As he rang off I heard him giggle. Michelle must have come up with a good riposte. They were clearly getting to really like each other. Good for them. I hoped it would work out.

I waited quietly in my room reading 'The Stone Angel' until I heard some snoring. Then I tiptoed downstairs and put a kettle on. After a bit I brought Dad some more hot lemon. He seemed better in spirit, even though he still was sniffing.

In the evening I went out to a party with Chandra. We're not doing the boyfriend / girlfriend bit. This is more a return engagement for the Halloween event.

The party was in a room in a church in Sandy Hill. An Indian students' group was running it. There was going to be food and music. Dad already said I could have the car, so I picked up Chandra. Like I said, we weren't boyfriend / girlfriend.

I think Chandra is finding it a bit lonely. He's 25, and in India would be married by now I think. But Canadian girls are a bit wary of the cultural differences. Some people would say it's racist, but I don't think it's that. More that Indian men are uncharted territory, and we don't want to end up running a curry kitchen. Oh I'm bad.

Anyway we got to the church hall and the smells are pretty good. We get some rice and nan bread on a paper plate and Chandra suggests which pots are what. I take a little of each, find I like the butter chicken and the dal, but the vindaloo is hot! So when I go back, I just take a bit of the ones I like.

As we're eating at trellis tables, a girl I know from my math class joins us. Suneeta is her name. My memory is still OK I guess. I introduce them and it's like watching the fuse start the Roman candle. Good job I'm not really Chandra's date, or I'd be pretty annoyed. But they both are stuck here over the holidays. Seems like they won't be quite so lonely. I'd actually thought of inviting Chandra to join us, but with all the changes in life we've been through this year, thought better of the idea. Actually it's turned out well that Chandra has met a girl he seems to like.

When Suneeta goes to the bathroom, I quietly ask Chandra if he wants a lift home or if he'd prefer to see if Suneeta needs an escort. Good thinking Annie. He's been wondering how to ask me, and definitely wants to walk her home. So I drive myself home.

Dad's asleep. Probably the best thing for his cold. It's only 9:30. I make myself some tea, get into my PJ's and pick up Margaret Lawrence again.

Sunday evening, December 20, 1964 – Anna

Dad was still taking it easy with his cold. He'd even decided not to go to work tomorrow and already phoned Nicole to let her know.

This afternoon was Marcia's 21st birthday party. Her folks made a big fuss about it. Constantine was there. Jane and Roland and a bunch of other folks as well as a number of aunts and uncles and cousins. I gave up after a bit trying to keep the names straight.

Given my finances, I had to be a bit inventive with a present. I got Marcia a corkscrew of the type I'd seen in restaurants, and had it engraved 'To Marcia, for emergencies and other events. Annie.' And made a little pouch for it so it could be hung on a hook or belt.

Given all the people, and family around, it seemed a bit like a home and school gathering. I made sure to stay for the cake and singing Happy Birthday, then walked home.

Thursday evening, December 24, 1964 – Martin

Michelle, Annie and I went to the Christmas Eve service that started at 11:30, though we wanted to get there about 10:30 to get good seats and enjoy the "quiet hour" that was suggested.

We were ready to go by 10:15. With the rain, we took the car but still had to park some distance from St. James. Under umbrellas, we made our way into the church. Someone had sensibly set up some racks for umbrellas where galoshes were usually placed.

I remembered the same day 17 years before. In fact, my mind wandered during the service, back to that first time. Then to last year, when we had stayed home with Clara. Finally to this year. I looked to my left and felt a comforting warm emotion as I glanced at Michelle. Then a moment of pride and happiness as I looked briefly at Annie.

Suddenly the congregation were singing "O Come All Ye Faithful", which was the last hymn for the service. I chided himself – I always seemed to daydream through church. Perhaps I should call it meditation!

As we shuffled out of the service, there were pro-forma greetings with other parishioners. The minister was at another exit. We had met Rev. H. Donald Joyce on a previous occasion, but really only for a handshake and hello.

It was still raining on and off. We got to the car and put the umbrellas carefully on the floor of the back seat on the side where Annie was not sitting. Not very Christmas like.

Fortunately, things didn't go as late as the Catholic midnight mass and the reveillon, but it was still 1:30 before Michelle was curled up in my arms. We had shared a late but light supper with Annie around 9. On our return from church, Michelle and I had a cup of cocoa, but Annie was feeling tired and went up right away. Present opening could and would wait until morning. Both Michelle and I were still awkward about spending the night together when Annie was home, but she had told us again a few days earlier "not to be silly".

After the cocoa, Michelle had whispered

"Let's take a quick bath, in case, you know ..."

"Of course, with enthusiasm!"

However, perhaps because of the mildness of the day – it was

above freezing and there had been a lot of rain – we had not put up the thermostat, so had to hasten to dry off and dive under the covers, albeit with no pyjamas.

“Ooh. It’s chilly.” Michelle said.

“We came out of the warm bath. Lets hope we warm up in a minute.”

“I hope so. The cold seems to make this shrink.” Michelle had her hand round my penis.

“Your hand feels nice.”

“I know where this would be warmer. Inside it’s own special Christmas stocking.”

“Naughty. But nice. Santa will have you on both lists.”

The thought made me start to get hard, and I rolled her on top of me. With her so small, this was easy. She wriggled until she could feel me against her entrance and then pushed back so I was partially inside her. I pushed inside a bit and started to gently thrust.

“No. Don’t move. I just want to lie together like this. It feels so special.”

“I may have to move a bit to keep hard.”

“OK, but only as much as necessary. And I don’t mind if we fall asleep and you come out.” She stretched to kiss me and I kissed her back.

“I truly hope you feel loved, Michelle. I’ve been realizing more and more that I love you.”

“It’s mutual. I love you too, and in a way I never felt for Bryan.”

“For me, the quality of the feelings I have for you and felt for Clara are pretty much the same. I hope that isn’t a disappointment.”

“No. I think I realize you had a good marriage and a strong love. I think I’m saying Bryan and I didn’t have that.”

“But you are very different from Clara. I couldn’t do this with her.”

“No?”

“We could do it in this position, but she couldn’t just lie on me without my getting tired. You’re light enough that you could even fall asleep on me. It’s a bit more difficult for us to mouth to mouth kiss, but I kind of like just having you here, me inside.

And if I were just barely inside, like now so we can kiss if we try, I’d be staring at her chest above her breasts.”

“Hmm. I’d not thought of that. Of course, she had breasts for you to kiss.”

“Still sensitive about that. I like kissing yours, even though they’re small. Perhaps because they’re small.”

“I’ll probably always be a bit dissatisfied with my breasts. I’ve even wondered if I should look into those new implants that were reported. That Texas woman seems to really like her new breasts.”

“Surely there’s a risk of infection, poor placement, or even nerve damage so they only look good but aren’t sensitive to touch any more. You know your tits are a lot more responsive than Clara’s seemed to be.”

“Really.”

“I think so. And perhaps I shouldn’t say it, but last Christmas she only had one breast.”

“Oh. Martin. I feel such a heel for complaining.”

“You didn’t know. But I remember the scar and her trying to get used to being lopsided, as well as sick a lot of the time from radiation treatment. Those memories are hard to erase, and I think I needed to tell you about them. Every so often the memory pops up and I feel a small chill. You help that go away. Keeping quiet would only put a space between us.”

“I still feel stupid.”

“Don’t. Kiss me and let me caress you.” I put my hands on her behind and gently squeezed while she stretched up to kiss me. “That better?”

“Yes. Thanks. Let’s turn out the light. Can you reach it without me falling off?”

“Just.”

I re-adjusted under her and put my arms round her. We lay quietly together, but both eventually drifted off. About an hour later, Michelle slid off. I vaguely remember this, but did not truly wake up.

Christmas Day, Friday, December 25, 1964 — Anna

It had been raining yesterday, and now there was more rain on Christmas Day. Most unlike Ottawa for Christmas.

Dad and Michelle woke sometime after 9. I heard them talking quietly so they wouldn't wake me, so I got up and made sure they could hear me moving about in the kitchen. They came down in PJs and dressing gowns. Almost like a real married couple. Oh. I'd better bite my tongue.

I announced "There's coffee, and I cut the Stolle I bought at the bakery. It's got almond stuffing. I know it's German, but Mum used to like to have it on Christmas Day."

"I've never had it." Michelle said. "But I strongly approve of doing things like this as a way of remembering." Here we go with inventing traditions.

She took a bite. "It's nice. Good for you Annie. You haven't said a word Martin."

"Too busy taking a bite of this and having some coffee. Shall we open our presents now or wait until Andrea's here?"

"Oh. Now." Michelle and I said together.

Dad went over to the tree and brought back the few parcels.

"Michelle and I got you this, Annie."

The package was just over a foot long and about 4" wide and an inch thick. I carefully took off the wrapping – Mum got me to be careful and reuse stuff – then I realized what it was.

"Wow. A Novo Duplex slide rule. Thank you both. This will serve me well in my studies and later. And one of those drafting pencils to go with it."

I gave Dad a big hug and kissed him on the cheek. Then the same to Michelle. I'm always afraid I'll break her. I gave them my presents for them.

"I've got these for you. I'm afraid my budget was a bit tight, but I've added some personal effort." I'd got some leather key chain holders, and made embroidered tags with their names.

"I figure you two will have to deal with keys to one or more houses. Hope I'm not presuming too much." I said.

"Not at all Annie. We were talking the other day about the awkwardness of dealing with two houses. But we're thinking – and we need to tell Andrea too – that we should keep both houses for now, until you graduate anyway, so there's not so much change and disruption for the two of you." Michelle explained.

"But what about the inconvenience for you both?" I countered.

"We'll survive." Michelle said. "And maybe it's better to have

a chance so we can figure out how we want to live. It's been a very busy time for us all, and it can be good to have some things that aren't changing while we get used to those that are."

"Good thinking. Though I think you make a good pair. You said you haven't told Andrea yet."

"No. This afternoon perhaps, or maybe tomorrow when we're all here."

"We can have bacon and egg breakfast together. I'll dragoon Andrea into helping, and you two can be lazy and immoral until we call you down to eat."

"Who are you calling lazy and immoral, daughter?" Dad challenged. "You don't show up for church very frequently."

"Oh. You both know I didn't mean that you are lazy or immoral."

"We know." Michelle said.

"And I even came to church with you last night."

"Michelle and I haven't exchanged gifts. Should we should wait until Andrea is here?" Dad said.

"Good idea." Michelle said, already half way up the stairs to get a shower and dress.

* * *

Nobody hurried and it was about 11:30 before we all drifted into the living room. I had a book I was sort of reading, Dad was responding to some letters and cards, and Michelle was sipping a cup of coffee.

"It seems odd that there was no daytime service for Christmas." Michelle said.

"I did notice some for the Catholic churches, so that's probably why you sense that." Dad replied. He didn't say where he'd noticed, but I think I saw some notices on the religion page in the Citizen.

"Yes. Though honestly, we mostly went at midnight then stayed up with the reveillon until 4 or 5 in the morning. The daytime services were for families with old people or infants." Michelle said, then asked, "Are we going to bother with lunch?"

"I'd not want to spoil my appetite, but I think Charlotte said we would not eat until 7." Dad replied.

"Maybe a slice of tourtiere?" I said, playing temptress. I knew Dad loved it. "I know Michelle put one in the fridge yesterday."

“Good idea. And a mandarin orange or two.” Dad added.

Around 1:15, Bryan and Rachel dropped off Andrea. Rachel brought her to the door, forestalling an invite for a drink by saying “We won’t stop. It’s too messy today and I’ve the turkey in the oven.”

“A merry Christmas in any event.” Dad said.

“Hi Rachel, Andrea, merry Christmas.” Michelle called out.

“Merry Christmas Mum. Martin, Annie. I’ve brought your presents.” This from Andrea.

“Yes. Come in and unwrap yours from us.” I said.

We all gathered in the living room.

“This one’s from Martin and I.” Michelle said.

“And this one’s from me – pretty obvious what it is.” I said, handing over the wrapped book.

“Ooo. Mum, Martin. It’s a record player! That’s good – Bryan and Rachel and the boys gave me records. I was wondering how I’d play them.”

“Well. We’d better not hear too much noise from your room.” Michelle cautioned.

“I’ll play them quietly.”

“Oh. The book is the Stone Angel. I’ve heard it’s good. A friend said she never would have thought a book about a 90 year old lady would have been interesting.”

“I think you’ll like it.” I said.

“Have you read it?” Andrea responded.

“Oops. Well I read it before I wrapped it up. Guess that’s a no-no.”

“I don’t mind. It means we can talk about it when I’ve read it. That’s what’s nice about books and things you can share. Though some people won’t do that, I suppose. I think sharing the ideas is better than the actual book itself.”

“That’s a nice sentiment, Andrea.” Dad joined in. Whew. Glad she does feel that way. That could have put the kibosh on Christmas Day.

“Here’s my present for Annie, and this one’s for Martin. I already gave Mum her apron yesterday so she could use it here and also have one for the other house.”

She’d monogrammed a lab-coat for me and made a carpenter’s belt for Dad. They were good presents. I really appreciated mine

and told Andrea so. Dad, too, was clearly pleased with his present.

"What did you get Mum?" Andrea asked Dad, changing the subject.

"We haven't exchanged gifts yet. We thought we'd wait until you were here. But here's my present for Michelle." Dad said.

He handed Michelle a package about the size of a book. She unwrapped the paper, and then the cardboard box.

"Oh. A small purse. It's really nice leather. With a long shoulder strap.

There's several pockets too. Oh. And a card.

"To Michelle, hoping you'll be able to use this when travelling with me.

Love, Martin'

Thank you Martin. I do hope I can travel with you. But why that message about a purse?"

"If you look, I've had the leather shop add a belt loop for security. It's so you can have your hands free and not worry so much about your purse being stolen. And there is space for passport and traveller's cheques and glasses. It's not very big, but that's so it rides on your belt comfortably."

"You're serious about us travelling together?"

"Of course. It would be lovely to show you the places I used to frequent in England, and some of the places I've been in Europe."

"Guess you guys are getting serious." I commented. Like it wasn't totally as obvious as the Peace Tower.

"Surely that isn't news?" Dad replied. "We've been telling you girls that we like to be together, just that we want to make sure your lives aren't disrupted by how we work things out."

"You've been good about making us feel important." Andrea said. "It has been quite a year or so. And just today, Dad gave Rachel an engagement ring. I think that was why she didn't want to come in. She didn't want to let that take the spotlight."

"Are you OK with that?" Michelle asked rather seriously.

"Yeah. It was pretty obvious it was coming. And I think Rachel knows how to keep Dad in line. I don't mean that as a criticism of you, Mum. Just maybe she knows his history and has some experiences of her own, so she tells him and makes him think about what he's doing. Also I think he realizes he messed up pretty badly with you, and mostly his fault."

“Actually, I’ve started to suspect as much.” Michelle replied. “I don’t think I really knew Bryan as well as well as I should when we married. We didn’t talk much about our attitudes to life. I like that about Martin. And we’ve been jabbering on so much, I’ve not given him his present from me.”

She passed over a quite large wrapped box. Dad took off the paper carefully – a habit I’d ‘inherited’ from him and Mum from the War years to allow its reuse. Opening the box he found a shallow tray with a bean bag underneath.

“A lap tray!”

“Yes. I saw someone using one in the hospital when I ... well you know. And watching you working in your armchair, I thought it would be good if you had a way to be able to write, especially with the fountain pen you like. And ...”

Dad cut her off by giving her a big kiss. I started clapping and Andrea joined in.

“I hope that says thank you.” Dad said as he released her. “How about a snack, then we go to ... Charlotte and Bernard’s. I was going to say Mr and Mrs Lacroix, but that feels odd too.”

“I’ve got the tourtiere heating, and a kettle keeping warm for tea,” I said.

“Good for you.” complimented Michelle. “And I approve tea, though later I want to make a nice toast to the four of us. I’m so glad we can be together like this.”

I think Dad noticed a tear, because he passed her a tissue.

“I’m happy about us too,” he said.

“Yeah. It’s nice.” Andrea said.

“Better eat the pie before we all get emotional.” I was fighting to keep my composure too.

Late evening, Christmas Day, December 25, 1964

– Michelle

Christmas night. I was lying in Martin’s arms at his house. Andrea was in the guest room. She’d been playing some of her records but the music had stopped a few minutes ago.

“Thank you for a nice day, and for the lap tray.” Martin said quietly.

"Thank you too. I hadn't thought much about travelling together, but I think that would be really nice."

"Not everyone can travel well together. I hope we can."

"Hmm. It would be awful if we didn't. But I think we'll be OK. I like that purse."

"I hope it's big enough."

"It'll force me to be efficient and not just toss everything in. But do you think we'll need to worry about security?"

"Did I tell you about the time I got on the train? It was after my visit in 1947 to see Clara and I was going back to Oxford for a few weeks to arrange everything so we could get married. When I got on the train at Gent St. Pieter's, this fellow in the compartment woke up as I and a woman passenger entered, and he discovered his documents were gone. He seemed to think we'd taken them, but the train agent realized pretty quickly that the woman and I had just got on, and moreover were travelling independently. Still, you don't want to lose your passport or money, and the purse is a bit more secure than the typical handbag."

"Especially if I put it on a belt. Maybe I'll wear slacks for travel."

"Yes. Good idea, though some churches want women to be "properly dressed" – in quotation marks."

"We'll work it out." I said.

"Actually, I wasn't sure if I shouldn't have got you something more traditional as a present. Some jewellery perhaps. But then the only thing really suitable is what Bryan got Rachel. I didn't think we were quite ready for that, at least as a public gesture."

"And we agreed \$10. But I think you got me the right present. I wondered too if the lap-tray was not too practical. But I think you and I treasure things we can use rather than the baubles. Things you use regularly remind you of the person who gave them."

"I'll be happiest if we get an engagement ring together when the time comes. I've still got Bryan's, and really I have to keep it in my jewellery box. Maybe we can trade it in if you don't think that is too crass."

"No I still have Clara's ring. It was one of those from the kit-bags of my dead colleagues. But I think I'll give that to Annie and she can have it made into something else like a pendant. But with your ring, I suspect you wouldn't want to give it to Andrea, and if it has no emotional value, or creates negative feelings, you should get the

money for it. But it is your money. We'll have to start talking more about those matters soon."

"Yes. Boring but necessary."

"Very un-boring if you get it wrong and don't have enough money."

"That too. Let's talk more about travel – much more fun."

"Well, I was going to suggest we think of backpacks. They are fairly common among some Germans, but not so much for other travellers. However, they are much more practical on trains and buses or walking."

"We'll have to go shopping. Of course, you know I might need a whole new wardrobe."

"I think I'm happiest when you've no clothes at all."

"Naughty! But do you think it's warm enough for me to take off my nightie?"

"I think I know how to keep you warm."

Saturday, December 26, 1964 – Anna

We were up early on Boxing Day. It was still mild and wet, but forecast colder later, but no snow. Penny, Joe and troops were coming for a mid-day dinner. They'd need two cars, but Des had one now so he could get to his plumbing work. The two older children came with him and Sharon, and the younger pair with Joe and Penny. Joe had to preach on Sunday morning, and they'd have to negotiate roads that could be slippery.

Both cars arrived almost in tandem just before 10.

"We got up early." Penny explained.

"With your crew, I suspect much earlier than I dare to imagine." Dad responded.

"Come in and have a hot toddy and we'll let the kids tear open some presents." Michelle said.

I'd found books appropriate to all the children. Dad had been at Sears and seen a handy socket set in the Craftsman brand for Des.

"Thanks Uncle Martin, Annie. These are great. One of the plumbers I work with has taken his back for a replacement twice and they never ask any questions."

"Does he put a pipe over the handle to get more leverage sometimes?" Dad asked knowingly.

“Not that he’ll admit to, but I think that’s how he breaks them. But they usually don’t break and they let you undo some really rusted in nuts and bolts.”

“Joe, I hope we’re not corrupting the minister, but I know you like an occasional sniff of Scotch.”

Dad had bought a bottle of Johnny Walker Red and labelled it from me, Michelle, Andrea and himself. It was something that would not be on the shopping list in the Baker family.

“You’ll spoil him,” Penny said, “but I don’t think you’ll corrupt him.” She gave her husband - who hadn’t said a word but was smiling broadly - a kiss. David and Gloria both made a face.

Michelle said, “Penny, we struggled with getting you something practical versus something just for you. We compromised with a new sewing box, since I saw yours almost falling apart, but we put a few bits and pieces inside.”

“Ooh. Bubble bath. And ... ”

“Yes. Bubble bath and stuff just for YOU.” Michelle intervened so Penny would not reveal that there was also some dark chocolate, else the children might raid it.

There’d been a quiet agreement in advance that Andrea and Penny’s family would not exchange gifts, but the whole family, including Des and Sharon had built a gingerbread house for our household. The time and effort involved was obvious, and there was a fairly long explanation of who did what.

“Almost a shame to eat it.” Michelle said.

“But do eat it.” Penny said. “There’s too much good stuff in it to waste.”

“Sharon, this is for you. Pretty obvious that it’s a book, but I hope you like it. We never quite learned if you liked reading.” I said, handing her the little parcel.

“Oh. I do like to read. But I’m often busy. And this is collected stories by Somerset Maugham.”

“Only one volume, I’m afraid, but it includes ‘Rain’ that we talked about one time.”

“Thanks Annie – and Martin and Michelle and Andrea too. I think this has been the best Christmas I can remember.”

“Is that a ring on your finger.” I gasped, suddenly seeing it.

“Yes. Des gave it to me yesterday. So now we have to arrange a wedding.”

“Congratulations.” Dad jumped in. “I’d better pour those tod-dies. Penny, I’ve made it with honey and lemon and spices, but the whiskey will be added after, so the kids can all join in. Let’s all get one and toast both Christmas and Des and Sharon.”

There was some bustling about, and everyone eventually got a cup or glass – the numbers meant that the crockery cupboard was almost bare.

“Des and Sharon. May this and many other Christmases be happy for them.” Dad toasted.

“Des and Sharon,” we all shouted.

“Now we’re eating at One o’clock.” Michelle said. “You can each of you decide what you want to do until then, except Andrea and Annie are going to help me at 12:30 so everything is ready on time. And Martin is in charge of drinks.”

“And we don’t want to hear any fighting or angry words. It’s Christmas.” Penny admonished.

“You heard Mum. Have fun but behave yourselves.” Joe spoke for the first time.

Gloria and David decided they wanted to read their books. Andrea and Joan and I went upstairs to see if Joan wanted any of Mum’s shoes and to look at Andrea’s new phonograph. Penny disappeared into the kitchen with Michelle. Beans were cooking in the oven.

Boxing Day, December 26, 1964 – Michelle

After the toast to Sharon and Des, Penny and I went into the kitchen to make sure lunch was taken care of.

“That was well-organized Michelle.” Penny said.

“Actually, I thought how you would do it. I hope I’m not being too bossy with Martin. After all, we’re not married.”

“Yet!” Penny said.

“We don’t want to upset the girls’ lives. We’ve all had a pretty upsetting year or so.”

“True, but it’s obvious you care about each other.”

“That’s an understatement, at least on my side.”

“Martin doesn’t do what he doesn’t want to do. He’ll be polite, but he won’t suffer in silence.”

“That’s good to know, and I think I did realize that. We’re still getting to know each other.”

“Unless you got up early, you were here last night. I hope the kids don’t ask awkward questions.”

“Oh. Sorry. Hadn’t thought of that. Annie and Andrea have been ... well, they’ve told us that they are comfortable with us sharing the bedroom and all the back and forth between houses is a nuisance. It’s not that we don’t want to be a couple, just we want to work things out and not be a cause of a lot of disruption, both for the girls and for ourselves as we adjust to things.”

“That makes sense, but don’t let my United Church ladies hear me say it. You seem happy together and comfortable with each other.”

“Martin is special that way.”

“You’re right. He was able to bring Clara out and make her comfortable in what was for her a very strange land. Oh. Maybe I shouldn’t talk about her.”

“Everyone is so sensitive! You’ll have seen we set up a wall of photos. It was a bit disconcerting in the bedroom when ... well, in the bedroom.”

Penny laughed.

“Been there myself with David’s photo.”

I laughed too.

“It’s good to know I’m not alone. And I want Martin and Annie to remember Clara, in particular as she was and not as some sort of Saint Clara I could never measure up to.”

“Clara was real enough, and like us all had her faults. But she was good for Martin. I really liked her – came to love her. I hope you and I find some of that comfort too.”

“Thanks for that. Now help me check these beans. The pots are big enough that there’s a danger of burning oneself on the side of the oven or the other pot.”

“Here. I’ll dampen a couple of tea towels and we’ll wrap the arms of the person who’ll do the lifting. Getting a burn is not a good Christmas memory.”

With wrapped arms and oven mitts, I took out the two large bean pots and put them on wooden boards I’d had Martin place on the counter. I took off the lids to stir the beans.

“Wow. Those smell good.” Penny exclaimed.

“La recette de grand-maman.”

“Bien sur!”

“We’ll have bread with them. I should have baked, but Christmas is too busy. And there’s a big salad. I’ve got some whole wheat rolls, some crusty rolls if they’ve kept since Thursday, and both brown and white sliced sandwich bread in case someone prefers that.”

“The kids might – it takes them a while to learn what’s good. But if there’s a toaster, that would likely make them happiest with the sliced bread and leave the good rolls for the adults.”

“And fewer crumbs.”

“Why do we know that too well?”

Boxing Day, December 26, 1964 – Martin

After the hubbub of everyone arriving and the toast to Des and Sharon, I was sitting in the living room with them and Joe, while Michael sat at the dining room table colouring using a book and crayons he’d got as a Christmas present. The two readers, Gloria and David, were lying on the carpet near the electric fire.

“Have you set a date yet?” I asked Des and Sharon.

“Not quite,” Des replied. “We’d like it to be in about a month if we can.”

“No long engagement then?” I responded.

“If we’re going to make a go of things, we might as well start now.” Sharon answered. “I’m terrifically grateful for the love and generosity at the Bakers’, and they’ve got me on my feet again. In the process, I’ve realized what a good man Des is, and I’ve come to love him and I think I can be part of the dream he has to have a recording studio. But I want to be in at the start, and that’s now.”

“As you see, our Sharon has found her voice,” Joe chuckled. “And don’t think I’m making fun of you, girl. You spoke well. The only obstacles are practical ones of place, time and people.”

“Will you invite your family?” I asked, knowing it was a loaded question.

“Allen, yes. Not Mum and Dad. And we don’t know yet if Allen could come. He’d have to fly and that’s expensive, or we’d need to wait until later in the year. I think I’m willing to wait so he can give me away. So that’s the hold-up on the date.”

"I wish you well and we'll try to be there – assuming we're invited of course."

"You're at the top of our list, Uncle Martin. You and Annie. You made this possible. I thought last summer I was deep in the manure pile until you both helped find the way forward."

"Given it's still mild and drying up, do you younger folks want to go for a walk and let Martin and I reminisce a little." Joe suggested.

Sharon realized Joe wanted some private time with me. "Come on you carpet-logs. Time to get a little exercise. Let's go see if the river has come unfrozen with the rain down at Billings Bridge."

There was some grumbling and moaning, then a general clomp and clamour. Annie joined the party along with girls upstairs and they all got dressed and trooped out.

"Another toddy Joe?"

"I'd love one. But easy on the whiskey. Got to drive later."

"No problem, I'll let you add your own measure. I hate folk trying to ply me with drink. I like it in moderation. In fact I like it very much, including the mild glow it can bring. But I hate to get drunk or even close."

"I'm about the same. See too much of the harm of overdoing it. But I'm not sure that it's a matter of will or choice for some people."

"No. Seems to be they don't enjoy it. Rather it consumes them. Fortunately, it doesn't appear to be an issue in our families as far as I know."

"On other matters, how are you doing, Martin." Joe asked softly.

"Not so bad. It's all a bit new to me. And to Michelle. At least I'm assuming that's what you are asking about."

"Yes. She seems good for you and vice-versa."

"We're trying to figure out how to proceed. There's the girls to consider. So we've tentatively decided not to sell our houses until Annie graduates next year, unless she decides to leave home sooner."

"Is that a possibility?"

"She has a sort-of boyfriend who moved to UBC. But I think they both want to put their education first. Annie has a pretty careful head on her shoulders."

"Like her Mum. Sorry. I didn't mean to remind you."

"No problem. Michelle and Annie and I have decided to keep Clara as part of our vocabulary. You can see the photos in the

dining room, And, yes, Annie does share that deep sensibility that Clara had. I think she also has a strong ability to bring it out in others, which is a gift. Though she's not all ice and calculation."

"She certainly made sure we had to listen to Des about Sharon. I was ready to read the Riot Act, and truthfully it would not have done any good and possibly a lot of harm. And you know, she did it simply by being there and making it awkward not to listen and think about the best way to proceed.

Going back to Michelle, it looks like you'll eventually end up together?" It was half a statement, half a question.

"That seems to be where we're going. I'm very comfortable with her, and I think she is with me. With under a year since we both lost partners in different ways, we don't think we should rush to the altar, but we do like to be together. Want very much to be together."

"I hope the kids don't ask when she and Andrea got here this morning."

"We should have planned a cover story I suppose. We started out being very proper and going home at night, but the girls told us they knew what was going on and to stop being silly. I know as a minister you have to raise your eyebrows at that ..."

"Not in private when the people obviously are trying to find their way. And even the Catholics say the marriage sacrament is made by the couple. But maybe if the young ones ask, you could say Michelle was here in time to make breakfast."

"What was that about being here in time to make breakfast?" Michelle had just come in carrying some nuts and cheese and crackers. Penny followed with a coffee tray.

"We were concocting a cover story for the junior crowd to disguise the fact you spent the night in a house with 3 bedrooms and 4 occupants." I replied.

"Penny and I noted the same potential problem. OK. I got here in time to help make breakfast."

"They may not ask. Kids pick up on discord, and you two are easy with each other," Penny said. "I sincerely hope things work out well for you both."

As it turned out, Penny had it right, and there were no awkward questions. The day moved forward easily, if somewhat noisily. The Bakers left at about 4:30 to be sure to have plenty of time if the

roads turned slippery, or rather more slippery than expected. And they worked out a number of points where they would make sure they were in contact, but not necessarily follow each other. That way if one got into difficulty, the other would come back if necessary to help or fetch assistance.

After they left, I asked if anyone needed any supper. Michelle replied "There's some leftover sliced turkey Maman gave us, and plenty of bread and things. I suggest we let everyone make their own. The kitchen is clear – Penny made sure all hands to the pump to get the dishes done and everything tidied. It was actually an easy day."

"Sounds good to me. How about you girls?"

"I think I'm going to learn how to use my new slide rule if that won't seem antisocial," Annie said.

"I want to start The Stone Angel." Andrea chimed in.

"I'd like a cuddle in front of the TV, please."

"Good for you, Mum."

"Thanks. I was a bit afraid I'd embarrass you by asking."

"No. I saw Gloria and David pull a face when Penny kissed Joe. But it wasn't mushy. It was ... well, nice. And they've been married for ages and have all those kids."

"I agree," Annie said. "It's nice to see folk still show affection. They obviously still love each other. That was something important to me with Mum and Dad – it gave me a sense of security – and I hope you'll find it with him too Michelle. In fact, I know I want it for myself too when the time comes."

"Thanks to both of you." Michelle said. "I've been kind of worried that showing affection for Martin could be upsetting for one or both of you, and then we'd have unhappiness in the house."

Annie suggested "I'm going up to my room. Andrea, if you want to bring your record player in there, you can read on the bed and I can work on my slide rule while we play some records. When we get hungry, we can come down and graze."

"Great idea! Thanks Annie."

I put the TV on quietly and Michelle and I sat on the sofa together. After about 10 minutes, however, we decided on a record and I put on some Mendelssohn. The electric fire was still on, and the room was cosy. When I came back to the sofa, Michelle put some cushions at one end and told me to lie down on my side. She

spooned in against me.

"I'd never have been able to do this with Clara."

"Why not?"

"You're so small, you fit. Hardly any other women would."

"Oh. Yes. I forget. I only have my own size to relate to."

"Michelle, I was starting to think more about how we ... well, evolve our situation."

"That's a funny way to put it."

"Well, I don't mean personally. I'm starting to think maybe we're too cautious in getting engaged or married."

"Is that a proposal?"

"Do we need one?" I asked.

"I suppose not. I see myself with you in the future. It's just a matter of how we get there."

"My thoughts exactly."

"And."

"Actually I wasn't thinking of when and where we say "I do". More about houses and such."

"Well, don't keep it a secret."

"I was wondering about your house and cottage plan. If you sell the cottage, you and I have 2 houses and no cottage. It would be better to have 1 house and 1 cottage, providing that works for the 4 of us."

"And Bryan doesn't make a fuss."

"You said, I think, that he gets the first \$7500. I could make an offer of that amount."

"I hadn't thought of that. And assuming we stay together, we still have the cottage and the entirely fortuitous Sunfish."

We both giggled.

"It would be worth putting in a bathroom and winterizing it, or at least making it possible to occupy for a while in winter. It's not so far from town and it's on the River."

"Of course, we'd then have 2 houses and a cottage in the short term. Too much property to look after." Michelle was being practical.

"We can sell one of the houses, or sell both and get another. We've talked about that before."

"Do you have attachments to this house, Martin?"

“It belonged to my grandparents. Penny lived here after we moved to England, and after David was killed. Clara and I had our first Canadian Christmas here. So there are some memories. But I’m not sure that those are so much about the house itself. Some photos and a few things with some memories might be enough. If we are to keep this house or yours, the decision should be made together and based on what we need and what we want together. Not forced by a misplaced form of nostalgia.”

“Good thinking. Should we involve the girls?”

“Of course. I suspect they are not too concerned as long as their lives are not made uncomfortable or inconvenient by the changes. And I think they want to feel involved and that we listen to them. I may be wrong and Annie might be more attached than that, but I don’t think so. In any case the girls offer us extra viewpoints and eyes on the possibilities.”

“Maybe we can talk over breakfast in the morning. Right now I’m feeling very comfortable and dozy.” Michelle said.

Evening, Boxing Day, December 26, 1964 – Anna

Andrea was doing well – I could hear some classical music from the living room hi-fi over her records, which were mostly pop music and some folk stuff.

When Andrea and I came down to get a warm drink and a snack we discovered Michelle and Dad asleep together on the sofa, spooned together.

“Sshh. Better not wake them.” I said.

“They look really peaceful together. I never saw Dad like that with Mum.”

“My Mum was a little too tall to fit on the sofa like that. But I’ve seen them comfortable together. It’s so nice and reassuring.”

“Let’s get our stuff and go back up.” Andrea concluded.

Sunday, December 27, 1964 – Anna

“What time did you two come to bed?” I asked at breakfast.

“About 11:30. Sort of ‘wake up and go to bed’.” Michelle answered.

“Well, you looked really peaceful together.” Andrea said. “We thought it was nice.”

“What time should I take you over to Rachel’s house?” Dad asked. Andrea was going back there for two nights.

“We said after church. Is that OK?”

“Yes, I’ll run you over. Your Mum’s car’s back at your house.”

Michelle joined in, “Speaking of houses. Martin and I were talking about them last night. We’ve currently two houses and a cottage, and Martin thought it might be nice to keep the cottage and either sell one of the houses, or else both and buy a new one, or at least new to us. We wondered if either of you girls would be upset about that. You know – memories and such.”

Andrea said “I like our house, but it doesn’t have anything that I’d miss as long as the new one is nice. And I’d be OK here as long as I had my own room, which I sort of have already here. And this house has the powder room down here. In our place there’d be more traffic to the bathroom.”

I followed: “I guess there are some memories here, but if we took some good photos and kept some of the furniture and things – nothing huge and bulky of course – I’d be OK. In any event, I’ll be leaving home in the next year or so, so no matter what happens, I really shouldn’t have too much to say.”

“We’d still want to avoid ... I suppose distress is the word.” Michelle said. “But Martin said almost the same thing about his attachment to this house. For myself, I don’t have great memories in the house I own now, and I could manage here, though it might be nice to do something fresh together. Also have a bit more space. Martin should have an office and maybe a workshop, and I’d like a place to do sewing and things, and a proper guest suite would be nice. With three women, another full bathroom or an en-suite to the master bedroom would avoid congestion in the mornings too.”

“Ah. Already spending all my money.” Dad joked as he bent over to kiss her. He’d been fetching the coffee pot so was standing behind her.

“In any event, it seems like we have the start of a plan.” he continued. “How about we start to prepare Michelle’s house for sale so it can go on the market in mid to late March, and we work out how we could live here while we look for a new place? It would be good to have one sale settled and the money in the bank before we

buy. And there's the matter of seeing if Bryan is amenable to us paying him his share for the cottage."

"Do you know how much that will be? Or is that an awkward question?" I asked.

"No. We've agreed he gets the first \$7500 of it's sale price, assuming it fetches that or more." Michelle answered. "So I don't think that's likely an issue if we pay him that amount. However, Andrea, could you keep quiet about this until I talk to your Dad. In fact, I'll give you a note for him this morning to see what he thinks. I'll do that as soon as I've finished my coffee."

"You know, we still have the awkward matter of 'us'." Dad said.

"What do you mean?" Michelle responded.

"Well, we'll be living together, and no cover story for the likes of the Baker children."

"Or the nuns," said Andrea.

"Or the nosey neighbours," I added.

"Usually having to get married would mean Michelle was in the family way. But I guess we are all in the family way in how we discuss things like this." Dad observed. "So, Michelle, when are you going to let me make an honest woman of you?"

"If we get a chance, let's ask the minister after church today." She had already jumped up and thrown her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"OK. Are you girls fine with that?" Dad asked.

"Yawn. It took you long enough." I mugged.

"Yes. We've known for weeks." Andrea agreed. "But I thought that was really a nice way to say things about all of us 'in the family way'. I really like you letting me be part of everything. And it will be neat to keep the cottage."

"Don't build too many castles in the air." Dad cautioned. "We've a lot of things to work out, and there may be some unexpected bumps along the road."

"Yes. But you guys will find a way to get round them."

Sunday, December 27, 1964 – Martin

As it turned out, we didn't get to talk to the minister that day. I dropped Michelle off at her house after church so she could get fresh

clothes, then Annie at home, and Andrea at Rachel's. I came home and freshened up, then called out

"Annie, do you want any lunch before we go to Jim Sinclair's?"

"Sure, but just a small sandwich. I think cheese and lettuce and some tea."

I made the sandwiches, and while the kettle boiled phoned Michelle.

"Shall Annie and I pick you up a bit after 2? Jim's invite is for 2:30 and he lives out near Carlingwood."

"OK. You like to be on time."

"Probably too much so. Habit from the RAF perhaps. But yes."

"See you then. Love you."

"You too. Bye."

We got near the Sinclair's house in good time, so drove round the streets nearby. The neighbourhood was relatively new, south of Carling and a bit east of the shopping center.

"Some of these houses might be worth looking at for us." I commented. "What do you ladies think?"

"There seem to be one or two for sale. We should look into them to get ideas." Michelle answered.

"Can I come too? I should learn what to look for in real-estate." Annie asked.

"Of course. You might note the mouse-holes or the mildew or such. Extra eyes are always good." I said. "And while we won't let you overrule our opinion, we will value yours."

"Thanks Dad. I think you're safe to show up now."

The gathering at Jim's house was for friends of the Sinclairs.

"Welcome Martin, Annie." Jim said. "Haven't seen Annie for about 4 years."

"This is Michelle." I said. I wasn't quite sure if I should add "my fiancé".

"Hello Michelle. Let me introduce my wife Ellie and my son Peter. Our younger son is in Scotland visiting his grandparents, then going on to Gorinchem in the Netherlands to see the other grandparents."

"Hello Ellie, Peter." Michelle said.

"Hi Peter." Annie joined in.

"Wow. You've sure changed from a snotty teenager." Peter responded.

"I was NEVER a snotty teenager." Annie hotly answered. "Maybe a little too studious, but never snotty."

"Even rustig, kinderen." Ellie chided. "Sorry. I should use English, but when the kids act up, I fall into Dutch."

"And you know I can still understand a bit of Flemish/Dutch." Annie said. "So I'll behave if Peter does."

"Of course I will. You're just so ... different now." Peter said.

"Come on in and introduce yourself to the others. Don't stand on ceremony." Jim said.

Sunday, December 27, 1964 – Michelle

We had changed into indoor shoes and hung up coats in the large closet in the hall. Martin took my hand and we walked through a large archway into the spacious living room with the dining room off to one side in an L shape.

"There's drinks on the sideboard and snacks on the table in the dining room. Help yourself and don't be shy." Jim said.

Some of the half dozen or so people in the room turned to see who had come in. Martin probably noticed me stiffen and likely wondered why. Before he could ask me, however, a man of about 50 stepped forward and said to me, "Hello. I'm David O'Neil. I think we've met but I can't remember where."

"I was your patient about a year ago." I said softly. "My name's Michelle Corcoran."

"Oh. How embarrassing for me. I have actually been truly caught out once by saying to a woman "I didn't recognize you with your clothes on", meaning her street clothes. This is almost as bad. But I must say you are looking very well, and I suspect looking very different from our previous meeting."

"Probably. I am much better. This is Martin Tremblay and his daughter Annie."

"I think we've met before, at a similar occasion to this."

"Indeed, I believe at the Sinclairs' previous house." Martin answered.

Dr. O'Neil said, "I suggest you try some of the goodies Ellie has put out. She manages to make the most wonderful Scottish shortbread and sausage rolls and cheese straws as well as the fantastic

Dutch almond roll they call banket and those apple fritters. I always wonder how Jim doesn't get to be morbidly obese."

Martin gently drew me into the dining room.

"Some beer or wine or ...?"

"I see some Scotch. I'm not driving and need a bit."

"Bit of a shock seeing David?"

"He was the surgeon who ..."

"Oh. Well. I actually suspect he may not remember your particular surgery, or else remember the surgery and not the face."

"Really? Once I've got my Scotch I'll see if I can diplomatically ask him." I was rather curious to find out if Martin was right about that.

"Have some of the goodies first. Ellie really does manage both culinary cultures well."

Martin wandered back into the living room. I heard him talking to a man I learned later was named Bill Jones, who despite the name was a Scot and had been at school with Jim.

"Merry Christmas Bill."

"Hello Martin. Sorry to hear about Clara, but you seem to have a new lady in your life."

"Yes. Both of us newly single this year. How are you doing?" Martin clearly wasn't going to announce our engagement here, and I found that came – somehow, I don't know how – as a relief. This morning I would have happily had a loudspeaker van announcing it to the city. Here I didn't want the attention, at least not yet.

"Not so bad. Not so bad. The engineering firm I'm with has had plenty of interesting work. A couple more years like these and we'll be able to consider early retirement."

"Nice if you can do it. What will you do then?"

"I'd like to try out some ideas. Nothing huge, but keep my hand in engineering. And spend more time with Jean. It's easy to lose touch with the people you love. I'm almost embarrassed to say that hearing about Clara put that in mind and started my plans evolving last Spring."

I moved to rejoin David O'Neil. I could see Martin manoeuvre so he was close enough to hear, but had his back to us.

"It feels odd meeting you socially Dr. O'Neil." I opened.

"Here you should call me David. And I'm awfully sorry I didn't connect the dots."

“You mean you didn’t remember me as a patient.”

“Guilty as charged. But I think that’s almost necessary. I’m a surgeon. If I think too much about the patient I’m operating on as a person, I might be too cautious and not do the right thing. You know – not take out enough of a cancer for fear of the scar. So it’s better you are just the job at hand for the time you are on the table. But here I can enjoy your company as an attractive woman who might become a friend.”

“That so odd.”

“Why?”

“You may not recall, but you performed an emergency hysterectomy – in the process leaving quite a long red scar I might add – and I felt it left me, well, not a woman, especially with my rather small bust. I was even convinced I couldn’t, er... perform. Fortunately Martin has been helping to reorient my view – he also said I was very attractive, and I’m still getting my mind around that.”

“As well he should, and you should. Now I recall. Hmm. Better not say more – patient confidentiality etc.”

“Can I impose on you to tell me if you think cocoa butter might help the scar fade faster?”

“That’s a fair exchange for my forgetfulness. I can’t say there’s anything formal I’ve read, but there seem to be some anecdotal reports that it is helpful. And it seems it may contain vitamin E which is thought to have some role in promoting healing. And I can’t think of any reason cocoa butter will be in any way dangerous, unless you happen to be near a chocolate addict, of course, in which case the possibilities could be unmentionably pornographic.”

We both laughed.

“Speaking of cocoa butter, Ellie put out a bit of Dutch chocolate,” David said in almost a whisper. “Make sure you get a bit.”

“Thanks. I’ll do that right now.”

“Best of luck to you and Martin.”

Later as we were driving home Martin asked

“Annie, you seemed to spend all your time with Peter.”

“Why not?” I jumped in. “He was very ... dishy.”

“Should I sharpen my elbows?” Martin asked.

“What does that mean?” Annie said.

“Michelle was annoyed one day when I was appreciating an attractive woman. We ... well we’ve sorted that out, but this seemed

an appropriate time for pointing out what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.”

“Stop it, you two. But I agree with Michelle he is dishy. And he seemed surprised that I’d ... well, grown up. He’s asked me out next week.”

“What’s he up to these days?” Martin asked.

“Working on a doctorate in epidemiology. Or, as he put it, becoming a scientist broken down by age and sex.”

“Why so?” I said, putting foot in mouth, then realizing. “Oh. I’m being stupid. That’s a great joke.”

Thursday, December 31, 1964 – Martin

I picked up Michelle from her office in the early afternoon. Most offices were closing early – unofficially at least. We drove to downtown and parked in paid parking so we could go to the Bank of Nova Scotia where I had a safety deposit box. We went through the ritual of getting the box and took it in the client cubicle where I retrieved the jewellery.

“They’re very nice. Old but nice.” Michelle said.

“This is Clara’s ring.” I picked up the diamond. “The other diamond from that set, though it wasn’t matched, went to Mary Taylor and the other ruby ring to Alf Taylor. Both were smaller stones than these. There’s these three others, but they’re not diamonds.”

“That’s a quite large ruby.” Michelle noticed on the ruby ring.

“Try it on.”

Michelle tried to put it on her middle finger, but it was too tight.

“Try it on the ring finger. If you like it, it can be your engagement ring.”

“Oh. It fits me too. But it’s not really traditional is it?”

“Actually they have been used frequently as engagement rings, but in recent years the diamond industry has done a good job of marketing. Does it matter if you don’t have a diamond?”

“No. And this is very nice, probably a lot more valuable.”

She kissed me.

“Does that make our engagement official?”

“Absolutely. Leave me at the altar and I’ll ...”

“Wear my balls on a necklace.”

“Precisely.” She laughed. “But I don’t think that’s in any way a possibility. Though it’s a colourful expression.”

“Parade ground sergeant used it as I recall during my basic training – square bashing we called it.”

“I love you Martin. Lets put this stuff away safely – except for my engagement ring – and go home to get ready for this evening. We should take a nap if we want to last past midnight.”

“Perhaps we should stop by Burke’s and see if we can get a valuation on the ring for insurance.”

“Yes. They’re just up the street. Oh, being in the bank reminds me that Bryan called.”

“And?”

“He’s more than happy to accept payment for the cottage. In fact, he would like to do so right away.”

“It could be arranged, but it’s inconvenient and could cost me some revenue.”

“I thought that, so I asked Bryan if he’d accept less money to be paid now. He suggested \$7000, I said \$6500 and we agreed \$6750 if you are willing.”

“You’re a hard woman Michelle!”

“That’s what happens when you cross me.”

“Well, you can phone him tomorrow and say I’m willing, but have to make sure I can raise the money next week, but should be able to give him an answer by next Friday, that’s the 8th I think. If he’s agreeable, I’ll work on it starting Monday.”

We stopped in at Burke’s, and were fortunate that the appraiser was present. He said he usually had customers leave the item for appraisal, but said in this case the ring was simple enough that he only needed to work out the size of the stone and judge its quality. The appraiser said that his estimate was that it should be insured for \$1000, but on second thought he wanted to check with an appraiser at one of their other offices before committing that to an appraisal certificate.

“Can we arrange to bring it back next week? I think my fiancée would like to wear it over the holiday. But I can pay now for the appraisal if you’ll give me a receipt.”

“Certainly sir. Would you like me to verify the mounting to make sure the stone is secure when you bring it in?”

“Is it loose?” Michelle asked.

"I don't think so. Let me do a quick check."

He prodded the stone a little with his finger and looked at it through his magnifier.

"It looks OK, but I'll give it a bit of a cleaning and a more thorough check when you bring it in. It's not often one sees a piece like this. Is it a family heirloom?"

"No. I found it in a dead comrade's kitbag when we got blown up in Belgium. I tried to find his family but without luck – killed in the Blitz as far as I could find out. We didn't trust the War Graves folk with stuff like this. I also tried through Jewish friends in Europe to see if it had been stolen by the Nazi's – my comrade likely got it from someone in a German column we attacked and wiped out with our Typhoons' rockets and cannon. If it's true owners are identified with proper documentation, I'll be happy to return it."

"I'm not sure many people would be as scrupulous," the appraiser said.

"I wouldn't want to wear it otherwise," Michelle added.

"My best wishes to you both. I'll look forward to seeing it next week. And I can probably forget to charge for the cleaning."

I paid the appraisal fee, was given a receipt, and we headed for the door.

"I'll need some new gloves, Martin. These are too small for the ring."

"Come on then."

"Oh I didn't mean it. I was just kidding you."

"But you are right. The gloves don't fit over the stone and could pull it loose."

"OK. There's several stores here on Sparks Street that sell gloves. I don't need an expensive pair, just some nice warm ones. Maybe I'll start to wear mittens instead. Ski mitts would work well."

* * *

By 4 pm we were at Michelle's, but Andrea had left a note "Gone to help Annie dress".

"Well, I could put on my evening clothes and we can go over to your place." Michelle said.

"I'll call Annie and see what's going on. Do you want me to ask if Andrea has everything for tonight?"

“Please.”

Annie was going to a New Year’s party with Peter at the Chateau. She was going to wear the dress that Jane had sold to Clara. Andrea wanted to see it, and the girls were helping each other dress. Because Michelle was hosting her family on New Years Day, we were planning to come back to Michelle’s. We’d be walking over to Barbara’s since it’s only 4 blocks away so we don’t drink and drive, so we’d need to first walk over to my house to pick up Andrea.

I reported back on the phone call.

“Andrea has about three outfits and they are trying all the permutations and combinations. I also asked if she had her coat and boots for tonight so we don’t mess around coming back here after we fetch her. There’s a dusting of snow, but it’s not too cold.

Actually, I told Annie we’d come around 7 to get Andrea. Peter is picking Annie up in a taxi. That’s a great relief. But I’ve told Annie to make sure she has enough for taxi fare safely tucked away somewhere along with Barbara’s phone number.”

“Are you worried?” Michelle looked concerned.

“No. But I think it’s a good idea for Annie to always have a fall-back plan. I’m not concerned about Peter, but you never know what can happen, and I don’t want Annie to have to rely on him having money or resources to look after her.”

“I should maybe do the same.”

“Not a bad idea to have a little money and important information stashed somewhere.”

“Where though?”

“In your bra?”

“If I wear one, which you know I often don’t. Une vêtement inutile. At least in my case. But money in one – a really padded bra.”

We both laughed.

“Or you could pin it in your panties or in a hem.”

“I’ll start to think of something. It could be useful for our travels.”

“Exactly.”

“We’ve a couple of hours. Should I start to dress?”

“Will you take that long?”

“If I have to undress first I think it will.” she said with a smirk.

“Hmm. Quite likely. And then we could take a bit of a nap. But better set an alarm.”

“How much time do you need to dress?” Michelle asked.

“10 minutes. I put out my suit and things for tonight this morning. I’ve stuff here for tonight and tomorrow and for Saturday morning if I decide to stay over, but I think perhaps I should spend a bit of time with Annie. Also take a photo of her in the dress to send to Jane.”

“Yes, I don’t want ever to be an obstacle to the closeness I see between you two. I just hope I can find a similar easiness with Andrea.”

“Like I said, we should be at my place by 7. That’ll let us sort out anything with Andrea’s outfit. Annie may have already gone. Oh. Maybe phone back and ask them to take a picture of Annie.”

“Good idea. Why don’t you.”

“Got to pee. Sorry. You went while I phoned before.” I said.

“OK. See you in the tub.”

Thursday, December 31, 1964 – Anna

Peter had invited me to the New Year’s party at the Chateau Laurier. It was a bit disconcerting that he’d got the tickets to take Evelyn, the girl he’d been going with in Halifax.

Still, it was a chance to wear the dress that Jane had sold to Mum. Andrea wanted to see it, and we helped each other dress. Because Michelle was hosting her family on New Years Day, Dad and Michelle were planning to come back to Michelle’s house after New Year’s Eve at the home of Michelle’s friend Barbara.

Dad phoned while Andrea was trying on dresses. He wanted a photo of me in the dress Mum had bought from Jane and worn for her Ottawa wedding. Good idea. I’ve met Jane once, that is, after leaving Oxford when I was three, and I don’t remember her from that time. But we did make it back in 1960 for a holiday, and I do want to send her a picture of me in the dress. Assuming, that is, it looks OK on me. Michelle phoned just after to tell us to take the photos in case they didn’t arrive before Peter came to pick me up.

“Hey Andrea, Dad wanted to make sure we both have coats and boots for tonight. There’s a dusting of snow, but it’s not too cold.”

“How do they think I came here. In my birthday suit?” She’d picked up this expression from Dad, who somehow got it from being in England for a while.

“Yeah. Obviously. But would you rather they didn’t think about you?”

“No. Guess not. But don’t tell them – they might get ideas.” We both laughed.

“You know you have 3 dresses, 4 scarves, 3 sets of earrings and 2 necklaces as well as 2 sweaters. That’s 3 times 4 times 3 times 2 times 2 or 144 permutations.”

“If you take 5 minutes to try each, 12 hours to try them all on, and you don’t need to go to the party! How about that?”

Andrea stuck out her tongue. We laughed. She had pretty well settled on her choice.

We took some pictures of me. From the mirror the dress looked nice on me. It clung to my curvy bits, and I hoped it wasn’t too obvious that I didn’t have a bra on. The back of the gown plunged with some cross straps, but a bra would have shown. And I’ve Mum’s Flemish figure, and even if I’m a bit bigger on top, the Rubens hips are there. Not huge, but still there. But this dress was good – I wasn’t all hips and bum. Tight slacks and some dresses can make me look heavy.

“What about earrings?” Andrea asked.

“Can I do without? I think pierced ears are kind of barbaric, and clip-ons get sore after an hour or so.”

“You look fine. I’m jealous.”

“Your turn will come.”

“Promise? ”

“Promise. Or I’ll make sure I’m out of town!”

Dad told me to make sure I’ve enough money for taxi home and Barbara’s phone number. The dress didn’t have pockets, and really nowhere to put anything. However, it was a good point. I pinned a \$10 bill and the phone number under the waistband, and put the same in my clutch purse with my house-key and some Kleenex and my driver’s license.

Dad and Michelle came about 7. There was quite a bit of excitement about the ring Dad had given Michelle that afternoon, one of those he’d found in the kit-bag of one of the men killed in the mine near Ninove. A beautiful ruby. Good for them.

Peter said he'd come in a taxi around 7:30. I was glad Dad got to see me in the dress. He gave me a funny look, then glanced away. When he went upstairs to get something – I thought cuff-links or something like that, but it turned out to be his camera – and Michelle said “I think you reminded your Dad how your Mum looked. There's that photo of her in the dining room where you put the various photos of her.”

“Yeah. He gave me a strange look there. I hope it didn't upset him. Or you.”

“It's still ... well, there are moments. But he's warned me about not making your Mum ‘Saint Clara’ as we refer to the problem of handling memories and feelings. And though you have a different face, there are ... echoes of her. But I think Martin really is happy that you are wearing it. I'm starting to be able to read his feelings, or at least I hope I am.”

“Thanks for that.”

“Enjoy yourself tonight. But stay safe.”

“I've decided that even if I'm offered drinks, I'll stay off alcohol. In any event, I'm not legal yet. Still 4 months to go.”

Dad came back with his camera – the Pax. He'd bought a flash for it. We'd used my Kodak Brownie and turned on all the lights we could. He took a few shots both ways.

They put on their winter gear and set off for Barbara's, leaving me to wait for Peter. I decided to get my boots on and put my shoes in a shoe bag, then just had to put on my coat and grab my gloves and scarf – I didn't want to mess up my hair, even though I didn't get a special hairdo for tonight.

Hmm. If I think about the pictures of Mum in the dress, we have a similar hair style. Rather short. And both dark blond. From the rear, you might mistake us. Even from front or side, Michelle is right to use the word ‘echoes’. We've not the same face, but we do – did – have similarities.

When I saw a cab slowing down, I put on my coat. Peter was just coming up to the steps when I closed the door and was locking it.

“Hi there.” I said.

“Hi yourself. You were waiting.”

“Didn't want to run up the meter.”

He held the cab door and I got in, careful to make sure the dress

didn't contact anything that might be dirty or have salt. Peter went round and got it his side.

"The Chateau Laurier please." he told the driver.

When we got there, Peter paid and then escorted me to the coat check. He helped me off with my coat, and supported me while I put on my shoes. The coat-check man gave him the tickets for our things, and Peter turned round and stopped in his tracks.

"Wow!"

"Wow what? "

"You. You're gorgeous."

"You're looking pretty good yourself. But staring at me is blocking the way for people with coats."

"Oh. Yeah. Let's find our table."

We followed the general movement to the ballroom. There were tables set up around the edge of this, as well as in an adjoining large room. Our tickets were for a table in the main space, and there were 3 other couples. Two couples had come together – middle aged. They turned out to be two MPs and their wives from the West of Canada. The other couple were in their early thirties and turned out to be from Kingston, where they ran a hardware store.

The evening included a fairly slow meal, with music for dancing in between the courses and following it. I'm not a great dancer, especially ballroom. Peter somehow had acquired some knowledge, and steered me around the floor. I realized he could feel my breasts against him, and unconsciously pulled a little away.

"You don't like me holding you close?" he whispered.

"Actually yes, but"

"You're worried that there'll be too much contact because that lovely dress doesn't allow for what my Mum calls 'members of the supporting cast'?"

"Yes." I laughed.

"I'm OK with it if you are."

"You won't take advantage?"

"I'll try to maintain decorum, at least while we're in public."

"And when we're not in public?"

"It rather depends on how you feel. It would cause a lot of trouble for our folks if anything happened that we both weren't comfortable with."

"Perhaps I'll keep you in the public eye – at least for a while."

The fact we were with strangers meant that backgrounds and situations were explained over dinner. Though it was the Chateau and the food was good, I didn't think it exceptional. There was a consomme, a salad, a choice of beef or salmon for the main course – very unimaginative – and then a dessert of a chocolate mousse. The last was perhaps the most interesting, largely for its presentation with some raspberry coulis and a rather nice cookie.

I ordered 7-Up to drink, but Peter had ordered a glass of red wine with his meal – we both took the beef. He offered me a sip. It was OK, but actually I was happier with the soft drink.

Though I'd known Peter since we were children, I'd somehow not learned about how his parents met in the early part of World War II. His mother, Ellie, was Dutch, but had two German grandparents, and the grandfather was Jewish, or at least of Jewish background. Peter implied that they didn't, in the event, get any direct persecution from the Nazis, but there were others with similar backgrounds who ended up arrested and ... well, the results were too familiar.

So the family, who lived in Gorinchem which is kind of in the middle of Holland north to south and a bit west of the middle in the other direction, managed to find a training position for Ellie as a nurse in Glasgow. The War started, then Holland was overrun, and she stayed on at the hospital after her training was complete. That was where she met Jim Sinclair leading to what Peter called 'the usual consequences', which I suppose means or includes him.

Between the main course and dessert we got up to dance again. It felt really nice leaning against Peter. He was just a tiny bit taller than me – I'm 5' 7" so taller than most girls. I was getting used to feeling my breasts squish against him, but now I could sense that he was noticing.

"Peter, I once heard a line from Mae West 'Is that a pistol in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?'"

"You noticed. Should we loosen our hold?"

"I'm OK if you're not too uncomfortable."

"Now that we can actually talk about it, I think things will settle down."

Actually they did. Maybe I should feel miffed that I don't excite him enough, but I'd rather we be comfortable together. We could save the excitement for later.

Where did that thought come from? Here I was with a whole

bunch of formally dressed people thinking of my date's penis. And I hadn't been drinking. Not that I'd know the effect of drinking – I've only had the odd glass of wine or sherry.

Through the evening we chatted with each other and with Jill and Jeremy, the couple from Kingston. The MPs and their wives were – without actually being rude or discourteous – largely keeping to themselves. I danced once with Jeremy when Peter asked Jill. We made it round the floor, but neither of us were at ease with each other.

After dessert and coffee were finished – it was now nearly 11 because the service had been deliberately slow – the band, which was a bit of a throwback to the 40s and 50s, took a break and the MC gave a 10 minute stand-up comedy routine. Lamé jokes, entirely forgettable. I don't recall his name. We laughed when we were supposed to, but maybe 10 minutes of silence would have been preferred. Towards the end of his spiel, I excused myself and went to the entirely luxurious powder room.

I checked that the money and phone number were still pinned in my dress, and was careful to hike it up in the toilet. As I washed my hands, there were ladies re-applying make-up. I'd only a little lipstick, mainly to keep my lips from chapping with the cold. I find make-up a nuisance. A little skin cream if it's dry or cold. I had, fortunately, remembered to put a comb in my clutch, which also had a long strap. Such a nuisance otherwise in the toilet – there's never a place to rest a purse, but usually a hook or the knob or even the toilet paper fixture to hang it on if you have a strap. And the long strap meant I could, if I wanted, have the purse on me when I danced, though tonight I just left it on the table. It only had ten bucks in it.

By the time I came back, the band had started up again. I stopped in the doorway and watched for a while. It's not that I didn't want to rejoin Peter – I was having a nice time with him, a really fantastic time for reasons I can't quite pin down – but I wanted to take in the scene of the ballroom, the people, the suits and gowns. Sort of mental photography.

"Did you want something, Miss?" one of the staff asked me.

"Just taking in the whole scene. It's rather wonderful." I replied.

"Yes. It's a special evening, isn't it?" and he disappeared.

When I got to the table, Peter asked if I were all right. I told

him I'd been watching from the doorway, taking everything in.

"Having a good time?"

"Yes. It's special. Dance with me again."

This time it was a moderately slow waltz. Not one of those almost funereal ones reserved for people to grope each other, however. Still, I let myself press against Peter. He had his mouth near my ear.

"I really and truly take back the 'snotty teenager' remark."

"Thanks."

"And I can honestly say that I would not have enjoyed Evelyn's company half as much."

"Then she's not worth mentioning. Snooty Bluenose."

"I thought Bluenose was your nickname."

"But I had the real thing if you remember the story."

"I think I heard it, but you'd better remind me."

I told him how when Mum and Dad got married in Ghent, I'd found Dad's fountain pen – one of his weaknesses is to love to write with one – and was drawing with it. I used to like to draw – still do – but Mum had been trying on my outfit for the wedding and I got ink everywhere, including on my nose. Dad gave me the nickname Bluenose, and we came into Canada at Halifax, which was an additional motivation.

"So that's where 'Blue' comes from."

"Yes."

"But Tremblay is your Dad's name. What was it before?"

"Joos. Anna Louisa Joos. I've been wondering if I should try to use Anna or Ann rather than Annie. When I was small, Mum and Dad used Annje, the diminutive, but people here got confused by that."

"Anna might be good for professional purposes. I agree with you, Annie is more for a little girl rather than a woman."

"I'm not 21 yet – 4 months to go."

"From this vantage point, I'd say all woman."

Somehow, I didn't have a reply. But it sure felt nice together there on the dance floor, and I was having some inappropriate thoughts that he'd be even more fun without the very nice and very appropriate dark suit he was wearing. I'd better try to think about something else.

Back at the table, we found that the staff had delivered noise-makers and silly hats, as well as champagne flutes. The time had

flown. It was already 10 to midnight. Goodbye 1964. Oh. A cold feeling washed over me as I thought of Mum. But then warmth returned as Peter had moved his chair next to mine and put his arm round my shoulder.

“You shuddered there for a moment. Are you OK?”

“Just had a thought that 1964 is going, and thought about Mum. I’m OK now.”

“That’s not something I’ve experience of. I can only try to be aware of your feelings.”

“It comes like that. Mostly I’m fine, but there are moments when something reminds me of her and there’s a kind of cold breeze in the mind. I think it affects Dad that way too. But Michelle is good for him. I haven’t seen so many moments like that recently. Except tonight, when he saw me in this dress.”

“It was your Mum’s?”

“First it was Jane’s. She’s a friend of Dad’s from Oxford, and she had this dress in 1913 to go to a Ball in Oxford with her husband, who was a college don. He was older, but volunteered in the First War, and was killed. There’s some story there, but so far I’ve not been told the details. Anyway, after Dad and Mum got married, we went to England so Mum would have some idea about Dad’s life there, and Jane suggested Mum might like the dress, as the ship we were coming to Canada on had some formal evenings. Clothing was in very short supply, and so Mum bought the dress, then wore it for the second – religious – wedding they had here in Ottawa. Uncle Joe officiated at that, and we went skating afterwards. That’s the bit I remember.”

Peter whispered

“It’s a lovely dress. But – oh, I probably shouldn’t say this – I find I really want to put my hands all over you.”

“Funny. I should get all huffy and offended, but I don’t think you mean that in a nasty way.”

Peter was flustered

“No. Of course not! It’s just so ... attractive on you.”

“But it makes you want to take it off me?”

“Umm. Well. I suppose yes.”

“Only suppose?”

“Well, yes. Dammit. But I’d hate to dirty or damage it. It’s really lovely on you.”

We'd been so absorbed in this discussion that we'd not noticed the clock counting down. All of a sudden we hear the 'Nine ... Eight ... Seven' and so on. Suddenly everyone was yelling 'Happy New Year' and Peter was kissing me. Or was I kissing him. Oh. It felt right. We locked lips for a long time.

Then I heard applause. People around us were clapping. We broke the kiss and realized it was for us. Both of us turned red. Peter said,

"Let's go out into the lobby for a moment."

We held hands and skipped out into the lobby. Peter sat me down on one of the sofas.

"That kind of took me by surprise."

"Me too."

"Do you want me to see if we can get a room?"

"Peter! Think of the potential consequences."

"Yeah. That sort of came out before I could think it through. Dad's read the Riot Act several times about what can go wrong. And made sure both Robert and I know how condoms work. But they're at home, not here."

I don't know what devil was in me, but I blurted out

"There's some at our house. And Dad and Michelle are going back to her house."

"Shall we get our coats? Or do you want to have the midnight snack and some champagne?"

We looked at each other. I had a funny sensation between my legs. Oh, this was awful, but in a strangely nice way.

"Coats!" I said.

December 31, 1964 – Martin

We showed up at Barbara Greenwoods just after 8. Barbara was a school chum of Michelle. She was a pleasant looking woman of medium height who was not fat but pleasantly rounded.

"Hi Michelle. Oh, here's Andrea. Almost all grown up. It's been too long. And this must be Martin, your friend."

"My fiancé!" Michelle had taken her mitt off and was holding up her hand.

"Congratulations! Joanne – Michelle's engaged."

A sturdy and masculine woman dressed in slacks and a sweater came out of the kitchen.

"Michelle, you know my room-mate Joanne. This is Andrea, her daughter I told you about. And this is Martin, her fiancé. I gather this is recent."

"The ring just this afternoon. But we told the girls – Martin has a 20 year old daughter. I think I told you. We told the girls on Sunday. And no, we don't have a date yet. We're still working all those things out."

"Good for you, and best of luck. I gather you had a rather unhappy first try." Joanne said.

"Not altogether unhappy, except at the end. And Andrea is a joy."

"A good point. My error."

"Don't worry. I know the sentiments are sincere and well-meant, and I'd much rather that than perfectly diplomatic language or nothing at all.

How are you both, by the way?"

"Keeping well and busy. We've just last month finished the renovations here." Barbara answered. "Joanne did the carpentry and plasterboard. She's so practical."

"But you do the soft furnishings and the décor so well." Joanne added. "In any case come on in. You're the first, but there'll be a bunch of other folk soon we hope."

In fact the doorbell rang as soon as we'd sat down.

"Andrea, can I ask you to run the record player?" Barbara asked. "I know you have one and can operate it properly. Make the music pleasant and just loud enough to hear but not interfere with conversation."

There was commotion at the door, and once coats and boots had been stowed a couple came in with two teenagers who likely straddled Andrea's age.

"Martin and Michelle and Andrea, this is Jack and Mary Palmer and their son Joseph and daughter Michaela. I've some things to put together in the kitchen, so please get to know each other."

"Let me get the names again," Jack said, "I've a mind like a sieve."

"Martin." I said pointing at myself.

"Michelle." Michelle copied me.

“Andrea.”

“I’m Jack”

“Mary”

“Joseph”

“Michaela.”

“That worked well. Now how do you know Joanne and Barbara?”

Jack asked.

“Barbara was in school with me at Immaculata.”

“Joanne was in school with me,” Mary said, “At Lisgar.”

“Mary, Didn’t we meet here about 6 years ago?” Michelle asked.

“Yes. That’d be right. We’ve been posted away. Jack’s in the military.”

Joanne came in and announced that drinks and food were in the kitchen, and people could browse as long as they saved space for a toast at midnight and a piece of special fruit cake to celebrate the coming of 1965. There was a finished room in the basement with a couple of card tables and some games like Chinese checkers and monopoly, as well as a darts board – ‘just don’t stick them in each other’.

The conversation followed the pattern set when Jack and Mary arrived. A little while later, a couple who were neighbours on one side came in and introduced themselves as François and Judy with their son Ian. I didn’t catch their last names. A bit later another set of neighbours from across the street came in with a tall gangly daughter. I missed their names entirely when they came in.

I shared small talk with Jack about military assignments in and outside Canada. Jack seemed to have been assigned only within the country, mostly to administer accommodations and food and fuel. Later I chatted with François and Judy, who ran a small deli on Bank Street that I had only once visited. I asked a few modest questions and learned a bit about the business and its joys and problems. I went to refresh my drink – I’d chosen to drink rum and coke, mostly coke actually – when Andrea joined me.

“Not down with the game players?” I asked.

“I’m not very good at them, and I’d rather be here and watch. Besides, I’m responsible for the records, and they have a lot of good stuff. Beatles, Dylan, Peter Paul and Mary, Ventures, all kinds of stuff.”

“I think the record player was a good choice for a Christmas

present.”

“Yeah. Thanks a lot to you and Mum for that. And thanks to you for asking Mum to marry you. I really like her ring. It’s special. And she’s on cloud nine right now because of it.”

“Nice to be appreciated. But I do love her you know.”

“Annie and I knew it all along. I’m glad you found each other. Martin, do you think Joanne and Barbara are a couple?” This last question was said in a whisper.

“Yes. I think so. You only need to look. It’s unfortunate that our laws supposedly make it illegal. As long as people don’t force themselves on others, I can’t see the harm in two people caring about each other.”

“It sort of feels odd to me, I guess. But I’ll leave any more questions about that until later.”

“I think that would be a good idea. They’re our hosts and have made us very welcome.”

At this time Barbara was sitting in a big armchair, and Joanne sat on the arm of the chair beside her, her own arm around Barbara’s shoulder. They were clearly comfortable together like this.

I wandered downstairs. I played darts for about three quarters of an hour. There were gales of female laughter from upstairs. The ladies were clearly enjoying themselves.

“You’re good at that,” said the tall gangly girl.

“English pubs. I’m Martin Tremblay by the way.”

“Jennifer Swensen. We live across the street.”

“Are you a student?”

“I’m in first year Chemistry at Carleton.”

“Probably the only girl.”

“Yes. But it isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. The boys seem to be a bit afraid of me.”

“Annie, my daughter who’s not here tonight, is in third year Physics at U of O. I’ll write down our phone number and you can have coffee and commiseration with us sometime.”

I found a business card in my suit pocket – I always carried one or two there – and wrote our home phone on it as well as “Annie”.

“Thanks. Oh. You’re a research scientist.”

“Yes. I read Physics at Oxford, then did my Ph.D. at Toronto in radio and microwave stuff. I work on antennas and related circuits.”

“Neat. My folks think chemistry is test tubes and stinky stuff. But today it’s more microwaves and electronics, though we don’t do much of that yet. So far it’s mostly book stuff, with a few test tube experiments and some traditional physics stuff with Fletcher’s trolley.”

“That’s pretty much the usual route into physics and chemistry. By the way, I think a lot of marks are lost by forgetting units on the answers. Even if your profs. aren’t fanatical about units, it won’t be wrong to include them.”

“Good tip. There was about 25 minutes of one of the early physics lectures on how to do algebra on units. So they probably will have some marks on that. I’ve been including them as far as I can remember, but maybe I’ll be a bit extra careful to make sure.”

“I think the first year is generally rather tedious. And you are figuring out the system, which is different from high school. Socially you are in a new fish tank, so to speak.”

“That’s for sure. Did you find it that way as a student?”

“I was a fish in a totally new tank.” I explained how I came to be in England, the start of the War and then going to Oxford.

“Hey. Do you two want to play doubles darts against Michaela and I?” Ian asked.

“OK if Jennifer is willing.”

“OK.” Jennifer agreed.

It turned out that Jennifer was even better than I was at darts and we ran away with the match.

“Where did you acquire your skills?” Martin asked as they finished.

“We have a board. And I am studying science.”

“Well, thank you for partnering me. I’d better see how Michelle is doing.”

“Is that the very petite lady? And Andrea’s your other daughter.”

“No. My wife died just under a year ago. Michelle is divorced and Andrea’s her daughter. We met last summer and just this week decided we should get married.”

“Congratulations. She seems really nice.”

“I think so. But I’d better keep an eye on her. She’s so petite that – well, as a chemistry student you’ll recognize that one drink

for her is the same as two or three for a larger person.”

“OK. Call you sometime to speak to Annie.”

It was around 10:30. I wandered back to the living room. Michelle was sitting on the sofa talking to Jennifer’s mother.

“Can I get you something, Michelle?”

“Actually, I’m going to visit the washroom. Don’t want an accident.”

I offered a hand and noted that she seemed to need the support.

“You OK.”

“Joanne made me a couple of rum and cokes.”

“You’d better switch to non-alcoholic drinks. Even with a normal measure of rum, that’d be 4 of them for you. If Joanne made them, then possibly 6 to 8. I’ll walk you to the bathroom.”

The bathroom was fortunately unoccupied.

“Want me to come in to help.”

“No. I think I can manage – just.”

Martin waited. Michelle took quite a while, then came out.

“I splashed my face and feel a bit better. But I think you’re right that I should stay off alcohol for the rest of the night. My head’s swimming a bit.”

“Have you had anything to eat?”

“Not much.”

“Let’s go back down and sit together and I’ll be your waiter so we know what you are getting.”

We found an armchair where we could squeeze in together and I went and filled a couple of plates with chips, some spiral sandwiches and crackers and cheese. I delivered these, then found some plastic cups and filled them with 7-up.

“Thanks Martin. I should have been more careful. I hope I won’t have a terrible hangover tomorrow. I want to remember today for this lovely ring you gave me, not a big headache.”

“Eat a bit. It’ll help slow the absorption of the alcohol if it’s not yet in your bloodstream. But don’t go too fast or you might make yourself sick.”

“Good idea. Things are still swimming a bit.”

Barbara came and sat down on a chair near them.

“I guess the nuns won’t be happy you two are getting married.”

“Probably not.” I replied. “But we haven’t abandoned the spiritual life. We go to St James United together.”

Michelle added "On Labour Day I went to see Sister Catherine. She's in the mother house in Pembroke. She didn't say anything counter to the Church teaching, but her sentiments were very sympathetic to my situation. My family and Andrea were told by some ignorant and uncharitable busybodies that they shouldn't talk to me because as a divorced woman I was automatically excommunicated. And that just isn't true. It's that meanness that more or less forced me to worship elsewhere."

"Anyway, we've moved on now," I said. "I think it would have been a lot easier for Michelle if the Church were a bit more understanding."

"Yes. There's much to be said for more understanding generally," Barbara said wistfully. "Oh. I'd better check things are ready for midnight. Do you two have noisemakers?"

I arranged to get some hats and noisemakers. Michelle was still a bit unsteady.

Midnight came with the usual uproar, and we enjoyed a long kiss. Then there was a hot noodle dish – Joanne had worked in Indonesia for a couple of years and said it was called Bami Goreng. It was spicy and rather nice. Better, they could each take as much or as little of it as they wished, along with a bean salad she called Gado Gado that had a peanut sauce. There were also some quite strange things like potato chips she pronounced "Kroopook", which Martin suspected was spelled very differently.

Michelle and I both chose to drink tea with our food, and about 1 a.m. though it was OK to leave. Walking home, with Andrea well in the lead, Michelle asked "What do you think Barbara meant by "more understanding"?"

"Given the way Joanne put her arm round Barbara early in the evening and the big hug they gave each other at midnight, I think they may be more than roommates. I don't have much knowledge of people who like others of the same sex."

"It's illegal isn't it?"

"I've never heard of any prosecutions of women, but men are often charged with homosexual offences. Allan Turing was convicted of what the British call buggery. He did some of the early work on automatic computing. A friend once told me he did something really important in the War, but that nobody would learn about it until everyone involved was dead. He is already. Supposedly committed

suicide.”

“Joanne does seem to play the role of the man, but I can’t get very upset as long as they don’t involve themselves with someone who isn’t interested, or approach children.”

“I feel the same way, though I think I’d feel pretty uncomfortable to be approached. There were lots of rumours at Oxford. Bowra, the warden of my college, was reported to like both men and women. We may see some change in attitudes and laws in the next few years. It doesn’t seem right to bother people who aren’t hurting others.

How are you feeling now?”

“Not too bad, though I’ll be glad to get to bed.”

“Are you sick, Mum,” Andrea asked.

“No. Joanne mixed my drinks, and made them far too strong for me. I should have realized.”

“The effect is per pound of body weight, so your Mum gets a lot more bang for the buck. In this case it made her a bit tipsy.”

“I’ll have to remember that. I’m not so big myself.

By the way, Annie and I really didn’t have time to congratulate you both. I’m really jealous of your ring, Mum. It’s different, and really neat. Nicole is going to turn as green as it is red.”

Early morning, January 1, 1965 – Anna

There were a couple of cabs waiting just in front of the lobby entrance. We were home by 12:20. I let us in, we closed the door and were kissing, still in our coats.

“Better get out of our coats and boots.” Peter said.

“Peter. Do you mind if we make a cup of tea? I really want you, but I’m afraid if we keep up this rush we’ll ... we’ll ... make a mess of things.”

“Sure. That’s probably a good idea. Guys traditionally want to get into a girl’s panties as quickly as possible in case she changes her mind, but I don’t think you’re likely to do that.”

“No. I said I want you, and I mean it. It’s just kind of a shock how quickly I realized that.”

“Yes. Me too.

Er. Can I ask if this will be your first time? I’ve heard it can be a bit ... uncomfortable.”

"I won't play coy. A while ago I realized I wanted to know about sex, and I didn't want it to be in the back of a car or behind a bush. And I had a really good friend, Fred, who I'd like to stay friends with, by the way, and when Dad arranged that there were condoms in the house after we had a pretty intense conversation about how NOT to get into trouble, I asked Fred if he would be interested."

"I'll guess he would be. I am."

"I hope you're not disappointed."

"No. I like your common sense. Hope it was fun."

"Yeah. Nice. You've a standard to meet."

How about you? You're a couple of years older. I suspect it won't be your first time."

"No. There was a girl a few years ago at the summer camp where I was a camp counsellor. So was she. Real sex-fiend. Used up a couple of boxes of sheaths over one weekend. And Evelyn and I tried a couple of times, but it actually was a bit tense between us. That's the total so far."

The kettle was boiling, so I filled the pot.

"Shall we take the tea upstairs?" I asked.

"Yes. You know, that would never be part of a movie script."

"Does that mean you don't want sex with me?"

"Don't be idiotic!"

"I'd better get the condoms."

When we got upstairs I went to the drawer in the master bedroom where they were kept – we really should find somewhere that Michelle or particularly Andrea wouldn't stumble across them. I don't want Michelle to have fifty fits.

Peter had carried the tea tray upstairs. I'd put on a package of oatmeal cookies in case we got hungry. I recalled getting the munchies after one lively session with Fred. Hollywood had people smoking afterwards. Marcia had repeated a joke about that: 'Do you smoke afterwards? ... I've never looked.' Silly, but I got an odd feeling Peter and I were about to create some sparks. I was oddly calm and about to pee my pants at the same time. Talking of which

...

"Peter, you can hang your suit on a hanger in the closet there. It's too nice to get crumpled."

"Shall I help you out of that dress. It really does make me want to touch you all over, but I suspect you'd like to keep it nice."

He'd already got his jacket hung up and was taking off his pants.

"OK. And, yes, I do want to keep this dress nice. It has sentimental value, and I suspect it's also worth quite a bit in real money, since it's an antique – made in 1913 I was told.

Now I want to get out of it. There's a couple of buttons on the straps at the back. And actually it's easier if you help me."

He looked a bit silly in his shirt and tie and underpants, but he expertly undid the buttons and helped me lift the dress over my head. I slid off the black half slip, then I unclipped my nylons and rolled them down my legs, keeping my back to him. Then I pulled my garter belt down.

I turned to go to the bathroom, but unconsciously held my arms in front of my chest.

"Not going to let me look."

"Oh. Sure."

I let my arms down and he gave a wolf whistle and started to come towards me with his hands outstretched.

"No! Don't!" I cried. "I'm not ready to discover what it feels like to pee and ... fuck at the same time."

Peter laughed a big, hearty laugh and I took off for the bathroom. I came back with my black panties in my hand and threw them at him.

"Do you think I'll need those?" I asked as he caught them.

Peter still had on his underpants, but they were obviously overfull in the front. He took them off and I had a chance to look at his ... er ... equipment. I guess it was a little different from Fred's.

"Annie, you look really nice. Thank you for this."

"What for? I'm not sure why you're thanking me."

"For being ... well, straightforward about sex. It's clear to me you don't run around. But you've decided you want to ... er ... make love with me. And I'm really grateful."

I picked up my mug and took a sip of tea. Peter did the same. Two naked people having a nice cuppa. But it was right. We each were looking at the other. Kind of naughty. The mugs gave us a kind of excuse to take our time to do that.

"Peter. Do you want to put the condom on now? Or have me touch you a bit first? I just don't want you to get excited and have you ... well, want to be inside me before we get a chance to put the condom on properly."

“I’m pretty excited, as you can see. Maybe put it on now so we don’t have any accidents.”

He was moving toward the box, but I was beside it and took one out and carefully opened it.

“Shall I do the honours?” I asked.

“Oh. OK. If you want and know how. Even sex-mad Janice had me do it.”

I’d got quite expert with Fred. And it gave me a chance to, shall we say, handle the merchandise. When I had it properly installed, I cupped a hand under his balls and led him to the bed.

“This way sir.”

I’d had the good sense to bring a spare towel from the bathroom. I opened the bed and spread it out and lay back.

Peter didn’t need any encouraging. He lay beside me and kissed me, his hands on my breasts. Then he kissed my breasts and put his hand between my legs.

“I now realize why the towel. You’re pretty wet.”

“I’ve been rather excited all evening. It’s a bit new to me.”

“I can’t remember being this excited before either. We have a funny effect on each other.”

“Funny strange or funny ha-ha?”

“Funny marvellous. Should we ... you know?”

“Sure, but take it slowly until you are properly inside, and even then let’s try things a bit at a time. After all, we’ve got all night if we want.”

“Annie, no Anna, you make it soooo comfortably nice.” and he slipped inside me. It went in with a slurp. He moved in and out and there was even a little farty noise.

“Oh. Was that me?” I asked.

“Just air in your vagina – I think it may be because you are very excited. And it’s only a celebratory little noise of us together.”

“True. Can you move in and out harder?”

I can’t believe I just said that. But it feels like I want him in me – up to my tonsils. It was nice with Fred, but this I’m making all kinds of noises and uncontrollably, and I’m pushing back at Peter and there’s all this wonderful slurpy slappy noise and I’m goingWow! And Peter is too.

We collapsed in a bit of a heap together. Peter reached down at the same time I did.

"I've got it." he said.

"Yeah. A bit of the unfortunate condom drill. Be nice not to have to. I think that's one of the few side benefits for Michelle."

"Side benefits?"

"I guess you didn't know. Her ex. gave her gonorrhoea and she had to have an emergency hysterectomy. I think she figured she'd end up with no sex for the rest of her life. I think Dad's been correcting that error."

Peter laughed.

"I guess it would be nice to not have to mess with condoms. Evelyn – oh, maybe I shouldn't mention her."

"Actually, we'll need to have a talk about her, but not tonight. But tell me what you were going to say."

"Oh. We'd been discussing her going on the Pill. She thought condoms were terrible. But she also seemed to find sex kind of icky altogether."

"I like sex and ..."

"Obviously! And I like that you like it."

"Actually just now was a bit new. I haven't been that wild or noisy before."

"You won't find me complaining."

"It was nice for you too?" I asked.

"Nice would be an understatement that should be punishable by not less than 5 years in jail."

"Glad it was so nice for you. Do you want to try again in a little while?"

"Probably. But maybe finish our tea and curl up together. Put the condoms on the bedside table in case of acute emergency horniness."

I laughed. We rearranged ourselves, got our tea and had a couple of cookies.

"Would you like a toothbrush?" I asked him.

"Yes please."

I went to the bathroom and set out a towel and facecloth and a new toothbrush – I'd bought a couple for myself over the holiday. Then I washed myself – between my legs I was really wet still. After brushing my teeth, I came back to my room.

"Your turn."

Peter disappeared into the bathroom. I found my nighty – a short one – and slipped it on. I don't like my shoulders to be cold. When Peter came back, I asked him,

“Do you mind the nighty?”

“Are you wearing anything else?”

I lifted the hem of the nighty and showed him. He smiled. I smiled back and he came and hugged me and gave me a kiss. I cupped his balls and felt his cock stir.

“Getting ready for a second round sir?”

“Maybe. But perhaps some cuddling first.”

“I'd like that. Do you want a T shirt or something? I could scrounge a pair of Dad's PJs.”

“No. I'll be fine. If my cock gets cold, I know where to warm it up.”

“Only if he's properly dressed for the occasion. At least until and unless we work out other arrangements.”

“Fair enough. Into bed. I need to kiss and caress you.”

We surprised ourselves. While we started off with a big kiss and some hands on different body bits, and I think we both expected to end up joined by the sports equipment, we somehow nestled in against each other and were asleep in about 5 minutes. There was even daylight, or at least early dawn when I woke. I was still in Peter's arms, and he had a hand on my breast. Felt nice there, but I was a bit cramped. I eased myself around so I was spooned into him.

“Where do you think you're going?” a slightly croaky voice asked.

“Just getting comfortable.”

At this point, I realized I was being poked in the bum.

“Oh. Someone's awake, or at least a part of them.”

“Just a regular morning hard-on.”

“I'm not really well-informed about male bodily functions. I guess I did note Fred was hard one morning, but I think he found it embarrassing, so maybe it happened more, but he didn't let me see.”

“You've eyes in strange places if you can see it now.”

I turned round, pulled the covers back and took a good look.

“Is it possible yours and Fred's are different?”

“I was circumcised when I was little. The foreskin would not retract.”

“They talk about retracting the foreskin in the condom leaflet. And Fred sort of moved something down his penis when we put the condom on.”

“I don’t have one to bother with.”

“The head is like a small helmet. Can I touch?”

“Of course. Gently though.”

I touched him, and as I did, some liquid oozed from the tip. I hadn’t noticed, but Peter’s hand was somehow between my legs – I was partly kneeling to look at him and my thighs weren’t together so he had easy access. And I was wet again, oh, was I wet again.

“Peter. I think I need you again. Now! Please!”

He got a condom, and – oh I can easily love this man – he put it on quite carefully and deliberately, not rushing which might have been dangerous. Then he simply pushed my shoulders back and as my head touched the pillow he slipped inside me.

“Thanks. I need that. I can’t believe how easily you’re getting in.”

“You’re still quite tight, but very wet, so it slips in. Do you want me to be er.... vigorous?”

“I’m surprising myself here, but I don’t bloody care what you do as long as your thing is in my thing.”

He took his time – in his place I’d probably have pounded away until I could hardly walk. I somehow came to a couple of climaxes – that was new – and eventually I sensed him getting tense and breathing hard and as he did I got more excited and had another sort of climax as he obviously emptied quite a lot of semen into the condom. The reservoir was very full as he pulled out and I got a look.

“This could get to be addictive.” I ventured.

“What do mean ‘get’?” he replied.

We laughed, then fell back into each other’s arms.

“Peter. Do you think we’re going to have to have some serious talks about us?”

“I don’t know, Annie... er, Anna. If you’d told me 2 weeks ago this would happen on New Year’s, I’d have figured you were nuts. But we seem to get along together.”

“Like a house on fire. Let’s enjoy this time now, then get together for a serious talk in a day or so to explore how we might be part of each other’s lives. The pleasure with you is very interesting. I

could get hooked on it. But I know I want a career and I know you do.”

“I’m OK with enjoying now, taking time to digest what it might mean, and then meeting to talk about where we might go with it. It feels like some sort of madness, but it also feels ... right with you.

I’m going to have to sort out those feelings. I really want to have you as a friend, and from what’s happened in this bed, more than a friend.”

“I’m going to have to think about that too. What time is it?”

Peter reached for his watch.

“Just gone 7:40.”

“We’d better get up in case anyone comes back here. I don’t mind pretending you stayed here rather than go home, but I’d rather the incriminating evidence were gone. You know, properly wrapped up in the garbage. And I really need a shower – I got quite sweaty with all that activity.”

“Do you want to share the shower?”

“Won’t that lead to more?”

“Possibly, but I think more touching and getting to know each other’s bodies. And it wouldn’t be a disaster if it led back to bed. Though honestly, I don’t think it will.”

Peter was right. We had a nice shower together, and he washed my hair and I his. And other bits, of course. Then we dressed and made a nice breakfast. It was rather comfy and domestic, but we both seemed OK with that.

It was about 9 am when we realized Peter should be getting home.

“Damn. Nosey McPherson will be on the lookout if we’re not careful?”

“Who?”

“The neighbour lady on this side. She came over last summer to tattle on me and Fred after well, you know. I don’t need her tongue-wagging about you. We’ll sneak you into the garage, then you can keep your head down until we’re up the block.”

“You’re driving me home? Strange way for a date to end with the girl taking the guy home in the morning.”

“If you want to complain about that, you can leave your sports equipment in your locker, mister. ’Cause you won’t get to play with mine.”

Peter laughed.

“Blue. Anna. I really think I’ve hit the jackpot. And it doesn’t matter to me what we do as long as we’re both happy doing it together.”

January 1, 1965 – Michelle

I had previously invited my parents and Nicole – who’s Martin’s secretary – and her fiancé Stephane for an informal and light dinner at my house. Martin and Annie were invited of course. Martin, Andrea and I had gone back to my house – we’d have to change the nomenclature soon since we were going to get married. Annie arrived about 4 p.m., looking a bit bewildered. When I asked what she had done all day, she said something about puttering about, but no details.

“Your folks not here yet?” she asked.

“No, they called to say that as they hadn’t run the car and it was a bit cold. Dad decided to warm it up for 10 minutes. Oh. I see them now.”

People came in with the usual uproar that winter clothing demanded.

“Come in the living room and we’ll all get a drink. Qu’est-ce que tu veux, Charlotte?” Martin asked.

“Un petit sherry, pas trop sec, s’il te plait.”

“We’ve a Harvey’s Bristol Cream.”

“Parfait.”

“Anyone else for Harvey’s?”

“Me, please.” Nicole said.

“Me too. But very small.” I added.

“Annie?”

“Can I have a very small scotch? I’d like to try it.”

“Sure. I’ll join you? Ice or water?”

“No. Straight up.”

Martin said, “I saw a barman at the Chateau refuse a woman once when she asked for a straight scotch. She was from Edinburgh and gave him a proper telling-off and got her scotch.

Anyone else for scotch.”

“A beer for me,” said Bernard.

“Me too.” This was Stephane.

“Will Molson do?”

Both nodded agreement.

“Andrea, what do you want?”

“I’ll have pop, but I can get it myself.”

“Maybe you can bring the beers for Stephane and your grandpa.”

“OK.”

The drinks went round.

“To Mille-neuf cent soixante-cinq, may we have peace, prosperity and good health.” Martin toasted.

“Mille-neuf cent soixante-cinq!” came the reply.

I had deliberately toasted with my left hand to show off the big ruby ring Martin had given me from the kitbag collection, as Annie called it. Nicole noticed

“Quelle bague. C’est merveilleux. Does it mean you’re engaged, you two?” Nicole asked.

“Indeed it does.” I answered. “We haven’t set a date, and I don’t want to steal your limelight, as I had my big day before, so it will be a quiet wedding.”

“But I’m happy for you.”

“Moi aussi, ma fille,” said Charlotte. “Martin est tres gentil – vraiment un bon homme.”

“Congratulations, Martin,” said Stephane.

“Thank you, Stephane. And I’ll second what Michelle said about a quiet wedding. You and Nicole deserve the big day.”

“We’ll make sure of that,” said Bernard, “but my felicitations too. I think you suit Michelle well. I’ve not seen her as happy in a long time. It’s a pity the Church has been so cold to her, or it would be perfect.

In any case, a toast to Michelle and Martin.”

“Michelle et Martin,” came the response.

“Martin, where did you find that ring for Michelle?” Charlotte asked.

“It’s a bit of a long story. Essentially it was in the kitbag of one of the men killed when the mine blew up the truck in Belgium in 1944. I didn’t trust the War Graves people to get it to the right people. I tried through Jewish friends in England because I suspect it was stolen from people the Nazis sent to concentration camps. Michelle knows that if someone with a genuine claim shows up, we’ll return it to them and get her a replacement, but I don’t now think that is very likely.”

“It is a lovely stone, and a nice, simple design.”

“Martin took me to the bank yesterday to show me the jewels he found, apart from two rings the family of one of the men would accept. I think it’s lovely. Almost as lovely as the man who gave it to me.” I kissed him full on the lips and there was applause, the loudest from Andrea.

“You clearly approve.” Nicole said to her.

“Yes. I like Martin. He’s good for Mum. Good for me too. He talks to me, not down to me, and makes me think for myself. But he’s not a push-over.”

“I know. I work for him, remember.”

“Yes. Guess I forget that sometimes.”

“At work they’re going to be annoyed with us, particularly me, since Michelle’s my sister.” Nicole said. “They’ll have to have two sets of parties and gifts.”

“Maybe we should tell them to combine the parties, and I think I can forgo a gift, or if they insist, accept a bottle of some sort.” Martin suggested. “By the way, Nicole. Have you two got a date and place sorted out yet.”

“Almost. We’ve been talking to the minister at the Unitarian church. He’s willing to do the service. But we’ve thought it would be really nice to do it with a nice background. It’s a pity Michelle is going to sell the cottage.”

“Actually, we’re thinking of paying out Bryan.” Martin said. “Michelle, did you talk to Bryan again about the cottage?”

“Why are you bringing up Bryan now?” Charlotte asked. “Today is about you and Michelle and Nicole and Stephane.”

Martin answered, “But Nicole just told me she and Stephane thought the cottage would be a great location for their wedding. I said we were talking about keeping the cottage.”

“Well, I did phone him today, and told him you’d give him an answer Friday.” I said.

“What’s this about the cottage?” Bernard asked.

“We are thinking that we’d sell this house, and either renovate the one I’m in – I’d better get used to not calling it ‘mine’ – or else sell it too and buy something together. We need a bit more space for both girls.” Martin said.

“And you’ll pay out Corcoran the \$7500? Michelle asked me to review her divorce agreement, so I know the number.”

“Except Bryan wants money very soon for some reason, and Michelle negotiated the price down to \$6750. I’ll start on Monday to figure out what I can do to get that. I’ve got enough capital, but it’s tied up in investments.”

“Then, my boy, you can borrow it from me for up to six months or so – with proper papers of course, but no interest since you’re family, or soon will be. We got paid out for a contract and I was wondering what to do with the cash. Now Nicole can have her wedding where she wants it, and you, Michelle, Andrea and Annie will have a cottage.”

“Thank you Bernard. That saves me a huge amount of effort.”

“Thanks Daddy!” both Nicole and I said together.

“I’m glad to do it, especially when you’ve knocked 10 percent off the price. That’s a new side of my girl. I’ll make sure the money is ready by mid-week.”

“But if Nicole wants a wedding there, won’t you have to put in a proper bathroom,” Andrea asked. “It’ll be hard to keep her gown from getting dirty in the privy.”

“We were thinking of putting in a septic system and proper bathroom, but trying to do so this year would be difficult.” Martin commented.

“Let me talk to my foreman, Réal. Maybe we can at least get the septic in and hook up a temporary toilet and sink before our heavy work season starts. I agree with my granddaughter that it isn’t quite ready for Nicole’s wedding from the couple of times I’ve been out there. But we’ll have to get on with it as soon as the snow is gone, and get all the approval’s done too. It may not be a fancy bathroom, but we can make sure it’s clean and functional. And we’ll make sure the price is right for you.”

“What date did you plan for your wedding, Nicole?” Martin asked.

“We were thinking of June, but have started to talk of the week when July 1 comes. It’s on a Thursday, so if we had the wedding Saturday after the holiday, we’d have some time to set up nicely.

What about you and Michelle though?”

“We haven’t even talked to the minister yet, nor had time to discuss a date ourselves. My own preference would be relatively soon, but I think we may have the wedding of my nephew within a few weeks too.

Give us a week or two and we'll make some sort of announcement."

Evening, January 1, 1965 – Anna

Dad and I walked home together.

"You were quiet today." Dad observed.

"Was I? Maybe the others were just ... more noisy."

"You generally manage to hold your own."

I was quiet for a moment, then said

"I may have done something stupid."

"Oh. Want to tell me."

"No ... Yes ... Sort of."

"Your choice, and only as much as you want. Unless it's something that could be bad for others. Are you upset that I gave Michelle the ring?"

"No! Don't be silly! You two get along famously. And I think that it's good that the ruby ring is doing something other than sit in the safety deposit box.

By the way, is Mum's engagement ring there?"

"Yes, of course. You should go and check yourself. We got you on the list last June. That ring is for you to have, if you want it. I'm not sure I'd be happy if you sold it though, but if you want the value, we can have it appraised and I'll pay you."

"Never! I want it to remind me of Mum. But would you mind if I had it made into a brooch or pendant?"

"Of course not. I was going to suggest that.

So what's bothering you?"

"Uhm."

"We can leave it if you want. As I said, as long as keeping quiet won't hurt anyone else, it can wait."

"Well. It's about last night."

"Something not so nice?" Dad prompted.

"No. Rather the opposite, which is in some ways more uncomfortable."

"And?"

"Well, Peter and I got on like a house on fire. Lots of similar background stuff. And we seem to finish each others sentences. At midnight, we kissed so long some people around us clapped and

cheered. It was sort of embarrassing if I think about it, but we didn't care. Then Peter asked if we should see if we could get a room. Normally I'd have slapped his face, but somehow it didn't seem an odd idea. But I did have the sense to ask what would we do to avoid consequences. He admitted he had condoms at home but not with him, and apologized for the suggestion given we might do something irresponsible. And I blurted out that we had condoms at home and practically the next minute we were in a taxi home. We even missed the midnight meal and the champagne."

"And now the alcohol has worn off, and you are feeling a little ashamed?"

"I only had a few sips of Peter's wine, and he only had two glasses all evening. I didn't want to worry about being asked for ID, so I had just pop or orange juice. I think we were kind of drunk on each other. But we had the good sense to take precautions. I think Dr. Sinclair has drummed that message home too. Besides, I didn't want to damage my dress. Peter said it made him desperate to touch me, but I didn't want hand prints all over it."

"Hmm. So the solution was to take it off?" Dad said this with a big smile so I knew he was just teasing.

"Dad! Well, actually that's a good one. And not so far from the truth. But I wanted him too. Now I don't know how I feel about him and Fred and ... all sorts of things."

"I can't admonish you for something that happened in a way not so dissimilar from when I met Mum. Or Margaret for that matter. And you took precautions."

"I just hope Nosey McPherson didn't see him leave this morning. I snuck him into the garage and took the car to drive him home. He kept his head down until we got to the end of the block."

"Oh. Drama! But it sounds like you had a very good time. At least I hope you did."

"Yes. I just don't know where it will lead."

"Take it one day at a time, and maybe concentrate a bit on getting to know each other really well, and figuring out what you each want."

"Good advice."

"I hope I can follow it myself. I'm still a bit uneasy that Michelle and I may be going too fast."

"Dad. I feel really bad that I didn't properly congratulate you

and Michelle. I think she's going to work out for you. She's not Mum, and never will be, but I can be friends with her and love her for herself. I think if you let her go because of nerves, you'll kick yourself the rest of your life."

"Thanks for that. Sometimes a person close to you can see things with better perspective than yourself."

"By the way, how did Peter manage to get tickets at short notice for the Chateau?"

"He already had the tickets. He'd been going out with a girl who's studying at Dal. She was supposed to come up and meet his parents, but he got a goodbye letter in mid-December."

"So he's on the rebound."

"I suppose so. And another reason to slow down a bit."

"We are both trying to find the right measure for getting to know people we like. I'm glad we talk. Most fathers and daughters don't."

"Me too. But don't tell Michelle about me and Peter. At least, ... well you know."

"I don't intend to. That's your choice."

"Dad. There was something else."

"Another revelation?"

"No, more a question."

"If I can answer it I will."

"Well, with Fred things were very nice. I enjoyed it a lot. But with Peter I got so excited, then I got this sort of wave of enjoyment and had a sort of spasm. Sort of out of control."

"It's called an orgasm. Happens to men every time."

"I've heard it mentioned, and sort of realized it happens to men when they, well, go off. But this seemed more intense."

"My experience is that when it happens for women it can seem to be more intense than for men."

"My only worry is that you'll want it too much and neglect other things in life. It may be worth asking Peter what went wrong with the girl in Halifax."

"Thanks. Dad. Both those points are good advice."

Saturday, January 2, 1965 – Martin

I woke early. For the previous couple of mornings Michelle had been beside me, but wasn't today. I decided to get up. Annie appeared

to be still sleeping, but by the time I'd finished my shower, I noticed she was sitting at the small desk in her room wearing her dressing gown.

"Up already?" I asked.

"I've got some study I should do. But I'm actually writing down some questions that Peter and I should talk about."

"I was about to do something similar to help plan things with Michelle. But I think I'll have breakfast and get dressed first."

We both just had some toast for breakfast.

"I'll be going shopping this morning, probably with Michelle since it's easier to have someone bring up the car to the door of the supermarket. Is there anything special you want or we need?"

"The list was on the fridge under the magnet. I think you just need to make sure we have enough things for quick meals. Do we have enough cans of beans for beans on toast and eggs and stuff?"

"I'll add a note to make sure of those. Also some bread for toast is always useful, even if it's a bit boring. How's the peanut butter situation?"

"OK but we could use some more. Try to find some without sugar. Or buy some peanuts and we'll make our own with the blender."

"Hard on the blender, but it does taste better. I'll also look for some cold cuts."

"But not baloney!" Annie said.

"I don't like it either. Mum made a mistake getting that block five years ago. She thought I liked it. I thought she bought it because she did. And such a big block."

"And I got it for school lunches. Aaggch."

"Don't worry. No baloney."

"But get some cookies. Something not too sweet or soft."

I phoned Michelle. It was just 8, and she was still in bed.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't, but I hadn't got out of bed yet."

"I was thinking we could do our grocery shopping together and spend some time figuring out when and how we'll do what we need to do this year."

"Yes. That was what I was thinking about in bed. Maybe I'll just go back and sleep until 1966."

"Coward."

“Am not!”

“Very pretty, slightly cowardly fiancée who’d better be ready by 9 for me to pick her up.”

“Oh. That won’t give me time to shower.”

“Why not shower or bathe later?”

“Oh that’s not very efficient.”

“Who’s talking about efficiency.”

“Hmm. I see. Well, we’ll see. It’s a tempting thought.”

“Pick you up at 9.”

* * *

We decided just to shop at Billings Bridge, where we could compare Loblaws and Steinberg. By 10 we were unpacking things at my house.

“Annie! You here?”

“Yes. I’ll come down.

Hi Michelle.”

“Hi Annie. How was the party at the Chateau with Peter?”

“Good. Maybe too good. We kissed so long at midnight that we got a cheering section of people nearby. I’m going to meet him later for lunch so we can talk. We seem to rather like each other, and there could be misunderstandings.”

“Give us a call at Michelle’s if you want to join us later, either for dinner or after.”

“And if Peter wants to come along, you can bring him too if you phone ahead so we make enough food,” Michelle added.

Saturday, January 2, 1965 – Anna

Peter came to the house and since neither of us were very hungry we made some tuna sandwiches and some tea and sat at the kitchen table.

“How’re you doing?” he asked.

“In one sense, fantastic – on top of the world. In another, what happened New Year’s Eve just doesn’t seem to be Annie Tremblay, nor, with my 1965 resolutions, does it seem to be Anna Tremblay.”

“Meaning you just don’t behave that way normally?”

“Do you?” I asked pointedly.

“Frankly ... no. It’s not like me at all. I’m a guy, so ... you know ... I’ll take some fun if and where I can get it, but generally not with someone I’ve known most of my life who is a family friend. This was a bit out of character.”

“But can we say it was a bad thing? It kind of felt right in the moment.”

“Did it ever! Better be careful or we’ll be at it again.”

“Maybe we should have gone to the cafe.” I said.

“We’ll behave, and we can talk more freely here while there’s nobody else around.

It seems to me that we both enjoyed our time together hugely.”

“Agreed. As long as there’s no unfortunate consequences.” I had to tag on the proviso. The statistical efficacy of condoms wasn’t great, but it seemed a lot of the failures were from non-use or sloppy use. Peter added.

“We took precautions, and used them properly. There’s always some risk, but I think you know I’m not one to avoid responsibility.”

“It would be pretty unfortunate for both our educations if I got pregnant now.” I said, then added,

“But I sort of wonder how you feel about Evelyn and me. How do you see each of us relative to your own life?” I had to know where I stood, and I hoped I wouldn’t regret the answers he gave.

“I met Evelyn about two years ago. We were in the same year at Dal, but different programs. I was doing maths – actually statistics, but that isn’t quite separate yet, and she was studying English. We met at some lecture about the Vietnam war where there was a coffee and cookie session after. Her family is fairly prominent in Halifax.

Anyway, we get along pretty well and start going steady. Things got a little hotter in the beginning of last year, and we tried sex a few times. She said she liked it, but didn’t seem to really be that enthusiastic, especially with condoms. She said she was going to see a doctor recommended by one of her girlfriends to ask about the Pill. That was last May. I was about to come back here to start some summer work with the epidemiology people here, then begin my Ph.D. So it’s been letters and occasional phone calls. Then about 3 weeks ago I get the ‘Dear Peter’ letter.”

“You’ve not seen her since May?”

“No. And frankly, I wasn’t so upset about the letter. More

annoyed that I'd kind of waited for her and blown a bundle on arranging a nice time for her with the tickets for the Chateau. But it doesn't seem such a bad investment now. Even if we didn't stay for the champagne and midnight snack."

"I was super happy to have the chance to wear Mum's dress."

"Pleased to be of service. Better not talk much more about that or there'll be a raving sex maniac in your house."

"Me or you?"

We both laughed. Peter continued

"I think I'd begun to realize that with Evelyn I wouldn't really find the companion I wanted. Somehow that seems possible with you, even though we've really only met as grown-ups a few days ago."

I thought the same thing, but it seemed too early to say so, so I temporized.

"It could be an illusion. We've been on holiday. Real life may jump up and kick us in the ass."

"Yeah. But somehow I don't think it'll kick us very hard. Especially if we do like we're doing now and keep talking and thinking and trying hard to get things right."

I got up, walked round the table and kissed him on the cheek. It would have been the lips, but I didn't trust myself to keep my panties on. Anyway, we talked a bit more, and decided that since we were in the same city for at least a while, we could share some time and, well, some sex if there were appropriate opportunities, and maybe work on helping each other achieve our educational goals.

Mid-day, Saturday, January 2, 1965 – Michelle

After we drove to back to my house and unloaded the remaining – 'my' – groceries, Martin and I made some tea and sat at the kitchen table. Andrea came to join us. Martin had bought some ginger snaps and he'd got an extra bag so we could have some at each house.

"What are you two going to do today?" Andrea asked, I thought in a slightly naughty way. I decided to ignore this.

"Starting to plan our year. Getting married when there are two extra people, two cars, 4 or 5 bicycles and 3 properties involved takes organization." Martin said.

“Yes. In the movies they never talk about things like that.”

“In the movies they aren’t even in real houses,” I countered. “I don’t think they have fronts on the rooms so the cameras can see in.”

“Guess so. Anyway, I was wondering if I can go to a movie this afternoon with Susan Grafton.”

“You’ll be home for supper?” I asked.

“Susan was going to ask her Mum if I could stay for supper. She only lives a block away. You have her number on the wall by the phone.”

“Let us know. And I want you to call me when you’re coming home and Martin or I will come and get you. I don’t like you out on your own after dark.”

“Oh. Mum!”

“Not ‘Oh Mum’. Even a safe city like Ottawa has some nasty people. I still like to be careful.”

“OK. You’re right. It’s better to phone and let you know. I’ll call Susan now so I know if I’ll be there for supper.”

We only had a phone in the kitchen, so Andrea was obliged to be brief. It turned out she was invited to supper.

“I’ll go get myself ready then go over there now. We decided to have a sandwich or a hamburger before the movie.”

She disappeared upstairs.

“Want to talk about a wedding?” Martin asked

“OK. What sort of wedding do you want?”

“I don’t like a lot of dress-up and ceremony. I think it’s better to save the effort and money and put them towards our life together with the girls.”

“Do you want just us and two witnesses?” I asked. “Family might not like that.”

“I’d be happy with an informal service, say at St. James, and invite friends and family to attend and join us after for an informal reception. Perhaps we could even resurrect the old English tradition of getting married in the morning and having a wedding breakfast.”

“I wonder if that’s possible. But it would be different and less ... pressured.”

“There’s nothing to stop us from asking what time of day is allowed for a wedding. Or we could have a ceremony late morning or noon and do a wedding lunch.”

“Hmm. Could be nice. What sort of dress should I wear, though?”

“Do you want to wear a traditional gown?”

“I saw the photos of your Belgian wedding to Clara. She was wearing a nice silk suit.”

“Yes. Annie has that now, along with the linen dress in the picture at David’s grave in Uden.”

“She doesn’t mind wearing the clothes of ... well, someone who died?”

“I asked her that, but she said it’s a nice and quiet reminder of someone she loved. And the clothes are of good quality and fit her quite well.”

“I suppose it would be a shame to throw them out. And it would remind her of her mother each time she put them on. As long as it didn’t make her sad.”

“But something that may not suit you is that the Belgian wedding was on a Saturday morning. You wouldn’t feel it was too much of a repetition?”

“I’ll have to think about it. I don’t think so. Let’s allow ourselves the small luxury of some time to talk about different options and we’ll find a good solution. But maybe I want the carriage and horses.”

“Yes, your majesty.”

I stuck out my tongue at Martin, just as Andrea clattered downstairs.

“I get told off if I stick my tongue out!”

“You weren’t supposed to see that. It was just for Martin.” I answered. “Go and have a good time, but be careful.”

Andrea bounced out and slammed the door. Martin and I both winced.

Martin continued, “About the carriage. It sort of depends on where we’d marry and where we’d have the reception.”

“Yes. When you got married here – I think in a house not so different from yours and mine that your parents had – you went from the living room to the dining room or vice versa. The horse wouldn’t be able to turn around.”

“Indeed, we didn’t need any transport. But we did end up skating.”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t marry such an unconventional man. But you seem so conventional on the surface.”

“Only on the surface.

More seriously, I made a list this morning of the major things we need to take care of.”

“Let me look.”

The list was quite broadly drawn:

Sort out cottage money etc.

Choose which house to sell
prepare 1 or both for sale
if both, find new place

Move to combined household

Date and Place of wedding
note Des/Sharon & Nicole/Stephane

Honeymoon / holiday / conference trip

Wills / Bank accounts etc.

“Do you have anything to add?” Martin asked.

“Well, I can think of lots of details. I must admit I hadn’t thought about a honeymoon trip. How long would you like to take?”

“It would be nice to not have to rush. 5 or 6 weeks would be great. Do you think we could get some unpaid leave? Actually I have about 9 days left from last year.”

“I took only a couple of days too. Maybe we can manage with that if we have too. But I agree a longer time would be more relaxed. You wrote ”conference trip” – where’s that?”

“Well, it’s a bit soon for one the one I planned on going to, and I don’t know about any others off the top of my head. But I’m booked to go to the Institute of Electrical Engineers Conference on Electronics Design, which is February 8 and 9 at Imperial College London.”

“Yes, that is soon. And it’s winter time.”

“True. It would be a bit cool there, but not many tourists getting in our way. Do you have a valid passport?”

“Actually yes. I got one two years ago when Bryan was going to some meeting in Australia where he was supposed to discuss aboriginal matters relative to our American Indians. Then he made up some excuse – it may have been true – that he couldn’t get any extra time off and I didn’t go with him.”

“Would you like to get married quickly and go with me? Or even go, as they say, ‘without benefit of church’?”

“Yes to the first, no to the second. I think we’ve made our decision. Let’s figure out how to make it happen.” I leaned over and kissed him. “Can I say that I’m getting to be very attached to our ... er ... intimate time together, and I rather want it to be ‘legal’?”

“Yes. Me too.

How about we just go to England, or Britain if you’d like to see some of Scotland, and think of doing another trip to the Continent later in the year or else next year. I’d like to have Annie along, and I’m sure Andrea would appreciate it. For this February, we’d be gone 3 to 4 weeks, depending on what we can arrange.”

“Can we afford that – I mean the trip with the girls?”

“Can we afford NOT to give them – and us – that sort of experience? We’ll find a way. But there’s plenty to do first. And it would be too much of an expedition to arrange for them to come in a month. Besides, they both have school.

Talking of the girls, Annie will be all right on her own, but what about Andrea?”

“Well, she could stay with Bryan all the time, but I think I’ll ask Mum if she can spend time there. And Nicole will help keep an eye on her too I hope.”

“Is there time to get married before we go?” Martin asked.

“Why don’t I phone the minister now? The number for St. James should be in the phone book.”

“I’ll put a kettle on to warm up the tea. And I have to visit the bathroom to unload the previous cup.”

I was finishing the call when he came back downstairs. I said,

“It seems possible. Tell you after I use the toilet too.”

When I came back, I said, “I talked to Donald Joyce, the minister. We have to get a marriage license. We can’t let the church read the banns because I’m divorced. But once we have the license, it’s a

matter of a time convenient to all parties.”

“I’m having an awful feeling that my parents should be there. Maybe we should phone them and offer wishes for New Year and also ask about timing. We’d better go to my place so it doesn’t go on your bill.”

“Martin! We’re planning to get married in the next 4 weeks and you worry about that?”

“Yes. I’m acting like an idiot. By the time the bill comes, we’ll be jointly responsible.”

“Do you know their number?”

“Yes. But I haven’t yet dialled direct. I’m not sure that’s yet possible here – I heard something about it being launched in Winnipeg sometime around now. I guess we could, but maybe I’ll use the operator.”

“Here, go ahead.”

Martin dialled 0 and gave the number for Washington DC.

“Mum. Hi, it’s Martin. Happy New Year.

No, nothing’s wrong. Quite the opposite. I wanted to know if you and Dad are thinking of coming to Ottawa in the next few weeks.

...

Yes. Dad mentioned he’d probably retire this year. Oh. I’d somehow not remembered that they give you a trip to find housing.

...

You were thinking of February. Any chance you could advance that into late January?

...

Well, I’ve mentioned Michelle to you. If you’re sitting down, I’ll tell you we are thinking of getting married so she can come with me to the conference in London in early February.”

There was clearly a commotion at the other end of the line, then Robert apparently came on the line. Martin continued,

“Yes. Hi Dad. Happy New Year. Yes. Mum’s right. Michelle and I are thinking it makes sense to get married soon so she’s ‘legal’ if I take her with me to England when I go to the conference. It’s not an ideal timing, but then with two daughters and other weddings this year

Yes, Des and Sharon plan to get married – we’re not sure when yet – and so do Michelle’s sister Nicole – my secretary – and her fiancé Stephane, but that will be in the Summer. Lots happening.

.... So you might be able to come up later in the month?

Good.....

Annie. She's doing well. Met up with Jim Sinclair's son over the Christmas break and he took her to the Chateau for New Years Eve. They seem to get on well – almost like matches and gasoline. I hope it won't be too disruptive....

Yes. It's a pity you haven't met Michelle yet, but I think you'll like her.

No. I hadn't really thought things would happen this fast. But as Annie points out, you sometimes have to seize the chance for a life-long happiness....

OK. Love to Mum, and will expect your call early next week about timing. Bye.”

He hung up the phone and sat down at the table.

“I guess you got the gist of that.”

“Yes. Did you mean that about Annie and life-long happiness?”

“Oh. Yes. I was talking with Annie about how things happened so fast this year. Clara's not been in the ground a year. It is a bit sooner than I'd ever imagined.”

“Hmm. Me too. The divorce only got finalized just before I met you, and it wasn't that long a case because Bryan didn't oppose it.

You know I was feeling it was too soon as well, but Andrea said much the same as Annie.”

“Sometimes I smell a conspiracy between those two!”

“I don't think it's formalized, but they do seem to work together.”

“So do we accept their judgement and get on with being a couple – a married couple?” Martin asked.

“Of course. Otherwise we'd better stop ... well, you know.”

“I'm not sure I do. You'd better tell me.” Martin feigned ignorance.

“To put it bluntly, sticking your thing in me so I go all to pieces.”

“That bad!”

“Actually that good. And we'd better change the topic or we'll not get our list sorted out.”

“Pity. Later then.”

“Oh. Most definitely. I just want a few things organized first.”

“Well. Let's assume we're going to England for the Conference. That's February 8 and 9. Let me get out a calendar Here we are.

That's Monday and Tuesday. If we left on Thursday Feb 4, we'd arrive on the 5th, and have the weekend to get over jet lag."

"Is that bad? I've never done that sort of travel. Only been on a plane once to Vancouver with Bryan. There was a bit of a time difference, but it wasn't too bad."

"The main problem I find is if I can't sleep on the plane, because you get on at night and get off early the next day. So you've a long time until a proper bedtime, which is actually about 6 or 7 p.m. Ottawa time, but late in England or Europe. I found the last time I went I was able to get about 4 hours sleep on the plane, take a nap mid afternoon local time in Europe, then get up and stay up until between 10 and 11 and then sleep more or less OK during the local sleeping time. I was then fine for the rest of my trip, though I did take it easy for a couple of days. That's what I'm suggesting now."

"OK. I'll have to trust your judgement on that."

"I was also a bit surprised that I got a sort of culture shock. Things are smaller, more crowded, busier, and I thought a bit grimy. I almost felt homesick for a day until I found myself enjoying the things I had before."

It's useful to recognize that you can get those reactions so you don't let them take over and spoil the time."

"I didn't realize that either. It's helpful to know in advance or it could spoil our honeymoon."

"I wonder if we could spend the first weekend with Joe and Julia, or else with David and Esther. I want to see them all, as well as Jane and of course some colleagues in Oxford."

"Hey. Isn't it supposed to be a honeymoon?"

"You mean four weeks where you don't ever get your panties on?"

"No! Meany! Just I don't want all business and no fun."

"I've really only the Conference and people there, and then Bleaney in Oxford who are a must on my scientific list. All the others I want to see are friends who I want you to know too. Do you have a huge list of tourist attractions you want to see?"

"I'm happy to let you show me. But I'll start to make a list and we'll see what we can fit in."

"A lot of the places I like are not really on the tourist map, but are special to me. I guess I'd like to go back to see our street in Sutton, though truthfully it's not terribly interesting. Reminiscing really."

“We should do that. It will give me a picture of where you lived before the War.”

“And during the Blitz.” Martin added. “But we’d first better sort out travel and where we’re going to stay. Let’s see, that means writing to Joe and Julia, David and Esther, the hotel in South Kensington, Jane, and ... who else?”

“Martin. I wouldn’t know. You’re the one who used to live there.”

“Yes, of course. I’m being thick.

Oh. Can I get you to phone Penny and let her know our thinking and tell her we’ve called Dad and Mum? I want if possible to get to Des and Sharon’s wedding.

Hmm. What do you want to call my folks? Perhaps if I use Bernard and Charlotte, you can use Robert and Miriam, but we each say Mum and Dad to our own parents.”

“Agreed! It keeps things clear. That was quick. And yes I can call Penny right away. I’ll see if Des and Sharon have a date. It would be good if Miriam and Robert can attend both ceremonies. I can also call Nicole while you are writing to people and maybe she can handle the hotel and the airline, since I think she told me she did your bookings. We may have to arrange a special payment for my extra cost, but I think that is possible. I know Bryan talked about it once.”

“Probably through the government travel service. On Monday she can possibly get that organized. Here, we’d better put down a plan of days.”

He took a piece of paper and ruler and made a grid 7 wide and 5 high and put down the days of the week as column headings, then in the corner of each square the number of the day of the month.

“OK. The start is on the 4th. I’ll use a pencil and put night of 5 and 6 with Julia and Joe. Hotel for the Sunday 7, Mon 8 and Tues 9, maybe two more days for sightseeing in London, then we can maybe go to Oxford on Friday 12th. We can even try to go to Evensong in the College chapel. I think you’d like that. Should I ask Joe if he can arrange a rental car for us? Or we could ask Nicole to arrange it to be rented from the airport, but we’ll not need it in London, and it may be a nuisance.”

“Don’t they drive on the wrong side of the road?”

“Better not say that there!”

"No. Sorry. But driving there would be extra work for you. Or did you ever drive there."

"No. Only bicycle except for some driving informally in the RAF.

OK. We'll do public transport, though it means missing some of the places that are more difficult to get to on the train or bus. There'll still be lots to do and see."

"And didn't Jim say you needed exercise."

"True.

Suppose I suggest to David and Esther that we visit them at the end of our trip. They live close enough to London that we could get to Heathrow fairly easily. The plane leaves sometime early in the afternoon to Montreal.

You know, if we leave on the 4th and come home on Sunday 28th, we only need 16 workdays including the 5th. And I can count the 8th and 9th as workdays. "

"I'm going to phone Penny then Nicole. You write those letters. But better tell me when you think we're going to tie the knot."

"I'll overlook the naughty references to tying you up and suggest that we could think of the weekend of either the 22nd or 29th of January. And I'm OK with a Friday evening if that makes things easier."

"Good. I'll call Penny first. Do you have the number?"

Martin gave me the number and then went in the dining room to write. Perhaps he didn't pay close attention, but my call to Penny lasted somewhat longer than either of us would have expected. Then I dialled Nicole and as sisters we spoke in in a strange mix of English and French we'd got used to using.

In the meanwhile, Martin had managed to write an aerogram to Joe.

January 2, 1965

Dear Joe and Julia:

In my Christmas card I mentioned I'd be coming to England for a conference in February. It may come as a bit of a surprise that I'll be bringing a new wife along. Once Michelle and I realized we wanted a life together -- as we were told by both our daughters -- it became

apparent that it would be a good idea for her to see where I lived and studied.

We plan to arrive (assuming plans work out) on Feb 5. Is there a chance we could either stay with you or prevail upon you to book a B&B near you for the nights of the 5th and 6th? We'll likely go to the Cromwell Hotel in S. Kensington Sunday, and probably stay there 5 nights for London sightseeing. However, we would like to catch up with the two of you and your family, and the weekend is probably best for that.

Looking forward to your reply.

Martin Tremblay and Michelle (currently Corcoran-Lacroix)

Rather unimaginatively, Martin also wrote similar letters to David and Esther and Jane. For David and Esther he asked if we could stay or have accommodation arranged for the nights of the 24th, 25th and 26th February. He suggested that we would be in Oxford from the 12th to at least the 16th. It was possible we would use Oxford as a base for other sightseeing, depending on the accommodation we could find. Jane was now in an old folks home in North Oxford, having sold her house. Martin did not ask her to arrange accommodation. He felt we could likely get to Oxford early in the day and arrange Bed and Breakfast. Or we could splurge on something like the Randolph – at this time I had no clue what this meant. He did suggest that Jane get a reservation at a nice restaurant, and underlined "nice".

I came in the dining room to report on the calls and review the letters.

"Penny says Des and Sharon are arranging to have the banns read this Sunday. Joe will do this, but he's going to get a colleague to officiate at their wedding. They're thinking of the 30th. She got Joe on the line, and actually he can conduct our service as long as we have the license. Penny suggested we could have a simple exchange of vows ceremony a bit before Des and Sharon have theirs. She said she thinks my folks will be very welcome at the ceremony

and reception for Des and Sharon because Sharon hasn't got family coming except for Allen. He's going to fly in from Alberta. It won't be a big fancy reception, and it would save a lot of effort for your parents and Annie and possibly some Ottawa friends if we combine the two events. What do you think?"

"It makes a lot of sense. We need to tell folks we want their best wishes, not presents. I'd rather Des and Sharon got those – not from your family of course. It would save Penny having to get her crew here, and Mum and Dad having so much to do.

But what do Des and Sharon think?"

"Penny will phone back when she's asked them."

As if on cue, the phone rang. I answered.

"Hello. ...

Oh, Hi Sharon. Thank you. You too.

Great. Thank you very much for your generosity in being willing to share your day with us.

OK. We'll be in touch to work out details, but will reserve the 30th. Does Penny want us to phone her parents in Washington to give them the date?

Hi Penny.

Yes. We can phone Miriam and Robert. Thanks for this.

Bye."

"Are we phoning Mum and Dad again?" Martin asked.

"Yes. I don't want Penny out of pocket more than she will be."

Martin phoned. The date was set.

"I read your letters." I said. "They're really all the same, but they do the job."

"What else do we need to do today?" Martin asked, then said, "We can cross off date and place of wedding and consider that our honeymoon trip plans are as advanced as they can be for today, except for posting the letters. Lets do that right away, then come back and think about what we might need for the trip in case we need time to arrange anything."

I answered "Here's what's left.

Sort out cottage money etc.

choose which house to sell

prepare 1 or both for sale

if both, find new place

Move to combined household

Wills / Bank accounts etc. ”

Martin responded, “I’ll walk with you up to the post box. Seal the letters indoors here or your tongue will freeze to them.”

We bundled into coats and boots. As we walked we talked.

“Michelle, I’ll phone your Dad tomorrow to confirm when we’ll document the cottage money loan and get the cheque. I’ll assume you can phone Bryan today or tomorrow to let him know we’re going ahead but don’t have exact timing yet, but it will be Friday or before.”

“OK.

About houses. We’ve already talked enough that we know we’re going to sell mine first. So I think we should start to make the arrangements and figure out which furniture we’re keeping. The stuff we don’t want, we’ll put in my house to give it some sort of lived-in appearance while we sell it. I don’t think either of us have anything horrible in the living areas. Does that seem right?”

“It almost sounds like I’m saying it.”

We both laughed. Now at the mailbox, we posted the three aerograms, noting that pickup was unfortunately not until Sunday night.

“What about my house? Is the guest room adequate for Andrea?” Martin asked.

“I think it will do until we get mine sold and the cottage more comfortable.

Do you think we should stay there?”

“It’s comfortable, or perhaps I’m being lazy.

Actually, we’ll not have a guest room, and the garage only holds one car, though there’s enough space in the driveway. We’d have to shift cars around sometimes. So maybe it’s not ideal. We’re all used to the location though.

Perhaps it’s better to try it and keep talking together to see what we like and don’t like. Otherwise we may jump to a new place and find it’s awkward for the girls to get to school, or we aren’t comfortable in some way.”

“I can live with that. Or think I can. We’ll see when we’re all there.” I said.

“It’s worked when we’ve been there over the holidays. I suppose there’s the matter that you didn’t have all your stuff. So we’ll have some sorting and tossing to do. We can start today when we look

at what we'll want to take with us to England."

We came back in, made some more tea and went upstairs to the master bedroom.

"Do you have a suitcase, Michelle?"

"In the basement, near the front there's some rough wooden shelves. There's suitcases there."

"This must be another of Jim's ideas to make me exercise."

"No. I'll take credit this time. Sorry that we didn't think about it before."

But do you plan to pack already?"

"Not pack exactly. But things we're going to take and don't need in the meantime can be put inside the cases we plan to use. And we can get an idea of how much luggage we have in total. I really don't like to have too much, since we'll have to lug it about on trains and stuff, but it's not fun to be without something you want or need."

And though I've joked about no panties, I think you actually will want to take flannel pyjamas and maybe some tights and vests."

"Really. Will we be out in the cold?"

"Actually inside in the cold. The Brits only heat one room, and even that one not very well. The bedrooms are often cold. And – which is pretty uncivilized – so are the bathrooms. We may end up being the great unwashed for a few days. We'll have to think about having some laundry done at some point, but I'm prepared to make clothes do for two or three days if you don't mind that. I can tell you it's not so uncommon there."

"It wasn't uncommon here until recently. When we were little, I can remember we wore clothes for several days. We'll manage, though we might not have so much ... fun of the honeymoon type while we're there."

"I'll go look at the suitcases and bring up what I think will work."

When we've done a bit of that, we can take a break for some fun."

Do you want to go out for supper and maybe a movie?"

"I'd like to, but Andrea's coming back after supper. Shall I phone the Grafton's and say we're going out to supper, but will pick her up there afterwards."

"Good idea. We can eat relatively early."

Martin went to the basement and found the shelves with the suitcases.

"Do you think you could fit your stuff in this along with a small

backpack?” Martin said, showing me a very traditional leather suitcase in the old style with flip latches and even a key on a string. “There was one huge case – totally unsuitable for UK trains – and some I think are too old for use other than storage. This one will work, though I’ll want to find a strap to ensure it stays closed.”

“I don’t know. How many outfits do I need?”

“I think we need to make a list, but for the moment I’ll suggest that you should have at least two pairs of slacks, a skirt or two, one or two sweaters, six or seven tops or blouses, underwear, socks, stockings in case of a formal event, pyjamas. I’m taking 2 pairs of pyjamas in case one is damp from laundry. And I’m taking some long underwear and two vests or T shirts. They can be crammed in corners but are good if it’s cold as an extra layer underneath.”

“You mentioned that some places won’t allow women in slacks.”

“I’ve heard that on occasion. Though I think a nice pair of slacks is modest and won’t offend.

Do you have a skirt that pairs with a jacket as a suit? The Brits say costume sometime. That would be semi-dressy. Even better if one of the pairs of slacks goes with the jacket. I don’t think we need anything for cocktails or really formal dinners. I can’t see we’ll be doing anything like that this trip.”

“I have this navy suit with its 3/4 sleeve jacket. And these slacks turned out to be so close in colour you’d have to be a real specialist to know they weren’t a match. So that gives me some choices, especially with a couple of different long-sleeved sweaters.

What coat do you intend to wear?”

“I’ve a leather jacket that is lined. It’s a bit heavy, but if I dubbin it it is pretty waterproof. I’ll take a hat and a pocket umbrella. And gloves of course.”

“What about shoes?”

“Sturdy walking shoes, good slippers, and a pair of dress shoes. I’ve got to have a suit, unfortunately, but I can wear it as regular clothing during the rest of the trip, but I don’t fancy having it dry cleaned while there.”

“We’ll be the grubby Canucks.”

“I’ll still love you.”

“Even with all those clothes on?”

“After we select a few more things, I think we need to do an equipment check.”

"Is that like at the service station where the pump-jockey opens the hood and uses ... what is it ... oh I know, the dipstick to check things?"

"I think that might be it."

"You sure you have the right type of dipstick."

"I'm sure you'll tell me if it's not the right one."

We rummaged through the closets and found some appropriate shoes. Despite my short stature, we decided flat heeled shoes would be best. I dug up two pairs of woollen tights and a vest and T-shirt, along with some flannel pyjamas.

"These are the only flannel ones I have."

"Some of the British stuff used to be pretty good. We could buy there."

"Where would we put it? The suitcases are going to be full."

"I usually carry a canvas carry-all folded up. It can hold the dirty laundry and stuff that isn't fragile on the way home."

"You've had practice at this."

"Among other things."

I hadn't noticed, but he'd undone the fastening of my slacks and now quickly pulled them down, bringing my panties with them.

"Oh. You awful man."

"Step out of these, and take off the rest of your clothes while I run the tub."

I actually only had to pull my sweater and T-shirt over my head. Today wasn't work or formal, so I didn't need to bother with a bra. Wearing only socks I joined Martin in the bathroom.

"You're overdressed. I just have to take off my socks." Which I did, but Martin was undressed almost at the same time. We settled into the tub, Martin at the back.

"Martin, do we need to get some English money?"

"I have a bit of small stuff and a few notes at home. Plus I still have an account over there, but it has very little in it. I could, I suppose, get a draft, but I think I'll take travellers cheques. I usually get them in Canadian dollars and change them at a bank there. Actually WE'LL get travellers cheques – you should have some too."

"I've heard people say you should take American dollars because they are easier to change."

“That means two exchange charges. It is perhaps easier to exchange them at shops and hotels, but I don’t think the cost is worth it. And if we come back with travellers cheques, the Canadian ones can be used here. I’ve even still got a few. I think two twenties and a fifty. But I’ll make sure we have about 5 quid a day.”

“What’s a quid?”

“A pound – slang. Oh dear. I had to go through all this with Clara. Well, we’ll do it. But not now. I’ve some buttons to play with. And there’s this fuzz here to run my fingers through. You haven’t trimmed lately.”

“You could say I’ve been busy. And it’s not the easiest location.”

“Should I offer to help?”

“I bet you’d like that.”

“Of course.”

“Well, if you want.”

Later, lying together, I said,

“Trimming my ... pussy ... made you very excited I think.”

“You seemed to enjoy it too.”

“I won’t deny it. It was nice. Thank you for being gentle, but not... well, too gentle.

I rather liked you ... er ... handling me. Gently drawing the lips to one side and the other.”

“And making sure I got my hands all over the area especially on the sensitive bits.”

“Exactly.”

“We forgot something. We didn’t look to see if there was enough lubrication when we inserted the dipstick.”

“Did we need to?”

“Of course. Better do it now.”

“Now? You just had it!”

He rolled me over and took one ankle in each hand.

“Oh. No. You mustn’t. No. No. It’s too sensitive just now and ooohh that feels good.”

“The dipstick seems to be showing enough lubricant. Or should I say lubricant?”

“Incorrigible! Oh. Oh. I can’t believe how good that feels.”

Evening, Saturday, January 2, 1965 – Anna

Even though Peter was invited to join the rest of the clan at Michelle's, we decided I'd better go on my own. We were going to go through some of the furniture and decide what we really wanted to keep. I got there in time for a bite of supper – we were doing leftovers to empty the fridge so it was a bit of a strange plate of odds and ends.

After dinner we walked about with some masking tape labelling things as 'keep', 'sell' or 'maybe', using the same system Dad and I had employed when we had the sad job of sorting Mum's stuff. Andrea said

"This is kind of exciting. I hope we don't get any arguments or fights over things."

Dad said, "My feeling is if someone really wants to keep something, it's better to keep it, at least for now. So I don't plan to be too fussy."

"There's not too much I'm set on keeping, except for family treasures, but those are fairly small." Michelle added.

"With the 'maybe' furniture, we can choose what fits our needs best. I'd rather wait to buy new stuff until we all decide where we're going to settle." Dad responded.

"You mean we may be moving out of town?" Andrea asked. Michelle replied,

"No, but possibly looking for a new house with more space for all of us. When we went to Jim Sinclair's last week we saw a few for sale. But for now we'll live in Martin's house. It's in a familiar neighbourhood and you have your friends here and can get to school."

"I hadn't really thought of that. I like being able to get together with my friends. When I'm with Dad and Rachel that's more difficult because they're in Alta Vista."

"Even if we're a bit cramped for a while, it may be good to see how it works out while we look around." Dad summed up.

Wednesday, January 6, 1965 – Anna

University was starting up again, and I'd been to classes, but Peter and I met for a hamburger dinner at a little cafe on Bank Street.

“Tell me about your plans for your education.” Peter said when we had our burgers.

“I’d like to get my doctorate so I can find a career in science. Last summer I was a research assistant – mainly the gopher – for a group doing some work on semiconductor lasers. It was kind of interesting. Not big physics like nuclear stuff or cosmology, but I think it will be important for some consumer products. There’s talk of devices to store data or recorded music or even TV shows. Also there’s some rumours they could be used for communications using glass fibres, but not like the fibreglass of insulation or plastic boats.”

“You’d like a research career?”

“Yeah. I like learning. And I like doing things, making stuff work. What about you?”

“Well, epidemiology has been around a while, but with computers getting better and our medical data improving – the lab stuff that is kind of related to the things you’re talking about as well as the records that are now on magnetic tape – I think we could be set for some better understanding of what can be done to act earlier to keep people well.”

“Neat. I can see that could be not only interesting for itself, but very satisfying if you saved some lives.”

“I’m actually quite interested in people having good lives. I think there’s more than just being alive, and there could be some really fascinating debates on what constitutes a good life.”

“My wicked side says some of what we had New Year’s Eve could be part of a good life.”

“You won’t find me disagreeing.”

Have you given any thought to how you’d fit in marriage or a family? Even with the Pill and some changing attitudes, I think it’s still tougher for women.”

“Yeah. Before Christmas I overheard some profs. saying it wasn’t worth having women in science because they just got married and dropped out. Dad got mad and wrote to Father Guindon, who to his credit managed to put out a Christmas message that anyone marking student work should be blind to everything but ability.”

“I saw that letter. It was a good message. He managed to bring in the civil rights message, too.”

“But to your question, I guess my focus has been on getting my degree and getting a chance to go to a good graduate school. I’ve

not really thought what my life after that would be. I know that I've had a good model in the way Dad and Mum were such good partners, and clearly enjoyed being with each other. Dad seems to be managing to do that with Michelle too. Mum's illness and death kind of put thoughts about the longer term in my life in the deep freeze.

Going to bed with Fred was an attempt – I think a successful one – to learn how sex works for me. And Fred was and is a friend who's important to me. I wasn't in love with him, but I think I feel a form of love for him. I hope that doesn't upset you."

"No. I think for myself that I've still – despite her dumping me – an affection for Evelyn. And a lot of gratitude too, as well as affection, for the rather slutty Janice for helping me to learn about sex. I wouldn't see her as my wife, but she's a good soul, and I hope she finds a happy life."

I interjected, "And I've still not answered your question about how I see my life outside of science. I should give it some thought, and the rather nice time with you can't help but be an influence."

"I think it's going to be a factor in my thinking too." Peter replied.

Thursday evening, January 7, 1965 – Martin

It was about 7 p.m. when the phone rang. Annie was working late in the University library. Michelle was at her own house. Laundry, bill paying, and other chores had made their demands. When the phone rang, I answered it:

"Hello. Martin Tremblay."

"Dr. Tremblay, my name is Jack Masterson. I'm a radio ham and I communicate from time to time with Joe Carr."

"I just wrote to him on the weekend."

"Yes. He said that – well, not said, we do Morse – and wanted me to let you know I can get in contact with him most evenings. Mainly, he wanted to say he'll meet you at Heathrow if you give him the flight number, and your suggested dates are fine."

"Thank you – er – Mr. Masterson."

"Jack"

"Call me Martin. I can give you the flight number now. We'll be arriving February 5 on TCA flight – sorry, it's now Air Canada

flight – BA 612. Hmm. I think that may be a flight they share with BOAC, but that's the flight number, and it gets in at ten past six in the morning, I'm afraid."

"No problem, I'll let him know. If I don't call back, you can take it as confirmed. And if you need to get a message to him we can set up a time he'll be listening, say on Jan 14." Masterson then gave his phone number.

"Jack. This is much appreciated. It saves a lot of waiting."

"My pleasure. G'night."

I phoned Michelle to let her know. Our plans were starting to solidify.

Saturday, January 9, 1965 – Anna

We were all at home for Saturday breakfast at about 9:00 a.m. in the dining room. We'd made eggs and bacon and were finishing up with some toast.

"More tea, anyone." Dad asked.

"Yes please," Michelle answered.

I had my mouth full but managed to mumble a request for more too.

"I've still got some, thanks." Andrea said.

Dad did the honours and went to the kitchen and soon returned with the teapot and poured. Mainly to Michelle he said,

"I set up an appointment Tuesday afternoon just after lunch with Bernard's lawyer to sign the documents for the cottage. It's in both our names, so I guess we'd better make sure we get married."

"Have you been out there to check it's still there?" I asked.

"We'll take a drive tomorrow just to be sure. Either of you want to come?"

"I would," said Andrea.

"I'm spending the afternoon with Peter and having dinner with his folks." I informed them. "If you went early and dropped me off at the Sinclairs', I could come."

"Meeting the parents is serious." Michelle teased.

"Well, we've known them for years, as I think you know. You were there when he said he remembered me as a snotty teenager when we went over there for drinks. But Peter and I seem to find a lot of common ground. We went out for a hamburger supper on

Wednesday and had a discussion about our goals and plans. So in a sense it is serious, but probably not in the way most people would mean.”

“Whatever happens, I hope you’ll be happy.” Michelle responded “But I’m a bit confused about Peter’s age. Annie was born in 1944, but Peter is in graduate school. Was Ellie also a widow?”

Dad answered “No. Ellie and Jim met in Scotland. I’ll have to guess Glasgow where he trained, or at least did part of his training. She had a Jewish grandfather and family in Germany who already had experienced trouble under the Nazis by the time the War started. Ellie had trained as a nurse and her family wanted her out of Holland if – as turned out to be the case – the Germans ignored Dutch neutrality. The NSB – the Dutch Nazis – were already active too.

So Ellie got some sort of training job in paediatric nursing in Glasgow. Jim and Ellie married, I think in ’40 and Peter was born in ’41. Given the UK system, he was possibly a year ahead of most students here in Canada, but maybe put in with his age group, which would still be about right for him to have just started his doctoral studies here last September.”

“Must have been hard having a baby during that time for Ellie.” Michelle noted.

“I’ve never heard her talk about it. Sometimes we know a lot less about people than we realize.” Dad said.

“To change the subject, have we decided what furniture we all want to keep?” Michelle asked. Dad answered,

“We decided on this table and chairs. Your sofa but my arm-chair. We were indifferent to which bed for the master bedroom and kitchen furniture and a lot of other stuff. I think Andrea wanted her bed and chest of drawers. And there were a bunch of small things we put masking tape on to mark as ‘Keep’.”

“I’m surprised how few big items we really feel strongly about. Even the table I think was a choice of the better piece.” Michelle added.

“Would it help the ... transition ... if I moved to the current guest room?” I suggested. “I don’t mind leaving the typewriter and sewing machine in there.”

“Wow. You’d do that Annie?” Andrea enthused.

“I’ll be 21 this year. It’s comfortable here, but it’s almost certain

I'll leave home before you do. And I heard you all discussing whether to look in this area or another for a new place. This is a convenient location for schools and the universities and ... well, lots. If Andrea has a room where she can have her friends come over and do school projects, it'll take some pressure off having to find a new place. And my studies are more and more at the University.

Besides, the bed in the guest room is very comfortable. Mine is getting a bit lumpy."

"Thanks Annie. That's really generous. And it will make things less urgent." Michelle said.

"How about we load your waggon with some of the things we decided are 'Maybe' or to be used to make your – sorry Michelle's – house look lived-in and take them over. Then bring some stuff back." Dad said to Michelle.

"If you can bring back Andrea's bed, she and I can do some shifting here. No time like the present. But I want to be able to spend this afternoon working on some University stuff before I go out with Peter and Marcia and her new boyfriend." I said.

"Wow! Great!" was all Andrea could say.

"I guess I have one more thing to mention." I said. "As a New Year's resolution, I decided I'd start using my actual name 'Anna' because it seems to be a bit more appropriate for someone in a career. I'm not going to get upset if you keep saying 'Annie' – I'm sure you will even if you have the best of intentions – but for other folk, I'm going to introduce myself as Anna."

"Good thinking." Dad said. "We should have done it a few years ago, perhaps when you started high school."

"I'll do my best, Anna." Michelle added.

"Let's hope no rain like yesterday. Not like Ottawa winter." Dad concluded with a safe comment.

* * *

The bed move went pretty well. No big dents in the walls, and no bruised fingers. Andrea helped me shift my stuff into the guest room. The closet was a bit tight, even after we moved some things to the basement shelves.

We got my bed out. The frame was OK, but Dad suggested we simply put the mattress out for the garbage next week. My tall boy

chest of drawers we shoe-horned into the guest room after moving out the bedside table and a chair. There was a small work-table and chair that Mum had used for the sewing machine or the typewriter, and I wanted those for doing my homework. Andrea would use my desk.

I got a bit of time to do some University work when Dad and Andrea went to Michelle's to get Andrea's bed and chest of drawers. I let them do the donkey work, but gave Andrea a hand to get the bed properly set up and comfortable.

Around 5:30 I took a quick shower so I was ready for Peter when he came to pick me up at 6. We drove over to Marcia's apartment and I introduced Peter to her and Bill. Actually, I'd not met Bill before. Marcia only took up with him over the Christmas break, as I did with Peter. Coincidences!

Marcia had a basement apartment in her parent's house. This gave her a fair bit of freedom, but of course there were pros and cons. The cons were that she couldn't invite a boyfriend to stay the night without the possibility of it being noticed.

Tonight Marcia decided to cook. I wasn't sure if this was a good idea. However, it turned out all right. She decided to make a stew, which was fairly hard to mess up. Peter and I were bringing dessert, but I'd chickened out and bought an apple pie and ice cream at the supermarket.

Mainly the evening was a chance to both catch up on the term just past and get to know the new boyfriends, if you could call them that. Bill was already out of school, in his first job as a teacher at a local junior high school. Or were we calling them middle schools now? Anyway, grades 6 to 8. They'd met when Marcia had done a practice teaching session at his school. For a PE teacher he was atypical. Not a big, muscular guy but small and wiry. I suspected he was stronger than a first glance would suggest.

We were playing records – some Beatles and Dylan and PP and M – and generally talking about everything and nothing. There was a bottle of Mateus, the perennial student wine. Peter asked

“Anyone made any New Year's resolutions?”

Marcia jumped in

“I did. I decided I am definitely going to have more and better sex.”

Bill had been taking a sip of wine. He spluttered and had a

coughing fit as the wine went down the wrong way. Marcia laughed,

“Well, I now know you do listen.”

“So you’re joking?” Bill asked.

“Hmm. I said what I did as a joke. But if I think about it, the idea is not so far from what I’d like. Actually ‘more’ won’t be difficult – so far I’ve only had a couple of somewhat fumbling experiences. Finding privacy and a partner who is both interested and competent can be a challenge. And that isn’t a comment on Bill – we’ve not known each other long enough to get to the awkward moment yet.

‘Better’ might not be that difficult either. I guess the excitement made it interesting, but I think it should be a bit more fun than I had.”

“Bill might feel a bit intimidated.” Peter teased.

Bill spoke up. “Actually not. I like Marcia’s forthrightness. I think I could put down more and better sex as a resolution for 1965 too.”

“What about you guys?” Marcia put us on the spot.

“We’ve found we can talk about what we want. And we know we like to be together, but it’s early days for us too.” I said. I wasn’t quite ready to spill the beans. And if in some miraculous way I could describe how good it had been with Peter, Marcia and Bill would be green with envy.

I changed the subject.

“My resolution for 1965 is to use my true name, Anna. Peter pointed out that Annie is OK but more suited to a girl than a woman, and I’ll be 21 soon.”

“Might have trouble getting used to calling you Anna. You’ve always been Annie to me.” Marcia said.

“I don’t plan on being dogmatic about it, nor get my nose out of joint when people slip into Annie. I’m sure old friends and my family will still call me Annie even if I jump up and down, stand on my head and spit nickels. But I plan on introducing myself as Anna Tremblay, putting that name down whenever I have to give my name, and so on.”

“That sounds like a reasonable plan.” Bill said. “And I think you are probably right to try to make the change if you think it’s important to you.”

“Anna wants a scientific career, and that generally means your

name on written work. 'Anna' is almost certain to be taken more seriously than 'Annie', and it's hard enough for women in most fields." Peter said.

"Good for you, Ann...a." Marcia said.

Saturday evening, January 9, 1965 – Michelle

It was after supper. Martin and I were settled on the sofa with a glass of wine. We had some Strauss waltzes on the record player. Upstairs Andrea was sorting and arranging and generally trying to decide how she wanted her new room. That could absorb infinite hours.

"The bed-moving went with less fuss than I feared." Martin said.

"But still more fuss than you hoped, I bet."

"Always!" We laughed.

"It was really generous of Annie to give Andrea her room," I said.

"Yes. Made me quite emotional."

"You kept your composure."

"Only just."

"Martin, I've something to say I hope won't cause you to lose it."

"Oh. What's that."

"Well, I accidentally came across the drawer where you and Annie keep the condoms."

"And you found a half-empty box."

"Oh. You knew?"

"Annie told me. But I wouldn't have spilled the beans on her if you hadn't noticed."

"Peter?"

"Who else? But don't let her know that you know."

"With Andrea here now, maybe she should keep them in ... well, look after them herself."

"Yes, Even I don't think Andrea is quite ready for that discussion. Though if she asked about such things, I think I'd prefer an honest reply."

"I just don't want her stumbling upon them. And I'm not sure I want Annie's behaviour to be an influence."

"That makes sense. But I don't think Annie will be at all obvious. Less obvious than us I should think."

"Now you're making me feel sinful."

“Not intended. And I would guess Annie doesn’t want to cause any upset either.”

“No. And I can sort of understand,” I said.

“Understand what?”

“Well, Peter. He’s very attractive and also polite and ... well ”nice”.”

“”Dishy”. I’ll get out the elbow sharpener.”

“I don’t think you have to. But do you worry Annie might get in out of her depth? Fall in love ...”

“From what she has told me, I think she’s more than a little bit surprised how she and Peter reacted to each other.”

“New Year’s Eve?” I queried.

“How did you know?”

“Only time possible really. We were at my – correction Michelle’s – house. The rest of the time they’d have to go to a hotel or somewhere.”

“Please be kind to her.” Martin was almost pleading.

“Of course. Sorry I didn’t mean to upset you. I’ll try to make time to chat with her so she can talk to me if she wants. When I went to talk to Sister Catherine, it was more that she listened than said anything that helped me.”

“Thanks. And we’d better ask Annie to look after the condoms.”

“Martin, I found your ”To do” list. It’s in my pocket here. Let’s look it over.”

“Let me see.”

Sort out cottage money etc.

Choose which house to sell
prepare 1 or both for sale
if both, find new place

Move to combined household

Date and Place of wedding
note Des/Sharon \& Nicole/Stephane

Honeymoon / holiday / conference trip

Wills / Bank accounts etc.

Martin said "We seem to have effectively got it down to wills etc. and the actual moving to a combined house. And if we consider this house as acceptable for the time being, we could put that on a "to be done later" list."

"Slightly related, I wanted to ask you if you thought your parents might be interested in the other house, or even this one?" I said.

"Oh. I should have shown you a letter that came Friday. I'll go get it. Do you need a refill on the wine?" Martin asked.

"A splash only. You know how I get affected."

He returned with the bottle and a letter, which he handed me.

Dear Martin,

Since I haven't yet met Michelle, I'll just address this to you, but I hope you'll feel comfortable with sharing it with her. From what Penny says, we will easily and warmly welcome her and Andrea into the family.

This note is mainly about practical matters.

First, we're coming to Ottawa on the night of the 22nd. I'll send the flight details later. I think we come via Montreal. Dad says we now have to say Ottawa International Airport since last summer. Hotel at government rates is paid for, or there's a small stipend if we stay with you. I assume you have the list of authorized hotels. Let us know what you think.

Second, it's very good of you both, and Des and Sharon, to combine your weddings. It will save us, and I suspect others, a lot of effort, though it won't diminish the strength of our wishes for you all.

Third, and I hope this won't disappoint you, we are thinking of at least looking for a place in Brockville. We've really had much less contact with our grandchildren -- and we include Annie

-- than we'd like. I've asked Penny and Joe to keep an eye out for a suitable property. So we should probably consider not staying in Ottawa for the full time we're allowed for house-hunting.

Actually, we've got rather used to being looked after as far as property management is concerned. It would be nice to avoid too much house maintenance etc., but we also think we should own something so we can modify and renovate it as we wish. But the heavy gardening and snow clearing would be nice to leave to someone else. This is probably a pipe dream.

So our lives are also changing too. We'll have to think about what we want to do day to day. But I'm sure we'll sort it out.

Love,

Mum and Dad

"You know, Martin, they could stay in the other house. They know the neighbourhood I think." I said.

"Yes. They were only a couple of blocks from your – Michelle's house. It seems a shame the government wouldn't have to give them full hotel, but it would be more flexible if they drove down to Brockville. They could hotel there – Penny's is crammed tight. I'm not sure, but I suspect the housing search trip includes ground transport such as rental car."

"Let's hope the weather is not too bad. For us too. I'd rather not have to drive down on the morning of our wedding."

"I had a call from Penny. She asked about that. They figure that they can find space. Apparently one of the parishioners is in Florida and Penny looks after their house. The parishioner already knew Des and Sharon and said they could use the house for wedding guests."

"With my family and yours, it could still be tight."

"I think we wait and see what the forecast looks like. I'd not go down until the evening of the 29th anyway."

“Who will you have for Best Man?”

“I hadn’t thought. Should I ask Jim Sinclair?”

“Yes. But then you may need to find more accommodation.”

“Perhaps we’re worrying too much about that. We can work it out somehow if Jim is amenable.”

“Will Annie want to bring Peter?”

“I think we should let them decide what they want to do. Are you happy to have him there?”

“Of course. Even if I wasn’t happy, saying he isn’t welcome would be unkind to Annie. But I think you are right to let them decide. Things may be sensitive just now.”

“I’ll phone Jim now.”

Jim was, of course, happy to be asked, and after he’d checked his calendar and talked to his wife, said he and Ellie would certainly be there, and to let him know details. Also that he would take care of getting there on time, even if accommodation was needed. Martin said he’d write the address and directions and drop them off in the next few days.

“That didn’t take long.” I said as he sat back down.

“No. It’s been going very much more easily than I expected. I keep waiting for the big ”BUT” to come up.”

“Have a sip of your wine. Then maybe give me a kiss and put your arm round me. We’ve been talking too much.”

Sunday, January 10, 1965 – Anna

I didn’t go to church this morning with Dad, Michelle and Andrea. It wasn’t that I was late coming home, I just wanted to get some homework done. As I waited for the kettle to boil, I remembered that maybe I should move the condoms from the drawer in the bedroom dresser where Dad had put them. Now Michelle and Andrea were here, and I presume Dad and Michelle didn’t need them, I should put them somewhere more discreet. And I couldn’t really ask Dad to get them for me, but Peter could presumably handle that job. Still, I felt better having access myself.

I went upstairs and opened the drawer. Hmm. They weren’t quite in the same position in the drawer. Oh oh. In any event, I moved them to the box where I used to keep my diary. It has a lock,

though you could pick it with the point of the geometry compass. At least somewhat out of sight and secure from casual snooping.

After the others came back from church, Andrea and Dad went over to Michelle's house with some unwanted items and to get some we were going to keep. I was taking my cup back to the kitchen and Michelle was tidying the dining room.

"I've something a bit awkward to ask," she said.

"Oh. OK."

"Um. I don't know how to begin." She was very flustered.

Probably she'd found the condoms. Well, better have it out in the open with her. So I said,

"I actually wanted to tell you that I've started to clear some of the stuff Dad and I sort of left around in odd places. We got used to it as our own space, but it's really common territory now."

"Oh. I guess Andrea and I are sort of invading."

"I wouldn't put it that way. Just Dad and I kind of put things where they were convenient for us, and now it's time to move on. I emptied a drawer in the dresser in the master bedroom that used to contain some odd and ends, for instance."

Michelle smiled.

"Thanks for making it easier for me. Are they put away?"

"In the locked box where I used to keep my diary, but I don't write one any more. Not that the lock would really stop anyone. But they are out of sight."

"Martin seems to be able to talk about ... well, life and sex and stuff. I'm pretty awkward that way. But I'd like to be able to talk to you and Andrea more easily. It'll take me time. You really helped Andrea when she had her first period."

"I was glad to do what I could. Sometimes I put my foot in it."

"You always seem very much in charge of yourself."

"Seem' perhaps. I think both Dad and I put on a good front."

"You were quiet on New Year's Day."

"Dad noticed that too."

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah. Fine. Just got a bit of a surprise, that's all."

"You don't have to tell me unless you want."

"Since you know about the condoms, I suspect you've guessed. But Peter and I ... well, we really wanted each other. I can now see how easily girls get into trouble. Fortunately Dad and I had a few

talks, and Peter's Dad is very strong on looking after yourself and your partner. But the urges were quite powerful."

"You know Martin has that effect on me. I hope that's not upsetting for you."

"And you on him I think. It's sometimes a little disconcerting for me, but you two are good for each other."

"I hope you and Peter turn out to be good for each other too. You've still a long way to go with your educations."

"Yes. We've been talking about that. The harsh light of dawn after the night before."

"That bad?"

"No. I exaggerate. More that we realize that we'll have to work hard to keep study and career on track while we enjoy each other here and now. I think we don't want to put everything in life on hold for years and years."

"You really are Martin's daughter!"

I gave her a big hug, in the process once again finding her so small that I feared I might crush her. She hugged me back. She's really different from Mum, but I'm starting to have strong feelings for her.

* * *

I did end up going to look at the cottage. There was a fair bit of snow, so we couldn't really see how things were on the ground, but the cottage was clearly standing, and we struggled and got inside and it seemed everything was OK, though pretty bleak.

"There'll be a lot of work to make this ready for Nicole's wedding." Michelle said.

"If the backdrop is the river, I don't think that will matter so much." Dad replied. "But I can see it being really awkward if we don't have a functional bathroom that's big enough so the ladies can keep their dresses clean, and if we don't have some rooms where people can get changed in private. Those aren't impossibilities, but we do have to get them arranged."

I said "I can see lots of potential. I'm looking forward to coming out here in the summer. I think Peter's family has a cottage on the other side of the river. Be neat to sail across for lunch."

“That’d be really neat.” Andrea said. “Martin taught me to sail. I’m going to go for the White Sail course this year, then I could crew for someone if I wanted.”

We didn’t really need to spend more time, so we closed up and trudged back to the car. They dropped me off at the Sinclairs’, but decided that they wouldn’t come to the door or they’d be invited in, and Ellie might feel she should invite them to stay for dinner.

Jim opened the door and saw the car disappearing.

“They didn’t want to say hello?” he said, seeming disappointed.

“I think they were worried Mrs. Sinclair might feel she should invite them to stay.” I whispered.

“Yes. I can understand. OK. Here, let me take your coat. Peter’s still in the shower, and Ellie is busy in the kitchen.”

“Then maybe I can have a private moment.”

“Oh.”

“Well. You’re my family doctor as well as a family friend, and going to be Dad’s best man. But I’m wondering if I should have a different doctor if I’m going out with Peter. It could be a bit awkward.”

“Things getting a bit lively?”

“Peter said something?” I was a bit shocked.

“No. Came home acting like the cat who’d found the cream jug.”

“That obvious?” I groaned.

“Not really. But you’re an attractive young woman. And I saw him watching you at the party here. But I agree that it would be more appropriate for you to have a different physician so that you can be open and frank with him or her. I’ve a good woman doctor in mind I can refer you to. Phone Mrs. Jones on Monday afternoon and she should be able to give you the phone number.”

“Thanks Dr. Sinclair.”

“Actually, it’s I who should thank you. There are far too many young people getting into a mess they could avoid with a little good sense, despite the idiocy of our laws about contraception. Better not get me going. And you are probably due for a checkup.

Oh here’s Ellie. Annie’s arrived dear. I hope our Peter hasn’t forgotten her.”

“No, I’m here. And since the New Year, I believe we are to call her Anna, which is her real name.” Peter was coming along the hall from the bedroom area of the house.

“Is there a reason for using Anna?” Ellie asked.

“I’m hoping for a career in science, and I thought Anna – which is in fact what is on my baptismal certificate – would command a bit more respect.”

“Probably correct.” Jim responded. “And Anna’s no more difficult than Annie.”

“I’m not going to be pedantic about it. Especially with friends.” I said. “It’s more for the working world.”

We went into the living room. Jim suggested we toast the New Year, and offered us a single malt scotch. I asked if I could have a very, very small one, and he let me pour my own. I liked how the spirity vapour wafted through my sinuses.

“There’s a woman after my own heart – doesn’t pollute it with ice or water. Peter and Ellie better watch out, Anna, or they may find me after you.”

“I never did get the taste for scotch.” Ellie said. “Nor beer. I like wine, particularly the Rhine and Moselle whites. And I like sherry, dry or medium, but generally not sweet.” I noticed she had a Tio Pepe, which I recalled Dad seemed to like too.

We talked a bit about the differences Ellie and Jim found between Holland and Scotland, though they’d never lived in Holland together. They’d been apart a lot during the war, and Jim was not at home when either Peter was born in 1941 nor Robert in late 1943, though he did get to see his family fairly frequently, except from June 1944 to September 1945, during which he got only one leave.

Ellie commented “Well, my family were stuck in Gorinchem from mid-1940 to mid-1945 with the Germans. Fortunately, they didn’t figure out that there was a Jewish ancestor, or they would have been sent away. But they had to endure the hunger winter. And Jim was just a few miles away in Eindhoven and Helmond and Enschede.”

I noticed how she pronounced the names, and memories of Mum came flooding back. Fortunately, Peter was asking some questions about how and why the squadrons had moved around, and there was some back and forth and tangential stories.

When this line of conversation ebbed, I asked when they had come to Canada and why. Jim answered

“We came in 1953. I’d returned to Glasgow in early 1946 – the military hung onto the MOs much longer than they needed,

and civilian doctors were terribly overworked, while after hostilities ceased we were mainly occupied with keeping VD down to a dull roar. We had some colourful expressions I won't repeat here.

When I got back to Glasgow – Ellie and the boys were actually in Falkirk which was a bit nicer – I saw an ad for a share in a practice in that town, which saved us having to find accommodation immediately, though Ellie only had a couple of rooms. Anyway, I was junior to a physician who was well past retirement age, and pretty soon I took over. Then came the NHS, which a lot of doctors disliked because it brought in a whole lot of new patients with higher expectations than we could possibly meet. However, I think the general idea was right. On the other hand, I couldn't see bringing up the boys in Falkirk. It wouldn't give them a good start in life as far as I could see, and I was working too many hours a week for my own good. So I looked into coming to Canada, and happened to end up here. Someone I'd known in the RAF mentioned Martin was here, and I wrote him to ask what Ottawa was like. What he said appealed to us, and Clara said there were a number of Dutch connections, even the Dutch queen being here in the War, which was something Ellie missed in Scotland. So we came, and though the first few years were a bit difficult, we've been happy here."

"And now you get something like the NHS all over again here?" I asked.

"I think some medics, or rather the business types who are making lots of money from drugs or equipment or hospital management or insurance, are persuaded that they can do things better and more efficiently than anyone else. But I've seen too many cases where that 'efficiency' is because they don't offer services to the sick and dying. You can get me angry if you run a program stupidly, but not about the principle that people should have decent care no matter what their income. It doesn't need to be gold-plated, though, and I'm a strong believer in prevention over treatment."

I asked some more about their life in Scotland and also about Gorinchem where Ellie was born. We tried a bit of Dutch / Flemish. Then it was time to eat, and we had a Dutch boerenkool met worst – kale and potatoes with sausage. It was good, hearty food. Mum used to make a variant of it.

Tuesday, January 19, 1965 – Anna

I didn't have classes this term on Tuesday afternoons, and Dr. Josephine Howard gave me a 1 p.m. appointment, so I didn't have to wait. She was a small, quite attractive woman in I'd guess her late thirties. As she ushered me into one of her examining rooms, I noticed a wedding ring.

"Now what seems to be the trouble?" she asked.

"Dr. Sinclair referred me to you because I'm going out with his son Peter, and we felt it would be more appropriate that I have an ... er ... independent doctor."

"Yes. It does avoid ethical problems as well as personal ones. As this is the first visit – and the referral note mentioned you haven't had a checkup for about 4 years – we'll do that. And since you mention ... was it Peter? ... do you want to talk about things your relationship with him may introduce?"

"Yes please."

"OK. We'll get some history first."

She asked a lot about different diseases I might have had. Her eyebrows went up when she asked about parents and grandparents and learned both Mum and her Mum had died of breast cancer. She also asked about my situation and my plans. Eventually we got to the awkward questions.

"Have you ever been pregnant?"

"Oh no."

"Are you still a virgin?"

"Er. No. After Mum died, Dad and I got talking and some of my questions led us to talk about avoiding babies. Once we got over the embarrassment, he explained about condoms, and actually got some so that we both could avoid disaster, since he had met a nice woman colleague, though I hadn't any plans then. But last summer I'd been going out with a nice man who was dear to me but going away to study. And I was curious. One weekend we had the house to ourselves, so we talked about it, and I had quite a nice time then, and a couple of other occasions before he went away to Vancouver."

"No other relationships?"

"Recently, with Peter. I'm afraid it rather took me by surprise. I think him too. We've know each other since we were kids, but he'd been away to school and we met up again over Christmas."

“You used the condoms each time?”

“Yes. I made sure to check it was on properly and Peter’s Dad is pretty hot on avoiding consequences, so we ... withdrew right away afterwards.”

“Yes. That’s a disadvantage of condoms. It’s nice to be together for a while.”

I could like this doctor! She continued

“No pain or discomfort or bleeding.”

“No. Though I ... leak a lot.”

“As long as it’s just the clear lubrication, it’s actually an advantage. Just lie on a towel.”

“I do.”

“When was your last period?”

“Started January 4. It’s always reassuring after”

“Yes. Though that early it’s still vaguely possible that some sperm stays in you if it’s leaked. But rather improbable. Now get undressed completely and lie down. You can cover yourself with this gown. Do you want my nurse present?”

“I think I’m more comfortable with just you.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I’ve stuck some needles in an unfortunate little boy who needs his vaccinations.”

As it turned out, she was longer than I expected. The room was cool! When she came back she started with the internal exam. Not too bad except for the Pap sample. That was uncomfortable. And of course the mandatory refrigerated stethoscope. She did all the usual taps and squints and listening, pressed my tummy, squeezed my tits.

“You can dress while I talk.

You seem to be in good health. Phone my nurse next Monday afternoon to get the Pap result. Now, I assume given your new boyfriend, you want to talk about birth control. I’ll preface my remarks by saying that the law requires that in Canada all such measures are illegal, but some things that provide other benefits just happen to stop conception. Typically doctors won’t prescribe unless you are or are about to get married, but ... well ... I’ve had to deal with similar issues in my own life. I hope sincerely that the law will change soon.”

“Me too. In England, my Dad said the barbers sell condoms.”

“Yes. We’re a bit backward here. Anyway, you already know

about them, and presumably can arrange to get some, even though it's not always easy. There's also a diaphragm or cap, but they need to be fitted for you, and have a certain level of messiness. However, they don't require early withdrawal. And then there's the Pill, which probably is not as fantastic as the magazines suggest, but which many women find suits their needs."

"I think I'd like to try the Pill for a while."

"OK. I'll write a 1 year prescription in 3 parts. I want to see you after 2 cycles and 8 cycles and IMMEDIATELY if anything unusual happens. You start just after you get your next period – you'll then be protected from that time if you take them as directed. Do read the whole of the leaflet with the pills. If you get diarrhoea or vomiting you can lose protection, and if you miss pills also. Don't take unnecessary chances – I'm sure you've got a lot of plans for your life, and so does Peter I'd guess. I'll suggest you keep some condoms on hand, just in case. Sex can be — rather compelling."

"Thanks Dr. Howard."

"Nice to have met you, and welcome to my practise."

Saturday, January 30, 1965 – Martin

It was a little after 8 a.m. and Michelle and I were having breakfast with my parents, Miriam and Robert, in the parishioner's house. Michelle and I had slept in separate bedrooms, and somehow had done so without a lot of fuss or discomfort. Annie was driving Andrea down this morning, and Peter would likely travel with her rather than his parents. There'd be a ceremony at 1 p.m. for Michelle and I, and one at 1:30 p.m. for Des and Sharon. Then they'd have an informal reception in the Church Hall, but the plan was that it would finish at 4 to give everyone time to get home safely. Officially, there was no alcohol, though I know Joe and Robert had quietly arranged a small quantity of sparkling wine for a toast to the two couples.

Des and Sharon were going to take a week in Montreal and Quebec City as honeymoon, but Michelle and I were going back to Ottawa for the few days that remained before our trip to the UK. With the tidying up of Michelle's house, we'd been living together for the last few weeks anyway.

"It's been quite a hectic week for you, Mum." I said to Mum.

"I'm trying to catch my breath." I noticed as she said this that her years were starting to show, not always, but at moments.

"For us too, Miriam – I hope it's OK to call you that. Martin and I felt he should use Bernard and Charlotte for my folks, and I should use Miriam and Robert for the two of you." Michelle said.

"It's practical. I like it." Dad said, not waiting for Mum to answer.

"Yes. It will save confusion." Mum assented.

"When is the agent going to be at this duplex you're looking at?" I asked.

"9:15. I didn't want to get in the way of the later activities, but I want your opinion." Robert answered.

"Shall I stay here?" Michelle asked.

"Only if you don't want to come." Mum said. "This is a bit of a different possibility than we'd imagined. We're wondering if we are missing any hidden traps."

"And Des and Sharon will take one half of it?" I half-asked, half-stated.

"We'll rent to them, with part of the agreement that they do the garden and snow. And they get a first refusal if we decide to sell."

"Sharon is a garden wiz apparently." Michelle chimed in.

* * *

Dad – I should get used to saying Robert – and I dressed as soon as we got back from the duplex and were already seated in the borrowed kitchen having coffee by 11. The Lacroix parents, along with Nicole and Stephane had arrived about 10 minutes before. Bernard and Stephane were already in suits, and decided they wanted a walk round the town after the drive. I suspected it was so they could avoid the inevitable tension surrounding a group of women getting ready together.

"Do you think the duplex will work?" Dad asked me.

"It seems like a good arrangement as long as the people get along. And having had Sharon in our house, I think she'll become someone special to you. A lot depends on getting a decent price."

"Even at the asking price, we could afford it. But I think there's enough that needs doing that I'm going to offer less. I'll do that tomorrow and hope to get things closed rather quickly so Des and

Sharon can settle in and avoid temporary accommodation at Penny's or elsewhere. And to have it occupied and being brought back to life before we have to move in."

"Yes. It looked rather forlorn. Do you buy the story that the owner planned to convert it to a single family dwelling then got ill?"

"Not totally. But it means we don't have sitting tenants."

"You'll take the top apartment?"

"It means stairs, but Des and Sharon might have children in due course, and I doubt we'd be happy with running feet overhead."

"Good thinking. I guess the main thing I felt was missing was a garage."

"There's enough land for a double garage at one side, though it would make the garden smaller. Des noticed that too. He'd like to put in a recording studio, which might be possible over the garage. In any event, there are possibilities to explore, and in some ways I'm happy that there isn't an existing garage."

"What about the existing building?"

"It needs some cleanup. Des went round with a friend of his boss who's an electrician and they checked the electrics and plumbing. Joe has a lot of practical experience too, and he went along and spotted some trouble with a couple of the windows. But the roof is apparently good, done 8 years ago, and the heating system is only 5 years old – it's oil – and the conclusion was that the rest is fixable. In particular, fixable by Des or his friends at what will be a good price. And I don't mind doing odd jobs to keep active. I just am getting to the point where I don't want to have to do them."

"On the matter of activities, do you think there'll be enough to do for you here."

"The grandkids will be part of that. And I think we'll find enough to do. And it will be good to see you and Annie more easily, and Michelle of course."

"I'm afraid I'm still getting used to saying Michelle. I nearly said Clara. I hope you know it's not intentional if Mum and I were to do so."

"We've talked about that, and we know it's going to happen."

We also decided to mark the anniversary of Clara's death last Saturday privately. Michelle asked Annie and I what we wanted, and Annie with her usual good sense suggested we each take a few moments with photos and drink a toast to her quietly. And she

said she would mention that to you, but I didn't ask if she followed through."

"Oh yes. Mum and I had a glass of scotch with Annie last Saturday. I forget where you and Michelle were."

"I think we took Andrea to her Dad, then went shopping for some gloves for Michelle to match the suit she's wearing today."

"Yes. That was it. Did you take a moment?"

"Yes. Michelle and I together actually. She's quite insistent that we keep Clara real, and not let her become Saint Clara, as she puts it."

"Sensible. And Andrea seems a nice young woman."

"I'm sure there'll be moments. But so far so good."

Saturday, January 30, 1965 – Anna

There was some confusion about transport to Uncle Joe's church. It wasn't far from the parishioner's house, and those at the rectory were next door of course. But nobody had thought who would be in which car. Peter and I took Grandma and Grandpa and Andrea. This let us learn that they were hoping to buy a duplex and would rent the bottom half to Sharon and Des. Having been in the diplomatic service so long, Grandma and Grandpa were unused to mowing grass and clearing snow, and the younger couple would be able to take on those tasks. It was a pity they'd be in Brockville rather than Ottawa, but a lot closer than Washington anyway.

The ceremonies were simple but dignified. Dad seemed a bit nervous until 'man and wife' were pronounced. When it came to Des and Sharon, I could hardly believe how bright Sharon's smile was. What a change from the defeated, sad little girl we'd taken into our house last Spring.

At the reception, Aunt Penny came over to chat with Peter and I. I think she was flirting with him! Later, as I went to thank her for everything before we left to drive home, she whispered "Hang onto that one. He's gorgeous." While I agree, I didn't want to admit to too much – she's a minister's wife, after all.

Andrea and I were together going home, as it made sense for Peter to go home with his parents. He surprised me with a big kiss before we went out to the car, and it felt natural and right. Must

have seemed so, because even the younger members of the Baker family didn't make any fuss.

"Guess we're step-sisters now." Andrea said.

"Yeah. Which of us gets the glass slippers?"

"Neither of us, I hope. I've really liked being with you. I'd hate it if we didn't get along."

"There'll be days, I'm sure, when we get on each other's nerves. But let's hope we just have a bit of grumpiness and shouting that we can quickly forget about."

"Let's hope not too many days like that. It'll upset Mum and Martin, and I want them to be happy."

"Me too, Sis."

"Thanks, Sis."

Sunday, January 31, 1965 – Anna

Dad and Michelle were leaving Thursday night for England. They spent their wedding night in Michelle's house. Andrea and I met them in church on Sunday, and we sat as a united family for the first time. Somehow the grapevine was working, and the minister made a brief mention that Dad and Michelle had married yesterday, so there were some congratulations from a few parishioners as we left the church.

We all came back to the 'family' house for lunch.

"We'd better make a list of things that may need attention before we go away and while we are away." Dad said.

"I think you said I'm going to be staying here with Anna." Andrea said.

"Possibly against my better judgement, but it will mean you are at home." Michelle answered. "But I'm going to set up a schedule for you to call Grandma Lacroix and Aunt Nicole on all the days that you're not with your Dad. And I expect Annie – Anna – to arrange for you to not be on your own if she has evening obligations."

"Did Mrs. Grafton get in touch with you?" I asked. "I think she's willing to have Andrea there for a couple of evenings. I said I'd be happy to have Susan here for dinner or another time by way of exchange."

"Yes. She called me and in fact she'd like to go out with her husband on Valentine's day."

“That should be OK. It’s a Sunday I think, and I’ll invite Peter and maybe Marcia and Bill so we can have a bit of a quiet celebration. I’m not a fan of noisy parties, I think you know.” I said.

We made up a calendar of things to be done. The other house was more or less cleared out already, but Dad and Michelle had decided some of the rooms could do with painting, so we’d moved the furniture to the centre of the rooms and put drop sheets over everything that wasn’t to get paint. Bernard Lacroix had recommended a painter. Given the time of year, the painting wouldn’t cost too much.

Dad figured we should check the house at least every 2 days in case of any problems. One of the neighbours had a key too, along with a list of phone numbers for Andrea and I, for Nicole, and for Bernard and Charlotte.

Andrea was due to spend the weekends of the 5th and the 19th with her Dad, Bryan. Though he and Rachel had announced their engagement, they hadn’t walked down the aisle yet, but were living as if they had.

I suppose I shouldn’t be too quick to judge. I was rather looking forward to the two weekends I’d have the house to myself to – well – share time with Peter, which of course would mean I wouldn’t be on my own.

Tuesday was his 24th birthday. I’d sent a card Friday, so he should get it. I thought of putting in a sexy message, but thought better of that. If it fell into the wrong hands, it could come back on both of us. So the message was possible to interpret in more than one way.

To Peter,

With best wishes for your birthday.

Anna Tremblay

PS. Sincere thanks for a wonderful time
on New Year’s Eve.

You will hopefully allow me to repay
your generosity at some point in the
near future.

I was feeling a bit cramped and headachey. Well, my period was due tomorrow, and then Tuesday I could start the Pill. I'd filled the prescription at the pharmacy on Laurier near the University. Didn't want to have the local pharmacist in on my secrets. And I wore one of the cheap rings I'd got for Sharon. Might as well avoid awkwardness if possible. With luck, the mess would be over by Friday.

Andrea was going to Bryan and Rachel Friday night.

Early morning, Friday, February 5, 1965 — Michelle

"Did you manage much sleep?" Martin asked me as we disembarked the BOAC 707 at Heathrow and boarded a sort of bus.

"Not a lot. Maybe 2 to 3 hours total. You?"

"Perhaps 4. I've done this before. At least we weren't crowded and didn't have smokers right near us."

"It's still the middle of the night."

"Actually not, but sunrise is not for another hour."

"It feels so cold and damp."

"Good job I told you to have woollens and our good jackets."

"These flight jackets you and Clara got are good and warm, at least. I'm thankful to Annie for lending it to me."

"We found them in Toronto in 1948 in a war surplus store. They were quite dusty, but they cleaned up beautifully. But I hope I've got the dubbin on them well enough for the English rain."

"I'm still unhappy I haven't got the right hat to keep the rain from running down my neck. I don't want to use an umbrella if I can avoid it."

"You need something like a Sou'Wester but which doesn't quite look like one. I brought my cap with ear flaps, but it won't keep the rain off very well."

"Hmfmf. You got that with Margaret."

"I'll have to comment on anything you bought with Bryan."

"You're right. I shouldn't grump. And it's a useful cap."

"We can watch for better hats here — good and practical sou-venirs."

We lined up for passport checks. As we were wearing matching jackets, we went up together. The immigration officer asked

“Are you together?” as he noted the different names.

“Yes. We married last Saturday – I have the documents here if you wish to see them – but we are travelling on our existing passports.” Martin said.

“How long will you stay in the United Kingdom?”

“Until February 27.”

The agent stamped our passports and passed them back. I guess we looked married!

“Welcome to the UK. Next!”

The flight had been a couple of minutes early, and the baggage handlers must have been more or less free, as we saw one of our cases on the moving track as we entered the baggage hall. We had carried our backpacks on the plane. Martin said he’d bought one of them with Clara in Antwerp in 1947.

“There’s my case.” I said rushing forward as it came out of the chute.

Martin held me back.

“No need to rush. It’s coming towards us. And mine is just coming back round on the belt there.”

Customs gave us no trouble, and we found ourselves out in the concourse running the gauntlet of many people waiting to meet arriving passengers.

“Joe said he’d allow time for us to get our baggage and clear it and not come until 6:45. It’s not even that yet. Let’s go over there out of the way where we can watch easily.” Martin said.

He was carrying both suitcases. This would have to change, but I was so small that some adjustment in load would be needed. Right now we had some maple syrup as gifts. At least that weight would gradually decrease, though we weren’t seeing David and Esther until the end of the trip.

We found a spot against a pillar where we could watch the crowd of greeters. I sat on one of the suitcases.

“You’ll have to watch, Martin. I don’t know Joe.”

“I must be getting used to you in my life. I’d sort of forgotten that. Or not forgotten, well ... Oh. Here he comes.” More loudly he said. “Over here Joe.”

“That was quick. How long have you been out.”

“Just this minute. Joe this is Michelle.”

“Hello. Welcome to London. Come along and I’ll drive you home. Then I’ll come back to work – at this rate I’ll get there on time. I told the office I might be late because I was meeting a friend here. I work just over there in an office behind that building.” He pointed generally over to our right.

We walked possibly two hundred yards to a parking structure.

“I brought the car today. Normally get a bus.”

“Let us pay your parking then.” Martin said.

“No fear. You’re our guests. Here we are. This Rover 2000. You ride in the front Michelle so you can see. Martin’s been here before. I think both cases will fit in the boot, but we’ll put the rucksacks in the back seat with Martin.”

Joe had been carrying my suitcase.

“Are you planning to drive, Michelle?” Martin teased. I realized I was standing by the right front door. And there was a steering wheel!

“Oh. Sorry. I’ve never been where you drive on the wr....left hand side of the road.”

“Yeah. Wanna be careful of that so you don’t get run over here.” Joe advised.

We exited the parking after Joe paid and were very soon heading towards Slough. Even though Martin was familiar in general with Britain, he told me later that he soon lost his sense of where they were as Joe took some short-cuts through back streets. All the time Joe kept up a banter with us both. How did we meet? What were Robert and Miriam doing? Why was Annie unable to come? I realized that the same questions would be asked several times during the trip, but that this was a mark of the number of friends Martin had here.

We pulled up in front of a traditional British semi-detached house in a street of many of them.

“Here we are. Bet the twins are still not away to school. It’s only just quarter-past seven.”

We carried the luggage to the front door, which Joe rang. It flew open and Julia gave Martin a big hug.

“And you must be Michelle. Come in, come in. There’ll be chaos until the kids are off to school, so why don’t you take your cases up to the back bedroom then come down and meet them and I’ll give

you a cup of tea while they get on their way.”

“I’m off luv. See you all this afternoon.” Joe said, giving his wife a kiss, and then was gone.

“Where shall I put my shoes?” I asked.

“Oh just keep them on. Cold otherwise.” Julia said. But I had already put on my slippers that were in my backpack. Martin was already halfway up the stairs with one suitcase. He put it beside the bed – there was a camp cot there too. He quickly returned downstairs to get the other suitcase and brought it and his backpack up, and I followed him, carrying my backpack and my walking shoes.

“It feels odd not to take your shoes off.” I said.

“Took us a while to get used to it too. Unless they’re muddy or very wet, people don’t change to slippers. Let’s get one of the cans of syrup out and go down for that cup of tea. It’s cool up here.”

“I can see your breath. Martin.”

“It’s easy to forget how much less comfortable it is here. Clara said she worried she’d be cold in Canada, but then found it was so much more comfortable than Europe. Let’s hope you manage to adapt enough to enjoy yourself.”

“You might have to buy me special clothing. OK. Let’s see if the downstairs is warmer.”

We came down. All the doors were closed.

“That’s something else. Doors are closed to keep the draughts out or heat in. We tend to leave things open to let the heat move through the whole house.”

Martin guessed, correctly, which was the kitchen and which was the dining room. In the Carr household, the latter was actually more a family room, with a rather modest table over in one corner where a teenage boy and girl and a younger boy were eating some sort of cereal.

“There you are. Tea’s in the pot. I’ll let you help yourself to milk and sugar. This is Jacob, Jennifer and Victor. Children, say welcome to Dr and Mrs Tremblay.”

There was a general mumbling of greetings.

“Call us Martin and Michelle please.” Martin said.

“When you’ve got your tea, sit by the fire and let this crowd get on their way, then we’ll have a chin-wag and catch up. Oh. I forgot to ask if you’d like some breakfast.”

“Thanks. They gave us a continental breakfast on the plane.”

Martin said.

“Perhaps you could point me to the bathroom.” I asked.

“Oh, yes. You probably want to get freshened up after the flight. Your towels are on the bed and the bathroom is the door to the right of your bedroom door.”

Martin, realizing the miscommunication, said “I think Michelle wants the toilet. Another trans-Atlantic mix-up.”

“Oh. There’s one of those behind the kitchen. We closed in the conservatory so we could let Jacob have a bedroom there – each kid has their own room – and added a toilet, sink and small shower. Go out here, and it’s at the end of the kitchen.”

I went through the kitchen and found the rather small but functional bathroom. I could hear Julia busying herself with the children and their morning rituals. They all had strong accents I later learned were associated with London or what the British referred to as the Home Counties. Bus fare, sandwiches, make sure you’re home for dinner on time, and so on. With a clatter they were all out the door, just as I returned to the dining room. Julia had taken dishes to the kitchen and was washing up.

“OK?” Martin asked.

“I think so. It’s just all so different from what I’d expected. I’ll have to get used to it. I’m also still not quite sure I’m awake.

This tea is very strong.”

“You usually take it without milk. For your time in England, I suggest adding milk to smooth out the tannin. It’s also a way to warm up a bit.”

“OK. But then I’ll have to pee. I nearly forgot why I went there when I sat down.”

Martin laughed. “Oh dear. I should have – well maybe I did – warn you about that.”

Julia came back, bearing a fresh pot and a rack of toast.

“Thought some toast might be good. I’m going to have some – the kids keep me pretty busy in the morning. But I made extra. There’s Marmite and lemon curd and strawberry jam on the table.”

“I’ll be willing to bet Michelle won’t like Marmite.” Martin said. “I think you have to be born in England to think it’s edible, or else have some sort of special family background. We actually have an almost empty jar at home, but I’ve never offered it to Michelle.”

“I think our kids keep the company in business. We buy the large

jar.”

“I’ll prepare a slice of toast and Michelle can take a bite.” Martin said. He did so, making sure it was spread very sparingly. I took a bite, and probably looked surprised, but it was Martin’s turn to look surprised when I took another bite.

“Not giving it back?”

A muffled, full-mouth “no” was his answer, and he had to prepare one for himself.

“You’re looking well Julia.”

“A lot more of me than when you rescued me as a damsel in distress in June of 1941. Day after granny died from the bombing. It’s hard to believe my twins are older than I was then.”

“So you’ve known Martin all that time?” I asked.

“Yes. I think his Mum was a bit put out that I took up with Joe rather than Martin.”

“She sends her love, by the way” Martin said.

“And do tell her we think of her and love getting her cards each year.”

“Michelle, remind me to make sure to ask Mum to send their new address. Julia, I should tell you that Mum and Dad are retiring this year. They are hoping to live in Brockville which is on the St. Lawrence river where my sister Penny and her Joe live with their children.”

“Julia, How did Martin rescue you?”

“I’d been sent home from work because I couldn’t work because I was so upset. There was a big raid May 10 and my grandad was killed and granny hurt. She got pneumonia and died June 25. And I left my house-key on the dresser, so when I got home, I couldn’t get in. I was sitting on a wall crying when Martin came along, took me to his house where his Mum gave me a cup of tea until my Mum came home. Martin even put a note on the door to say where I was.”

“He still thinks of the details. But do you think Miriam was really upset you didn’t take up with him?”

“Not really upset. But I think – and now I’m a mother of twins of the same general age as we were then – that she wanted her boy to get some practise in talking to girls and learning how to behave with them. So we go out as Joe and Julia and Martin, which isn’t quite what she was expecting. But, as it turns out, it was a very

gentle and comfortable friendship, and Joe and I were a fit. And I can honestly say that I cared a lot about Martin, but I think both of us know we weren't right for each other."

"You seem to have made it work with Joe."

"Better had! Three kids need a Mum and Dad."

"To change the subject to practicalities," Martin interjected "We should stay up until after lunch and maybe go for a walk, then take a nap for a couple of hours, but then stay up until at least 9 so we get on UK time."

"I'm planning to go up the shops in a bit, so you could join me if you like. I can get something for lunch if you want."

"I think we'll walk as far as the shops then follow our noses and then maybe find a pub or café for lunch. I've got to teach Michelle the English currency, and we want to look for a good hat that will keep off the rain."

"If you don't mind a bit of a walk, Ye Olde Red Cow has a good reputation. Supposed to be from the 16th century."

"Do you have a map?"

"Joe knew you'd ask. There's one here on the mantelpiece."

"How soon do you leave for the shops?"

"About a quarter of an hour. Does that fit?"

"I think so for me. Just want to go to the loo and brush my teeth. Michelle?"

"Yes. That should be OK. I hope I don't fade too quickly."

"We'll take a taxi back if we have to." Martin said.

* * *

It was nearly 10 by the time we got to the shopping district near Bath Road. Martin had given me the map and made sure the Carr's address and phone number were in my leather purse, which was on a belt under my leather jacket. The jacket fitted me loosely enough that this was not uncomfortable. We wore gloves and scarves too, and Martin had on his tweed cap from Hamilton and I had a toque. We needed rain hats!

Martin had given me a couple of pound notes to put in my pocket and done the same himself. He had largely emptied his backpack except for the small umbrella and some Kleenex – correction 'paper hankies' here – and put it on so we could carry any purchases we

might make, or hold excess clothing like the scarves and gloves if, miraculously, we got too warm. He was a fuss-pot, but it was nice to be fussed over.

We had walked with Julia – me beside, Martin behind on the narrow English side-walk – correction, pavement. My head was already spinning with all this new language. Julia and I chatted about our daughters, in which I was careful to include Annie – correction Anna. Sigh. I caught a glimpse of Martin with an odd expression as I was talking about Anna to Julia. He looked very happy.

We talked about the usual concerns of boyfriends, education, safety at night, as well, of course, about clothing. When we got to the shops, we decided to let Julia get on with her routine, and struck out on our own.

“Martin, there are still lots of small shops here. Is this the way it is all over England?”

“I can’t speak for everywhere, but supermarkets are not quite as dominant here as in the parts of Canada I know. I’ve not been here for a couple of years, but I think that still holds more or less.”

“Martin, what is that store – an off license?”

“That’s what we call a liquor store. And if you look here at this small shop that is difficult to look into. Above the door it says ”Licensed Turf Accountant””

“So it’s a bookie? A betting shop?”

“Exactly. And you’ll see people – mostly men – going in and out.”

“We can stand over there and watch for a minute. The street is so different from a Canadian one.” I said.

We stood and watched for a few minutes as people went about their business. One man went from the bank to the betting shop then a couple of minutes later went back to the bank.

“I wouldn’t want to deposit my money in that bank.” I said.

“Shall we move on before you get cold?”

“Yes. Where to.”

“Shall we scout out Marks and Spencer’s for possible gifts for the girls?”

“What do they sell?”

“Mostly clothing, but some food items. Generally good quality and good value.”

“Oh. I see it over there.”

We went in and browsed the different parts of the store. Eventually we gravitated to the woollens.

“Martin. These are gorgeous, but there are none in my size I think. I don’t know if the sizes are the same.”

“I think Mum said you subtract 4 to get the US/Canadian sizes for women. Does that help?”

“Hmm. They’re still all too big for me.”

“I think I heard or read somewhere that M and S only provides sizes for the middle 80 percent of people. But you know, there should be children’s sizes that fit you. Why don’t we see what the styles are like.”

“OK. Though sometimes I wish I were not smaller than my 14-year old daughter.”

We looked through the juvenile woollens and found a couple of styles I liked. Well, what’s not to like about well-knitted sweaters.

“Why not try them on and note the size if they fit? We don’t have to buy them today, or at all.”

“OK. But is the price good.”

“About 2 to 3 bucks Canadian.”

“Oh. That’s good for these. I’ll see if they suit me.”

It turned out that one of the sweaters fitted comfortably.

“I’ll have to come back and buy this.” Michelle said.

“Better buy it now in case we don’t see it again. It’s only 14 and 6.”

“Is that how you say the price when it has 14, a slash, then 6?”

“Yes, it means 14 shillings and 6 pence.”

“Do I have enough in my pocket.”

“Sure. One pound is 20 shillings. You pay and we’ll check your change.”

We went to a cashier and presented the sweater which was duly wrapped in a lightweight cardboard box in tissue by a robust, middle-aged woman.

“Here you are luv, and 5 and 6 change.”

“Thank you. Is the receipt inside?”

“No. I’ll write you one. ... Here you are.”

“Thank you.” I said, looking at my change.

Martin put the package in his backpack and we made our way out of the store.

“You got two 2 shilling coins – called florins in slang – a shilling or one-bob coin, and a sixpence – slang tanner. Good that you asked for a receipt. We may need them for customs on the way home.”

“That’s why I asked. But all those names to learn! But I think we’ll be back to get Andrea a sweater and a skirt. Those wool ones are very nice and only about a pound. I think the children’s clothing is cheaper.”

“Lower or no tax. I only married you because you are cheap to clothe.”

I elbowed him gently, then added,

“The underwear was a good value too, not that you care if I wear any.”

“If this cold weather stays, you may want the vests.”

“Yes. I’m glad of Annie’s leather jacket with its sheepskin lining.”

“Thinking of protective clothing, we can look in Woolworths or British Home Stores for headgear. And I want to go in Smith’s to see if we can get you a map of London for Monday and Tuesday when I’m at the conference.”

“I’d been meaning to ask you about that, but too much was going on as we were arranging to get married and getting ready for this trip.”

“Hope you will enjoy it. I realize now it’s much less comfortable than I’d like for you.”

“I’ll survive. But you may find I adopt the old Canadian tradition on taking the first bath of the year on Victoria Day.”

“Frankly, I’d forgotten how chilly British bathrooms can be. I may join you. The great unwashed. At least Joe did install a small heater in the bathroom. If we turn it on and go in together so we don’t let the heat out, we may manage a quick wash. But not until tomorrow!

Here’s Smith’s. Let’s look and see what they have for London.”

We found the travel section fairly prominently placed in the shop. Martin picked up a book from a table display entitled “The Good Loo Guide”.

“Might be useful.” he commented.

“Does ”loo” mean toilet? I heard you say it at Julia’s I think.”

“Yes slang. I think a corruption of ”lavatory”, which is as bad as using ”bathroom” when you want a toilet.”

“Speaking of which. We should start to watch for one after the tea we had.” I said.

“How about this London map. It folds small, has the main area and a Tube map too. Doesn’t have the buses, but they have conductors. Or there’s the A-Z, but that’s more to find the small streets.”

“The folding one is a nice size to put in my pocket.”

Martin went to the cashier and paid – he only had pound notes handy and no change at all, so asked for some pennies in the change, as the map was 2/6.

“The map cost 2 shillings and sixpence, or half a crown. But there’s no crown coin or 5 shillings in circulation. I got the cashier to give me some pennies. She guessed why and told me to go back up the street where there’s a public ”convenience”. And I did remember to put some paper in the side pocket of my backpack, and I’ll suggest you take some out in case there’s none when you ”spend a penny”.”

“I assume that’s slang for going to the ... loo?”

“Here’s the penny.” He gave me one. “Meet you back here on the side-walk ... er, pavement.”

“You did warn me about the culture shock. I’m beginning to see why.”

When we met again, I remembered that I wanted some flannel pyjamas, so we returned to the Marks and Spencer and found some that would fit me in the juvenile section. At least now I could keep warm.

After this, Martin arranged that we start walking in the direction of the Red Cow. On the way we browsed Woolworths and British Home Stores and in the latter found rather unglamorous rain hats that had a good brim and chin strap for a couple of shillings each. We bought these in case of a downpour, but thought we would keep them in the backpack until necessary. The cap and toque were more comfortable.

We also looked in some clothing shops, gathering ideas. Eventually, shortly after noon, we found Ye Olde Red Cow.

“It looks later than 16th century. I’d say 1800. Maybe it’s been rebuilt. I wonder if we’re too early. Oh. I forgot to change my watch. It’s 7:20 in Ottawa.” Martin said.

“They’ll just be getting up, and we’ve been going over six hours since we got off the plane.”

“Let’s go in. It’s chilly out here.”

“Oh. It’s ... interesting.” I exclaimed.

“Good afternoon madam, sir. What’ll you have?”

“What cider do you have?”

“We’ve Bulmer’s Strongbow on tap, and these varieties in bottles.” the barman pointed to several bottles on a shelf. “But I recommend the Strongbow if you haven’t tried it.”

“A half pint please. Michelle?”

“I need something warm. Do you have coffee?”

“Certainly.”

“Then for me a coffee. And can we eat lunch here?”

The barman produced a card. “I’ll let you look at this while I get the coffee started. Do you wish black or white?”

“I’ll suggest she has white.” Martin jumped in. “I’m sure that will be preferred.”

“You are getting to know me, but are you sure I’ll prefer white coffee?”

“Black will be without milk and likely no cream to put in it. White is half hot milk or more. I know I prefer it. If you don’t like it, I’ll drink it myself and we’ll order you a black coffee. I almost changed my order, but I’d like to have the cider. Hard to get any good stuff in Canada.

Now what would you like to eat?”

“What’s a ploughman’s lunch? Or a scotch egg?”

“Why don’t I order and you can find out?”

“But we might not like them.”

“I know I do, and I’m pretty sure you will.”

Martin ordered one ploughman’s and two scotch eggs when the barman returned with the coffee and was pulling the cider.

“That’ll be 6/- please.” Martin paid with the coins he had. “Make yourselves comfortable. I’ll bring out your food. Would you like the Canadian cheddar or Double Gloucester?”

“We’re from Canada, in fact near one of the cheese-making places – Balderson – so I think we’ll go for the Double Gloucester please.” Martin responded.

We found a couple of chairs and small table near the fire. We took off our jackets and hung them over the backs of the chairs. Martin sipped his cider. He passed the glass to me and I took a sip.

“Oh. It’s nice. Not sweet, but still ... oh, I don’t know. But I can see why you ordered it. I will next time.”

“How’s the coffee?”

“Not like in Canada. But it’s pleasant and warm and ... milky. You were right, black might have been too harsh.”

“Here you are. Enjoy your lunch.” The barman delivered the ploughman’s lunch on one plate, and the scotch eggs on another.

“Why don’t I divide the ploughman’s and put it on the second plate and take one of the scotch eggs. If you pick up the other scotch egg, it’ll be easier for me to transfer stuff.”

“Can I bite into it?” Michelle asked

“Go ahead. But be careful not to lose any. They sometimes fall apart.”

I took a bite, discovering that it was meat surrounding a hard-boiled egg.

“Oh. It’s rather interesting. Put one plus sign for the woollens, a second for the cider, and a third for scotch eggs. And with that fire, I’m feeling a bit less cold. But I’ll check the minus column for the hard toilet paper and another for the not-very nice ”loos” as they say. I’m glad you put some toilet paper in your backpack.”

“We may have to look for some more. I put a full roll in my suitcase, fortunately. Saves on sore bum. I think that you might find what they call Delsey paper here that is like the stuff we’re used to.

Actually, why don’t you put a small amount in your jacket pocket in case of emergencies. Here, I’ll slip you a couple of small wads.” He got these out of the backpack by his feet and passed them to me, and I put them in one of the jacket pockets and snapped it shut.

People were coming in. The room got warmer, but also a bit smoky.

“My beard will get full of smoke.” Martin commented.

“And washing it will be cold.”

“No worse than shaving – in fact, less chance of nicks.”

“I’m starting to feel sleepy, Martin. Perhaps we’d better get back.”

“Are you OK to walk, or shall I see if we can get a cab?”

“We’ll walk. I’ve got to get used to that for next week when you’re at the conference Monday and Tuesday, and after when we’re together.”

“The toilets appear to be out the back there. We’d better use them before we start. I’ll stay here with your jacket – or maybe you

want it.”

“Dilemma! I’ll try without.”

Soon we were walking back. After about 10 minutes, we were passing a newsagent. Martin said,

“Just a minute. Let’s have a chocolate bar.”

“All right.”

We went in and discovered we filled the tiny customer space. Martin bought a Cadbury’s Fruit and Nut bar, and opened it as we left the shop.

“Here. This was always one of my favourites.”

“Mmm. Anudder for the pwus cowumn.” I mumbled as I ate.

With the stop for chocolate, our walk took us the better part of 45 minutes, so it was around 2 that we rang the bell and Julia let us in.

“Have a good time?” she asked.

“Very. I found a very nice sweater in Marks and Spencer, we got me a London map, and some rain hats for both of us. Then we took your recommendation for the Red Cow and had a ploughman’s lunch and scotch eggs. And Martin had cider, which I tried and liked. And he introduced me to Fruit and Nut chocolate. So a very successful walk, but I’m now about to drop. It’s not yet 9 in the morning back home.”

“We’ll take a nap, Julia. But make sure we’re woken around 5 or we’ll not get ourselves on British time.”

“All right. I’m glad you had a nice time. The weather isn’t wet, but it is cold. There’s an electric fire you can put on in your room, but I worry about setting fire to something.

I’ll be surprised if the kids don’t wake you up. Victor gets home about 4:30 and the twins around 5. Joe won’t be here till nearly 6, and we’ll eat as soon as he’s home or the kids will get annoying. I’ve got some lamb chops.”

When we were upstairs, I asked

“Shall we put the electric fire on?”

“If we do, we’ll have to make sure we don’t push bedclothes into it. These British rooms are quite small, and there’s lots of stuff on the bed. At least two blankets, a counterpane, and a large eiderdown.

I suggest we use the fire when we dress and undress, and rely on the covers and cuddling in bed.”

"I'm going to just lie under the eiderdown and stay dressed I think. Is that OK?"

"I was thinking that too. But I'm going to wash first and try to get the smoke out of my beard."

"Darn. It'll be in my hair too."

"We'll survive. I'm hoping the hotel en-suite will be relatively warm."

Friday, February 5, 1965 – Martin

"So you had a pretty good day?" Joe said on hearing what we'd been doing as Julia served up the chops, mashed potatoes and Brussels sprouts.

"I enjoyed myself – lots of new things. Except the cold. I find it much harder to take than the dry cold we get in Ottawa." Michelle said.

"I remember Martin saying that when he came to school in Sutton."

"Mum. Do we HAVE to eat our Brussels?" Victor complained to Julia.

"Yes you do. There's lots of children starving who'd be glad of them."

"We were thinking of doing a bit of a tour tomorrow in the car." Joe said. "There's quite a few nice places near here that aren't so much on the tourist list. Stoke Poges is just up the road."

"Is that where Gray wrote his Elegy in a Country Churchyard?" I asked, actually knowing the answer.

"That's the claim. And there's a monument there."

We can also go to Beaconsfield – G K Chesterton is buried there, and Henley on Thames, Twyford, and some of the other towns and villages. Nothing terribly far. Julia thinks you may prefer Windsor Castle, but Saturday is busier with local folk. You'd do better on a weekday in February."

"Or maybe they'd like to go to football. Stanley Matthews – Sir Stanley Matthews since the New Years Honours – is going to play for Stoke against Fulham." said Jacob.

"Not as if we're going to be attending up North, is it though." Joe responded. "And we'll take Victor with us. You twins should be old enough to look after yourselves."

“I’m going to the pictures with Mary and Angela.” said Jennifer.

“And which boys?” Julia jumped in.

“Mum! You’d think I was some sort of ... loose woman. Angela’s older brother Pete may join us with a couple of his mates. But we’re not going out with them.”

“I’ll expect you home by 10 at the latest. What about you, Jacob?”

“I may end up at the same film. Andrew and I are going to look for some pieces for the model aeroplane he’s building, and his Mum’s said I can stay for supper. Then we’ll go to the pictures.”

“And you don’t ask him which girls?” Jennifer complained.

“Can Michelle and I take you out for dinner?” I asked. “If we eat early, Jennifer could join us.”

“That’s OK. Mary said I should eat at her house.” Jennifer responded.

“And eating out’s expensive.” Julia added.

“I think the budget will handle it. Or we could have a big lunch in a pub or restaurant.” Martin suggested.

“Not a pub with Victor along.” Joe cautioned.

“Oh. Yes. I remember Clara and I only got in pubs a couple of times because we couldn’t take Annie in.”

“But there should be something suitable in Henley for lunch. That would be nice, and we can just have something light in the evening. If I hear right, travellers fade in the evening, so I’ll propose a quiet evening in front of the Telly.” Julia said.

“That’ll suit me.” Michelle said. “I’m still finding my head here.”

“There’s a Cadena cafe in Reading that would do for lunch.” Joe said. “I was reminded about it because Tesco just arranged to buy out Cadena.”

I noticed that they’d had to move the armchairs right into the corner. A gas fire was burning in the fireplace. The table had been pulled out from the wall so all 7 of us could fit around it, with two of the children on chairs brought in from another room. After the meal was over, the table was moved back, and the armchairs repositioned, one beside the fire, one a bit in front of it so there was a view of the TV. Victor brought a book somewhat like a colouring book to the table and was soon busy solving some sort of puzzle. The teenagers disappeared, Jacob through the back of the room to the addition that was his bedroom, and Jennifer upstairs.

The armchairs were big enough that Michelle could fit in with me, and she did so as we did that time in Brockville. Joe offered drinks, suggesting he and I have a scotch, and Michelle asked if she could have a very small one.

"I can't drink scotch" Julia said. "But I like a little sherry now and then." This was what she had. She took the other arm chair, and Joe positioned a dining table chair between the two arm chairs.

There was a soap opera playing. "Emergency Ward 10". Julia seemed absorbed, and conversation quieted when the commercials were not on.

"Are there commercials on BBC as well?" Martin asked.

"No, we have to pay the TV license to cover that. We'll change over for the news at nine. Like probably half of the UK, we make a cup of tea during the 10 minutes of announcements and such before the news."

"Yes. I read somewhere in one of my engineering magazines that the CEGB has to start an extra power station and bring it on line just as the previous program ends. It's something like a 10 percent jump in electricity demand in under 30 seconds because of all the electric kettles being turned on."

Over the next hour, Joe and I caught up on reminiscences, Victor worked at his puzzles, occasionally aided by Joe or Julia until his bedtime at 8:30. Julia kibitzed on the conversation with Joe and I. Michelle, tucked in against me, fell asleep.

"Should you wake her so she can go to bed?" Julia asked.

"No. Let's wait until after the news. She's comfortable I think. We do this at home. The girls told us that's how they knew we were going to end up married. Said it was pretty obvious."

"It seems so. I'm having a little trouble not saying Clara to her."

"You're not alone. And don't get upset with yourself if you do. A lot has happened this last year, both in public and private. Just last week, Churchill was buried. That will take some getting used to as well."

"I'm glad you found each other. I can't think how lonely I'd be without Joe, even given the children."

Michelle woke of her own accord when the tea arrived at the start of the BBC News. The Queen was in Addis Abbaba. The Confederation of British Industry had been founded, no doubt to push back against the Labour government of Harold Wilson, and

there were a number of smaller UK stories, plus the mention of Stanley Matthews.

“These biscuits are nice.” Michelle noted.

“Peek Freans Chocolate Digestive” Julia said.

“We have a Peek Freans bakery in Toronto – it opened about a year after I arrived there in 1948 – but I’ve not seen these in Canada, though I remember them here on previous trips.”

A few minutes later we went upstairs. The chill was striking after the cosy dining room. Michelle had noticed a woollen snake, complete with head and eyes, that Julia put across the bottom of the dining-room door to keep the draughts out.

“Ooh. I’m shivering,” she said.

“I’ll put on the electric fire and we’ll undress in front of it. Julia put a couple of hot water bottles in the bed. Do you want to use toilet or brush teeth first?”

“I’ll take toilet. I find the separate toilet quite odd.”

“It’s the norm here.”

I brushed my teeth and then tidied our clothes while Michelle was in the toilet, then used it myself while she was in the bathroom. I washed my hands in the bathroom and came back to the bedroom to find her warming her hands and standing very close to the 1-bar fire.

“Give me your PJs and I’ll warm them.” I said.

“I’m going to put on the new flannel ones. I took off the labels.”

I held them up in front of the fire to warm, turning them to get both jacket and pants warmed. Michelle took off her sweater and blouse hurriedly and put on the jacket, then just as quickly dropped her slacks and put on the PJ pants. Then she hopped into bed and buried herself in the covers.

“Ah. The hot water bottle is nice. And I’m keeping my socks on.”

“I put in a couple of extra pairs of mine in case you need some – they’ll be big on you, but serve fine as bed socks.”

“You really think of the details. I’m getting spoiled.”

I emulated Michelle’s quick change. I turned off the electric fire, got into bed and found the egg-shaped switch that was a second control to the dim central light. Michelle immediately cuddled in close to me.

“Shall we risk leaving the hot water bottles in the bed?”

“Will they leak?”

“Probably not. I just never trusted the rubber I suppose.”

Friday, February 5, 1965 – Anna

We drove Dad and Michelle to the airport Thursday afternoon. I had a class, but talked to the Prof. and explained why I'd be away. He said it was my responsibility to complete the course requirements, but that he appreciated being informed. A couple of the boys offered their notes. Can they smell my ... horniness? Marcia says it's more that when you're 'happily fucked', as she puts it, you have more confidence and carry yourself positively. Funny. I really don't think she has been 'happily fucked' yet, and I don't want to make her feel bad by telling her about Peter and me.

Anyway, we gave Dad and Michelle a good send off – uitwived them. Where did that come from? Must be something I remember from when we were in Flanders. Just popped into my head. Anyway, we got them checked in for the hop to Montreal – the checked luggage would be transferred automatically, and then decided to leave them to wait for the plane rather than hang around.

I was afraid Andrea would cry, but she held off until we were back in the car, then had a bit of a snuffle.

“I'm not really upset, just not used to Mum going away.” she explained.

“Sometimes a good bawl is therapeutic. So's a favourite meal. What do you want for supper?”

“Can we have fish sticks? Mum thinks that they aren't as good as fish that looks like fish, but I like them.”

“Sure Sis. I'll even do some chips if you want.”

“That could be messy. Let's have some mashed potato and some peas or else mixed peas and carrots.”

That's what we did. Then we both did some homework and went to bed pretty early.

In the morning I got us both off to school on time. My classes were over by 2:30, so I was home a good hour before her. I used the time to plan for Peter's birthday present. I'd told him to come at 7 for dinner. He knew we'd have the house to ourselves and I assume he was smart enough to realize he could stay over. We'd not had sex since New Year's – I should ask him if he suffers from Blue Balls.

Dinner! I'd not thought much about that. Am I getting sex-obsessed? Well, there was plenty of pasta and some jars of sauce and some grated Parmesan. What about salad? I quickly checked the fridge. Whew! Michelle, I love you. There was a lettuce and a couple of tomatoes – they'd not be the greatest in winter, but they'd do. And I knew where there was a jar of artichoke hearts, a particular weakness of mine. And there were carrots.

I threw together the lettuce and tomato and grated some carrot. I left off any dressing and the artichoke to avoid soggy salad problems. I gathered the items for the pasta but didn't open anything. We could do that together. I'd persuaded Dad to get a bottle of German white wine for me – I needed to chill it. Did that. Now what's left?

Well, I still had one problem – I wanted a small sign that would be revealed when Peter opened his present, but attaching it would be awkward.

* * *

Bryan picked Andrea up about 5:30. I made sure she had clothing and stuff that she needed, but in fact she'd got everything ready herself.

"Have a nice time with Peter" she said with a wink. I think she guessed what was going on.

"See you Sunday night. Be good." I replied.

Peter fortunately came early, not long after 6:30. I was going crazy by then, worrying I'd not got everything ready.

"Hi there." I said.

"Hi yourself." he replied and put his arms round me and gave me a big messy kiss. No tongue though. That's good. I need to be a bit warmed up for tongue.

"We could eat now. Or you could open your birthday present."

"You got me a present?"

"Yes. You're special and deserve a special present."

"OK. I'm curious. Can I have it now?"

"Upstairs in my room. I didn't want to have the rest of the family asking questions."

We went upstairs, me leading. As we did, I flipped out the label that was attached to a button hole of my blouse. I was wearing a white blouse and a short tartan skirt with knee socks. I'd pinned

up the hem of the skirt. Peter should be getting a good view of my legs.

When I got in my room I turned round, and the label – I'd got one that was quite big, 4 by 6 – was clearly visible.

Happy Birthday Peter

"Oh. Nice. I like this present."

He kissed me again. This time he brushed my lips with his tongue and I responded in kind. We eventually broke and I asked him

"Aren't you going to unwrap your present."

"Am I ever. But knowing how practical the Dutch and Scots are, I'm sure you don't want me to rip the wrapping."

"It would be appreciated if the wrapping could be re-used, Sir."

"Hmm. Where shall I start? I think with the socks."

Trust him to want to make me wait. He started with the left one, rolling it down no more than half an inch at a time, but suddenly I realized he had his other hand up my skirt and ... he was ever so lightly stroking me on my pussy. I could feel myself getting wet. Oh. Hurry up Peter.

Eventually he had both socks off. Then he undid each button of the blouse in turn, finally easing the blouse out of the skirt. As he took the blouse off me, he realized that I was not wearing a regular bra, but the top and (he'd discover later) the bottom of a red bikini that fastened by strings. I'd got it last summer, then decided it was too daring. The bottom tied with bows at each side. Perfect for this occasion.

I'd changed the straps of the bikini top so it tied in front. I wanted to watch him undress me. Hmm. But once I was naked, I'd need him that way too. Best laid plans – I'd better start to see if I can get some clothes off him.

"Are you getting too hot?" I asked as I reached to take off his sweater. But before I could do this he had it off, and was undoing his shirt and taking it off.

Then he came back to me and kissed me again. I felt his hand on my breast, then felt the ties being pulled and then he had his hands on both my breasts. Ooh that felt nice, especially when he tweaked the nipples gently.

We broke the kiss and he lifted the bikini top over my head. As he did so, I undid his belt.

“Does something in here need a bit more room?”

“I’m sure it does.” Despite my willingness, he took off his pants in a rush. There was a big bulge in the front of his briefs.

He started to feel the top of my skirt, clearly not sure how it undid.

“There’s a pair of hooks here at the side.” I was skirtless in about 1.23 seconds.

“I’m not going to have you get ahead of me.” he said, taking off his socks then carefully pulling the waistband of his briefs over his very erect penis and sliding them off.

“Very nice, Mr Sinclair. I think you’ll do.” I said. I saw him looking around for the condoms, but not seeing them didn’t stop him continuing.

“Well, then, this I can essentially rip off.” He pulled on both bows at once and my bikini bottom fell away through my legs. I noticed a big wet spot.

“We might have to fix this leak.” Peter noted. Oh PLEASE. Do fix my leak.

Then he spotted the sign I’d made. Right smack above my pussy.

No rubber needed.

““No rubber needed”” he read, clearly a bit confused.

“I started the Pill. It’s supposed to be effective now.”

“Oh wow. This is some birthday present. YOU are some birthday present. ... But how”

I’d some trouble figuring out how to get the sign in place. Finally took some scissors and trimmed my bush down a bit – well a lot – really short at the top down to just an inch above my slit. And shortened it below that so it didn’t look too silly. Then I used my razor that I use for legs and underarms and lots of shaving cream and cleared off a zone on my mound so I could use a bit of folded over sticky tape – the smallest piece that would work to keep the sign in place. Then I made a triangular sign that would fit the zone out of some index card.

“Does the sign stay in place?”

“You can take it off gently.”

“It’s my present. Maybe I want to rip it off.”

“No! Don’t! It might hurt.” But he’d already grabbed a corner and in one movement it was gone. Fortunately without much pain.

He knelt down and was examining my crotch.

“Cute. Very exciting. God I want you.”

“Me too.” I pulled him up and kissed him. Stuck my tongue in his mouth and grabbed his lovely penis. He struggled and tried to push me away and suddenly I felt wetness all over my tummy and what was left of my bush as well as my hand.

“Oh no. I’m sorry.” Peter said.

“Peter. I want to laugh, but I don’t want to upset you. Please. Can I laugh and love you and we’ll sort things out.”

“Yes. Let’s laugh together.”

“Then I’ll say that you seem to have sprung a leak too. Maybe if you can put your thing in my thing we’ll be able to stop the leaks.”

Now he laughed heartily, then kissed me briefly and said

“We’d better clean up and see if we’ve dripped. I don’t want to leave too much evidence, or we’ll get Andrea all curious.”

“Yeah. Michelle would have kittens if she did.”

We got some Kleenex and it turned out I’d got most of Peter’s squirts. We went in the bathroom and I suggested we stand in the tub and use the shower head to clean up, which we did. Without really thinking about it we dried each other off. I was on one knee drying Peter when on a whim I kissed the tip of his cock. It jumped a bit, even though he was not erect.

“He must like that.” I said.

“It’s a new feeling.”

Gently I put my hand round it and very gently kissed it again. There was a tiny drop of liquid forming, and I was curious enough to run my tongue along the underside of the hole and across it. It was slightly soapy and salty, but not objectionable. Peter groaned.

“Sorry” I said.

“Don’t be. It’s just intense, and very nice.” He was getting hard now. Before he got fully erect, I couldn’t resist and put my mouth completely over the head and gently ran my tongue over the two lobes below the hole. More moaning noises, and he grabbed my head. But I was a bit afraid he’d push it down my throat, so I pulled back.

“Back to the bedroom?” I asked.

“Yeah. More of that and I’ll never get round to the main event.”

This made me think a bit about what Dad had said about ‘making love’. That it was everything you did together, and sex was just

part of that.

“Peter, I had a conversation with my Dad about life and love and such, and I was using the phrase ‘making love’, and Dad said that for him and Mum, and I suspect now with Michelle, it was really everything you did together to build a partnership, and that ‘making love’ was a pretty feeble euphemism for sex, which was just part – a really important part – of the everything. So I’m not sure we should worry about any ‘main event’, though I suspect I want whatever you mean by it.”

“You’re going to be so easy to love, Annie – Anna.” He kissed me as we stood by the bed, then pushed me down on it.

“Can I take a look at your ... pussy?”

“Sure.” I spread my legs. He bent down.

“It’s really cute with the abbreviated bush.”

Suddenly I felt his tongue on my lower lips, then ... oooh that was strong. Guess he’s doing to me what I did to him. Well go to it! I just laid back and let the sensations wash over me. I don’t know how long he went on, but suddenly I couldn’t bear him doing it any more and had a wave of pleasure. I took his head in both hands and pulled him up. I was lying across my bed, and I wanted to kiss him so badly. But I’d still got my legs up and apart – I hadn’t noticed myself doing that – and as his lips kissed mine I felt his cock go in my hole. Wow.

“I didn’t quite expect that to happen.” I said.

“Nor me. Shall we do it like this? I can get in pretty deep.”

“We’ve not a lot of experience together. I’d hate to get sore or get a urinary infection if it’s too rough.”

“OK. I’ll go gently.”

He stood up a bit and put his hands on my tits and kneaded them. That was nice, and he was moving in and out nice and slowly, with long strokes. Too much. Well, not too much. I was in 7th heaven.

“Since I already went off, I can last a bit longer.”

“I’m fine with whenever. Well, sometime in the next 15 to 20 minutes might be good, or I’ll get hungry.”

“What would that mean.”

“I might get hungry in the worst – or even wurst – possible way. I already had a taste of it, remember.”

“Ottawa Citizen: Man loses genitals to hungry sex-mad girlfriend.”

“That sort of thing.”

“Well, I’d better grab your shoulders and put it all the way in so you can’t get at it.” He did this. It felt awfully good as he pulled us together, and I sensed him spasm a couple of times and then relax. As he did so, I had a small spasm myself. God, I could get used to this.

He didn’t pull out, but motioned me to shift around and after a bit of crabbing across the bed he was lying on me with his penis still inside. He kissed me on the nose and lips and cheeks and I lay there in a sort of emotional and sensual goo. Probably a wet spot too, but I had spread a towel earlier. Doctor’s orders. Of course it could have shifted.

After a couple of minutes, I asked,

“Dinner?”

“Yeah. We’ve probably worked up an appetite.”

We cleaned up a bit – the towel had caught the dribble ... just. So I wouldn’t have a big laundry job. We decided we’d better be dressed in case anyone came to the door. Unlikely, but no sense in unnecessary embarrassment. I chose fresh panties, slacks and a sweater. No need for a bra. Peter had a spare pair of pants and a casual shirt. He put on his underpants and socks. He’d also brought slippers. Ellie trained her boys well.

Cooking together worked out. I’ve heard married couples say that being in the kitchen together was a recipe for divorce, but Peter and I seemed to be able to do things without getting too much in each other’s way. Maybe the wine helped. We weren’t driving, and I was almost legal. I’d only planned the main course of salad and pasta. There was ice cream and some pie and cookies in the house, but Peter surprised me with a couple of fancy pastries. I’d not noticed the box when he arrived. Oh. He’d had them in his carry all with his clothes and toiletries. He must have shaved before coming over. I’d felt the stubble on New Year’s day. No wonder Dad preferred the beard.

By the time we were finished dinner, it was nearly 10. We cleared the dishes – Peter actually washed them up, then decided simply to crawl into bed. We even put on PJs, noting that they were easy to take off.

“Less work than putting on a condom.” I quipped.

“Blue. That birthday present was just the greatest ever. Thank you so, so much.”

“You’re welcome. But you know I had a really good time too.”

“Yes. I’m realizing that the more fun the other person has, the more fun I have.”

We settled into each other’s arms. My bed is a wide single, sort of a one and a half. So we were ... cosy. But it seemed to be OK.

After all the sex, we found ourselves talking about possibilities for education and jobs. In fact, education and jobs where we could be together. I said

“You know. We’re talking about things as if we already have decided that we want to be together.”

“I guess so. It wasn’t exactly a conscious thing. But if we go on like this, I can see it as a possibility – a very nice possibility.”

“We’d better be a bit cautious. You know ... life jumping up and kicking us.”

“I’ll try. It’s hard not to be enthusiastic about you, Anna.”

Did that ever sound nice. It rolled around in my head, or seemed to, until I woke to see daylight between the curtains. Wow. I’d fallen asleep and it was now morning.

Saturday, February 6, 1965 – Martin

We had decided to chance a hot-water bottle leak and soon were asleep, though both of us woke in the night and were awake for about half an hour, though I think at different times from later conversation. When we both awoke for the day, almost together, it was 8 am and we could hear noise of activity below.

“Are you going to take a bath this morning?” Michelle asked.

“I think not. Perhaps this evening before bed, and if we do it together, we can let the bathroom warm up a little.”

“Good idea! I can see my breath in here.”

“I’ll slip out to the toilet and turn the electric fire on as I go.”

“Hmm. Another reason to love you.”

“I would only do it for my favourite woman. Not just any run of the mill girlfriend.”

We managed to wash and dress much more quickly than usual, and came downstairs around 8:30.

"Sleep well?" Julia asked.

"Yes thanks. Here's the hot water bottles. I emptied them." I said. "We were both awake for about half an hour in the middle of the night, but apparently at different times. Still, we woke up at 8, which is more or less right for here, so I'm hopeful that a bit of care will mean we don't suffer too much from the jet lag."

"I hope you were warm enough." Joe said. "If not, turn on the electric fire."

"We did that for dressing and undressing." Michelle said. "But Martin thought it might not be a good idea while we're asleep in case we push the bedclothes near it."

"Thanks. That is a concern. I thought of putting in one high up like in the bathroom, but most of the year we don't need it. It's particularly cold this February, though you must be used to it colder."

"Not indoors. We have an oil furnace and just put the thermostat up. In fact, Martin pointed out to me that we open our doors to let the air move to balance the temperature, while here you want to keep the heat in, so you shut the doors. But I think we have more insulation in the houses to keep heat loss down, and double windows and doors."

"Some people are starting to talk of double glazing here, as well as insulation. I think it will become more common. Double doors I didn't know about. How do they work?"

"The outer door is quite light. Generally glass with a slider that has a screen behind it. We sometimes call them storm doors. But they provide a 6 inch air gap, so stop draughts. In summer, we slide the glass and the screen lets air flow but stops the bugs." I answered.

"I remember the 1948 Christmas letter where Clara said – oh sorry, maybe I should not have mentioned her."

"No. It's fine. She's part of our family's life. We have pictures of her around the house." Michelle said.

"Anyway, I remember Clara saying how she expected to be uncomfortable, but found Canada amazingly comfortable in winter." Joe said.

"We fed the children, but we're having bacon and eggs. Is that all right for you?" Julia added.

"Wonderful," I said.

“How many eggs?”

“Just one will do,” said Michelle.

“The same” I concurred.

“Joe will have two. Me one. So five. And bacon and toast all round?”

“Yes.” we said simultaneously.

“Tea’s in the pot. Help yourself.”

February 7, 1965 – Michelle

We were in our hotel room, hanging out our clothes. The previous daytime had been busy. Stoke Poges was a quiet success. It was not unknown to tourists, but definitely not on the A-list of places, and I’d not really heard about it, though somewhere in high school we’d read Grey’s *Elegy*. Beaconsfield similarly. Reading was busy with shoppers, and Joe had a bit of trouble parking, and we had quite a walk to the Cadena. While it was an outing for the Carrs, Martin said he felt that it was pleasant but less of a treat than he intended. Still, Julia seemed pleased that Victor got to experience a restaurant. He had Welsh rarebit, so Martin was able to relate how Annie had loved it and mixed up Flemish and English, hearing ‘Welsh rabbit’ and then translating ‘rabbit’ to ‘konijn’. The meal was good but unexciting, though the pastries for dessert were a novelty for me. Apparently they were the reason Tesco was buying the company.

Later we went to Henley – I’d heard about the regatta before – and then to several of the Thames villages. They were achingly pretty, though the weather was cool. We had another quiet evening, sharing photographs and learning about details of each others lives. Without mention, we somehow overlooked the bath.

Today we’d gone to Sutton. Joe and Martin were talking on Saturday as they toured the villages, and Martin had said he wanted to see the “old house”. Joe realized there was a good opportunity for a family visit and had phoned his parents who still lived in the same house. Julia’s mother and father had divorced in the early 50s – partly the stress of wartime deaths and injuries to family members – but her mother still lived in a flat near the Morden Tube station. Indeed, Charlotte Smith still worked at her old government job.

It was agreed that Joe would drop off Martin, Julia, Victor and I at the Carr house around 11:30, then pick up the twins, who would take the train and tube each way to Morden, where Charlotte could be picked up at the same time. We reversed the process around 2:30, and around 3:30 started for central London where Joe dropped us at the hotel.

I was assessing my trip so far.

“Martin, All the houses in the suburbs seem pretty much the same.”

“Yes. Kind of boring. And hard to differentiate one street from another. But they are houses, and give people a place to live. A lot were destroyed in the War. It was pretty desperate in '45 when people wanted somewhere to start a family.”

“We had it easier in Canada for sure.

When we were walking from Joe's parents' house to see your old place, we passed a woman with a little girl. She had very striking eyes. The two of you looked at each other as though you were going to say hello. Did you know her?”

“I couldn't place her then. And I'm not sure still, but I think she was the sister of the fiancé of one of my RAF mates. We met briefly – we were really only introduced and had no conversation – in 1946 when I took a bit of a trip in Kent to see some of England before I finished my studies. As I recall, the sisters were born in Canada, but grew up here. Perhaps she was trying to place me too.

Shall we go out to explore before it gets dark so you can get your bearings?”

“Yes. Even though I'm quite tired. Let me go to the loo first. There – you've got me saying that now.”

We walked west up the Cromwell Road – I was following carefully on my map – then up Exhibition Road to Kensington Road, then East to Brompton Road and Harrods. Martin was able to point out where he'd trained and where he'd been billeted. The museums would be easy for me to find.

Then we saw a small Greek restaurant in a side street and decided to try it. We each had some soup and shared a moussaka and then a baklava. The restaurant had a couple of other patrons, but the waiter complained that it was too quiet. Bad for him, good for us.

A little after 7 we were back in our room, which just had space for the bed and a simple chair and small table, and a wardrobe,

the door of which brushed the bed when it opened. The en-suite required some agility to navigate the toilet, sink and bath. However, the radiator was, if not hot, at least warm. Martin made sure the tiny window was properly closed. He found a cloth under the sink that appeared to be used for cleaning, made it wet under the tap – he used the hot to make it more comfortable to handle – then draped it over the bath to cover the overflow.

“Why are you doing that, Martin?” I asked.

“Come feel when I take the cloth away.”

“Oh. It’s a cold wind coming in there!”

“Tomorrow take a look at the outside of residential buildings. You’ll see all the pipes, and where the baths are, you’ll see the overflow pipe sticking out the wall, ready to catch the icy wind and turn the bath into a skating rink.

I’m going to get the bath going. Let’s get our towels and PJs and make this little room comfy and take a bath and wash our hair.”

“Don’t you have to prepare your talk?”

“I’m not on until Tuesday.”

The tub was slightly longer and narrower than normal in Canada, but we managed to squeeze in. There was plenty of hot water, thankfully, and we made good use of it. Martin had presciently packed a tin camping mug and we used this to rinse our hair and Martin’s beard. Martin had also requested some extra towels before we left to go walking. With some reluctance, they had been supplied. British service! The hotel was not cheap, and claimed a 3 star rating.

“Feel better after that?” Martin asked.

“Much.

Martin, Do we have enough clothes for the week?”

“Sure. We’ll probably need a laundromat when we get to Oxford if we change every day. But I’ve 6 more shirts and underwear. I think we can wear clothes two days in a row, or else intersperse the wear, but still wear them 2 days.”

“You made me pack the same number of outfits – I thought you were a bit of a bully about it, but now I’m thinking that it was sensible.

If we wash on Saturday morning in Oxford, that’s the 13th. We’d still have 2 weeks. I guess at a pinch, wearing everything 2 days, we could get home without more washing.”

“I’m sure Esther will let us wash. I even know where she used to

hang the laundry. And we could buy some new clothes too. They are cheap enough here to make it worthwhile, but we'd need to carry them then.

Actually, we could put some stuff in left luggage before we leave London and pick it up before we go to Hatfield."

"You mean so we didn't have to carry it?"

"Yes. The maple syrup for David and Esther. Conference materials I collect and my notes and slides, and anything else like things we buy for souvenirs."

"Wouldn't it be costly?"

"A few shillings. But that would save us lugging it."

"You know this is a funny honeymoon. I've not been made love to."

"No time like the present. The radiator is still warm – just. I bet they turn them off or down during the night. That's why it's a good idea to take a bath when it's warm."

"I'm still not taking my PJ's off until we're under the covers."

"A full body flannel condom?"

"In two pieces, even."

Sunday, February 7, 1965 – Anna

The weekend had been pretty interesting. Peter and I had sex a few times, but rather surprised ourselves – well, I would not have predicted it anyway – that we weren't at it the whole time. In fact, we actually did quite a bit of our university work sitting in the same room rather quietly. Perhaps it was the eminent availability of sex that meant we weren't in such a panic to make sure we were doing it.

Actually sleeping together in the same bed was kind of interesting. My bed is a wide single, but far from a double. We seemed to be able to sleep comfortably. Not too many elbows and knees, anyway. I woke up a couple of times and Peter was against me there. It felt nice, and I was soon asleep again. When we did wake up together in the morning, relatively late as it was after 8, there was a sort of half-awake sex session, and I can see how one might say 'making love'. It was very gentle. No urgency or panic. And no having to find a condom or worry about pulling out. Could get very used to that. Probably having to get up to go to work or school is a

big obstacle to regular enjoyment in that fashion. The curse of real life.

Peter took me out to dinner on the Saturday. We decided Chinese and found a little place over on Somerset we could walk to. Wanted some exercise, and there was no snow and the temperature in the high teens. We tossed about the idea of going to a movie, but opted instead for a cuddle and reading books. This could get dangerously domestic.

Today was above freezing and over half an inch of RAIN! Terrible.

Peter went home this afternoon – Ellie made him do his own laundry, and he was running low on clean clothes. If we stuck as a couple, I'd have to ensure I didn't become the washerwoman. The Irish Washerwoman tune briefly played in my head. But I'd Dad as a model, and he did laundry, if not all the time, at least quite regularly. And cooking and cleaning.

Am I already thinking these things? Talk about dangerously domestic, this was madly matrimonial. I must be on an alliteration kick.

Marcia borrowed the family car – she didn't want to get soaked – and came over for a cup of tea and some serious girl gossip this (Sunday) afternoon. She'd have preferred the evening, but Andrea was coming home at 5:30, to be delivered by her Dad, Bryan.

"What'd you guys get up to this weekend?" she asked almost as soon as she'd taken a seat at the kitchen table.

"Er. ... "

"Oh. Obvious! Hope you're not sore, and especially not knocked up."

"Marcia!"

"It's kind of obvious from your red face."

"Well, we took precautions."

"Peter doesn't mind using sausage skins? Officially prophylactics."

"Actually his father is pretty hot on not getting VD or creating unplanned babies. So he knows about condoms and can get them as needed."

"How many did you use?"

That Marcia. How could I get back at her for this?

"None."

"You mean you didn't do the deed."

"I didn't say that."

"Taking risks then."

"No. I'm on the Pill."

"Peter's Dad prescribed it for you?"

"No. When I went for dinner early in January, I had a moment to speak to Dr. Sinclair and asked him if it was still appropriate for me to be his patient when I was going out with Peter. He said it was better if I went to a different physician and referred me to a very nice lady doctor, Dr. Josephine Howard. When I told her that I was going out with Peter, she put two and two together. We talked about the problems of relationships while getting an education and I got the feeling she had been through it herself. She's married and probably under 40."

"Is she taking new patients? I could use a doctor like that."

My turn to ask the awkward questions.

"Bill been keeping you happily fucked?" I asked, deliberately using Marcia's crude but apt expression.

"Er. Well, we've tried once. Had to wait for nobody home upstairs."

"And?" I wasn't going to let her off the hook.

"It was rather nice, though I find the process of using condoms a bit ... clinical."

"Especially pulling out carefully, I'd guess?"

"That, and ... well, having to interrupt the passion."

I didn't need to push her more.

"You like Bill better than Constantine?"

"Actually Constantine was OK. He was good to me. Showed he appreciated my company. And we talked about lots. He reads all the time. Always has a book somewhere close. I wouldn't have expected that, since he didn't go to university. I've had to readjust my attitudes and prejudices."

"So, what happened?"

"Well, I might have revised my prejudices, but my folks of course want me to wait, teach a while, then marry a nice doctor or lawyer. But Constantine is working at the Cashway Lumber, and he's been put in charge of the tools section. They didn't actually make him a manager though, and he'd like a bit more appreciation. He told me he's managed to increase sales of tools by 30 percent in the last year by getting in a better selection and displaying the tools so the

customers can find them and compare them better.”

“Will he stay there, or try to find something better?”

“He’s thinking of starting his own business selling tools and things like nuts and bolts and stuff like that. Right now he’s trying to figure out how much money he needs for initial stock. It’s a chicken and egg thing. He lives with his folks to save. But he may try to specialize in cordless power tools, which would reduce the capital he needs.”

“You liked him a lot?”

“Yeah. Guess so. But he didn’t believe in contraception. So no go there. And I’d like to, as I’ve put it, be happily fucked. I think that means not having to worry about a baby until I really want to be a Mum. And it also means that I can enjoy being joined at the jollies with a man I like and care about.”

“Is there a future with Bill?”

“There’s no real obstacles, since he’s a teacher already and I hope to get a position somewhere not too far away when I graduate this year.”

Physics was 4 years, but you could do a B.Ed. in 3. Well, the end point was rather different.

“Can you get more privacy at Bill’s place?” I’d no idea where he lived.

“He has a roommate and they’ve a 2 bedroom apartment near Carlingwood. There may be some opportunity there, but they only started sharing the place in September, and haven’t worked out the delicate issues of girlfriends yet.”

“Well, good luck to you Marcia. Especially with the New Year’s resolution.”

“I think Bill and I plan to give it a good try.”

February 8, 1965 – Martin

The breakfast room in the hotel was rather small. We got there at 7:45, which was fortunate, as there was some fuss when a couple arrived at 8:10 and there were no tables left for two. Some discussion led to two individuals consenting to share so the couple could be seated.

“Is cold toast normal?” Michelle asked.

“Mandatory! I’ve never had it above 55 Fahrenheit in a UK hotel or B and B.” I mugged.

“Oh well. It’s edible, there’s plenty of hot tea, and the eggs, bacon, beans, and mushrooms were filling. I won’t need much lunch.”

“What’s your plan while I’m at the conference today?” I asked.

“Well, we looked at the map on Saturday night, and I thought I would take the Tube or a bus to Westminster. I’d prefer bus, but the Tube is easier from South Kensington direct.”

“That line is not strictly a Tube. It was cut and cover, just below the surface rather than tunnelled. However, call it the Tube.”

“Thank you Dr. Tremblay.” She stuck out her tongue. “Anyway, I thought I’d look at the Houses of Parliament and take some pictures, Maybe see the Horse Guards then Westminster Abbey, and walk through Green Park back via Harrods and end up at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I can stop off here if I need a rest or freshen up.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Excuse me. But are you attending the Institute of Electrical Engineers conference?” the man at the next table asked. He had a quite strong accent.

“Yes. Martin Tremblay. Defence Research Telecommunications Establishment in Ottawa.”

“Julien Lemoine, Université de Paris. This is my wife Simone. She speaks very little English and wishes to sight-see.”

“Moi, je m’appelle Michelle. Je suis très heureux d’avoir une compagne aujourd’hui. Je viens de planifier ma journée.”

“Formidable. J’ai une horreur des accents ici. Mon anglais est seulement la version de l’école secondaire. Et la monnaie!”

“Oui, la monnaie!”

“I think I’ll go up and get ready for the conference.” I said. “Make sure you come up in 10 minutes so I can give you the key.”

“Oui, Simone. Moi aussi. Je dois me préparer. Viens cueiller la clé avant mon départ.” Julien said.

“Bien sûr ma chère.”

Simone shifted her teacup and bread plate to the table where Michelle was sitting as we two men made our way upstairs, congratulating each other on the fortuitous meeting.

* * *

We met up with Julien and Simone for dinner. I had managed to talk to a few of the people I wanted to exchange ideas with. Though I wasn't directly in the field, I spent a few minutes with Donald Davies to learn a bit about packet switching, and actually ate lunch with one of Davies' younger colleagues over lunch. The latter was, in fact, more useful, as Nick Manson – that was his name – was familiar with the work of the Rand corporation people, and he had a sense of where the overall field might go. I sensed someone who didn't let his own patriotism or allegiances get in the way of his judgement. I could see that there would be wired networks using this technology. I also had intuitions that radio communications could use the ideas profitably as well. But Manson told me there were rumours that Telefunken was looking into using lasers in optical fibres to get extremely high capacity communications, which he felt combined with packet switching ideas could result in extremely high bandwidths suitable for very high definition images.

"Right now" Manson explained "a television image is 405, 525 or 625 lines high. That's nowhere near good enough for an X-ray of someone's lung. And to do something like take an X-ray in London and have a specialist in Chicago review it would need a lot of bandwidth, more so if we start thinking of video rather than single images. And I'm sure the medics can dream up ways to use that if the communications are cheap enough."

I explained this to Julien. I surprised myself by doing so in French, as the conversation over dinner fell mostly into that language in the local pub / bistro where we went to eat. The food was mainly grills, with a price a bit higher than I expected from the places we had been so far. Julien said,

"Toujours on denigre les aliments anglais. Mais je trouve ce repas honête et à mon goût. Ce n'est pas la cuisine Française, mais c'est bon."

It was clear Simone also enjoyed the mixed grill she had ordered. Michelle had Dover sole, while I chose a small steak, which was tasty if slightly tough. The vegetables were properly cooked, and not the usual, or at least cliché, British stewed-to-death mush.

Michelle was drinking cider tonight, and clearly enjoying it. Simone had tried it too, as the wine choices were not known to the French couple. Julien and I chose beers, myself an ale, Julien a lager.

“Martin, should we have dessert?” Michelle asked.

“I’m going to have treacle tart. It may be terrible, or it may be wonderful.”

“Simone, Je pense que ”treacle tart” se ressemble à tarte au sucre.”

However, this Québec favourite was not known in Paris, or at least was unknown to Julien and Simone. I suggested we order one, and if it was to everyone’s taste, they could order more. As it turned out, Michelle loved it, but the French couple found it too ordinary for their tastes and ordered a cheese plate, which turned out to have some Stilton along with Wensleydale and Cheshire cheeses. They offered us a taste of each.

Michelle had ordered a second half of cider, but I had drunk about half of that. This turned out to be fortunate, as we were walking back to the hotel arm in arm, she whispered

“Martin. I’ve not had that much to drink, but I have to think how to walk.”

“I should have warned you. People don’t get the fuzzy head from cider, but it often affects their legs. Do you think we can make it back to the hotel?”

“Yes. I’ll just have to concentrate. But do hang onto me.”

When we got to the hotel, we said our goodnights. It was not quite 9, but all of us were tired, and I had to check over my talk for tomorrow. When we got to our room, I asked,

“What’s your plan for tomorrow, Michelle?”

“Simone and I are going to the Tower of London. If we have time after that, I think we’ll go to the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street, then take a look at Gough Square where Dr. Johnson lived.”

“Two French speakers at the birthplace of the first English dictionary.”

“I suppose. But it seemed interesting when I read about it in a tourist guide a couple of weeks ago.

Simone has to be back here at 4:30. Their plane goes from Heathrow at 7:30.”

“Will you come back then too?”

“I’ll probably be tired enough by then.”

“Did you go to Harrods? Clara actually went there in 1947 to see if she could market some Belgian goods. It was her first solo trip in England. They were quite kind to her, though I don’t think

it resulted in any sales.”

“They have nice things there. But I think I’m more a Marks and Spencer girl. The prices at Harrods are probably correct for the quality and brands, but I don’t need to show off.

By the way, did you know there’s a Catholic cathedral – Westminster Cathedral. It was relatively modern, but rather nice. We even went up its tower and got a quite good view, though the light was not great for taking pictures.”

“How are you doing for warmth.”

“I think slacks are going to be my uniform. But I’m learning where I can get warm, like in pubs and cafés. And where to ‘go’. The money is still strange, and I need to be careful with it, but I’m managing. And your idea of putting money for the day in my pockets and not taking out my wallet is a good one.”

“Have you taken many pictures.”

“I’ve gone through three film cartridges, but I’ve four more after the one in the camera, so I think we’ll be all right. And you’ll be with me after tomorrow with your Pax. The pockets of the bomber jacket are good – I can just fit the camera in one of them.”

Michelle had an Instamatic, and was using 20-shot cartridges.

“If we need to, we can buy more cartridges. And we could get the exposed ones developed if you want.”

“I can wait until we get home. But I’ll defer to your judgement.”

“It’s tough. There’s a risk to the exposed film, but trying here is a problem if there is a delay and we are gone.

On other matters, have you given any thought to where you’d like to go after Oxford. Depending how long we stay there, we’ll have a 7 to 9 days to follow our noses.”

“Well, I’d like to see Stratford for its Shakespeare associations.”

“I think that’s best done as a day trip by bus from Oxford. We should look into it as soon as we get to Oxford, or maybe before. There may be information at the Victoria Coach station. We can go there Wednesday on our way to somewhere else and ask.

What else would you like to do?”

“It’s all new and different. Like the treacle tart. Not as sweet as tarte au sucre. And of course the custard.”

“But it didn’t have lumps.”

“You like it lumpy?” she seemed shocked.

“It’s what I got used to in college. A skin would form on the

custard – it’s really only a cornstarch and milk white sauce coloured and sweetened a bit – and I came to expect that lumpiness. Part of the experience. But I do like treacle tart. The breadcrumbs cut the sweetness. Tarte au sucre is too sweet for me.”

“So breadcrumbs are the secret?”

“And maybe Tate and Lyle’s Golden Syrup, though my guess is there are substitutes.”

“Lots of new things, well, new to me. I want to take some Marmite home.”

“Really? Well, we can buy that near the end. Don’t want to carry it around. But I actually like it sometimes too. It’s just that most Canadians try it and practically puke.”

“What is it?”

“Maybe you don’t want to know, but a friend of mine says only the Brits can figure out how to use the crud at the bottom of the beer vat. He’s not really right, but it is brewers’ yeast with onions and carrots stewed until you get that black paste.”

“So it’s not like beef extract. That’s sort of what it tastes like.”

“No. All vegetarian.”

“Shall we take a bath?”

“Probably a good idea while we can. Let’s make sure there’s hot water.

I’ll check my slides after, and you can fall asleep if you are really tired.”

“OK. But I’d like to lie in your arms for a bit if I’m still awake. Despite the lack of comforts, I’m having a nice honeymoon Martin. Not what I’d imagined, but really, really nice. And if I haven’t told you yet today, I love you.”

Friday, February 12, 1965 – Michelle

We’d had arrived in Oxford a bit before 10 by an early train from Paddington. Despite the discussion about left luggage, there was not as much conference material as Martin expected, though he did have a good list of new contacts and, if you included Julien and Simone, friends. We decided to suffer the weight of the maple syrup for David and Esther, and would save our shopping until those last couple of days. Also I’d been fairly sparing in the purchase of souvenirs, limiting myself to some nice colour booklets that included

good indoor shots of the Tower and Westminster Abbey. No use trying to get those without flash, and really not worth the effort.

We'd spent a couple of pleasant days around London. On Wednesday we went to Windsor Castle and played tourist most of the day, but in the evening had a quick meal in a strange Chinese restaurant in Soho that specialized in what they called dumplings, but which were more like Italian ravioli. Nice, and different. We wanted a quick meal so we could get to The Ambassador's Theatre to see the Mousetrap. I loved it, but Martin thought the story contrived, but our disagreement was amicable. We both felt the play was done well, and a worthwhile evening.

Thursday we went to Kew Gardens in the morning. The greenhouses were nice and warm! After a fairly late pub lunch, we went to the City and St. Paul's, then took a bus to Trafalgar Square and walked slowly back to the hotel past Buckingham Palace.

Now we were getting off the train in Oxford. Nicole had found us a hotel and also booked it. She knew I felt uncomfortable if I didn't know where I would sleep. Though Martin knew the way to the hotel he steered me to the taxi rank. It would only be a few shillings to the Banbury Road. And it would save the effort of carrying the cases. They weren't heavy by comparison with most we saw on the trip, but still heavy enough, especially because I'm so small. Pity they didn't have wheels.

"Are you up for a walk round the town?" Martin asked after we were installed in our room.

"As long as you include some stops to save my feet. Let me use the toilet and brush my teeth. Those Rowntrees Fruit Gums are nice, but I'm sure they're bad for cavities."

"Another thing you can't get in Canada. We'll go to Wadham first. Bleaney asked me to leave him a message to confirm our meeting Monday. He's invited me for lunch. I'm afraid he's old school and you're not invited. Don't take it personally, please."

"I won't. And by then I'll know my way around."

We walked down the Banbury Road, turned into Parks Road and went along it but inside the University Parks. We exited the Parks and walked past what Martin called "The Museum". Martin said

"That's where Huxley and Wilberforce exchanged words over Darwin's Theory of Evolution in 1860."

"There are lots of ghosts here. Was it Alfred Noyes who said we

had few ghosts in North America?" I responded.

"I don't know. But there are plenty here – some of them may still be alive!"

I laughed.

"That's the Radcliffe Science Library – part of the Bodleian. But the really fancy bit is a bit further down the road. You might want to spend some time in Duke Humfrey's on Monday when I meet Bleaney."

"There's lots to look at. I don't think I'll be bored."

"Here's Rhodes House – built on thousands of engagement rings."

"Not mine! Or not the one you gave me, anyway."

"Do you wish you'd brought it with us?"

"No. I think it's safer not to have anything someone would want to try to take from me."

"I didn't buy you a wedding ring either. We used your old one."

"Why spend when we don't need to. I feel married when we're together. Like this." I said.

We walked into the gate of Wadham and I followed Martin as he turned left into the Porter's lodge.

"I've a note for Dr. Bleaney." Martin said.

"I'll make sure he gets it sir. Is it not Mr. Tremblay?"

"Yes. What a good memory."

"You were here in the War and just after. Always courteous to me. Some of the gentlemen thought too much of themselves. And I remember when you came to say goodbye in 1947 with your new wife and her daughter."

"I'm sorry to report that Clara died of breast cancer."

"Very sorry to hear that sir."

"However, Annie – my daughter who was three when you saw her – is well. And this is my new wife of only a week or so, Michelle."

"Then I'll wish you both happiness, sir, and pass the note to Dr. Bleaney. I believed you worked for him."

"Yes. Then went to Toronto and did my doctorate in a similar subject."

"Well done, sir. You may know the Warden is still here. And I think you knew Ned Blackwell, who's been a scout here longer than anyone else."

"Dr. Bleaney has invited me for lunch on Monday. The note is to confirm that. So I'll probably see the Warden then. I'll keep an

eye out for Ned. I remember him. In particular he told me when he was first here in 1919, some of the 'gentlemen returned from the Great War', as he referred to them, had got drunk and set fire to their furniture and thrown it out of their windows in the main quad.

To change the subject. Are the gardens open?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you. Goodbye for now."

We walked into the quadrangle.

"There's Nicholas and Dorothy and King Jim. And the clock is apparently due to Christopher Wren. He was a student here." Martin said, pointing to statues and a clock.

"It's odd to think of that ... continuity of life here."

"Let's see if the copper beech is still there." Martin said.

The tree was still there.

"Martin, you have a picture of Clara and Annie with the tree."

"Yes. Printed from a colour slide. Let me get one of you here if you don't mind the parallels."

"It will provide more of that continuity."

"Thank you for that. I love you more each day."

"You too."

Martin wanted to avoid tiring me too much, and also hoped to see Jane to confirm tomorrow night. We took a brief look in the chapel. There would be Evensong on Sunday. Martin went back to the lodge and wrote a note to the chaplain saying we intended to come to Evensong and would like to attend the chapel supper if we could be added to the list. He wrote that a reply was not needed, since if we could not be accommodated, we would eat elsewhere. Despite saying a reply was not required, he included the hotel's name and address.

We left the College and Martin pointed out Balliol's back gate, the New Bodleian, the Sheldonian Theatre and Indian Institute where Jane used to work. We walked up Broad Street, down the Turl and into the Covered Market. I found this fascinating, and we browsed for a while, before exiting toward the Cornmarket.

"It's not very different here than Bath Road in Slough." I observed.

"True. Most British High Streets are similar – though the High Street here is round the corner and a bit different. This is the modern shopping street, though there are some other places with

shops.

We should have gone into Blackwells and got a map. The tourist office might have one – I think it's just past Carfax."

"Carfax?"

"Corruption of "carrefour". The intersection we're about to come to with the stubby tower. The tower used to be bigger, but after some big riots between Town and Gown – several deaths – the political connections of the colleges got the Town church tower lowered so St. Mary's is taller."

"Wow. Is there still conflict?"

"Not so obvious. But you see those two men in bowler hats over there. They're bulldogs, the University policemen who report to the Proctors."

"Double wow."

We bought a tourist map for sixpence. More or less at Carfax, Martin went in a bank and cashed some travellers cheques, making sure he got plenty of coins in case we wanted to use a laundromat. We walked back through the Cornmarket, past Debenhams and along the west side of St. Giles. Martin pointed out St John's and the Lamb and Flag on the other side, and Pusey house and the Eagle and Child. We decided against a pub lunch and were on the lookout for something else when we got to the split where Woodstock Road went to the left and Banbury Road to the right. Martin was pointing out the hall where he'd done English dance, when I noticed a little hole-in-the wall Chinese restaurant called the Dear Friends. We crossed the street and noted that for a few shillings we could have soup and a lunch plate.

Entering the door, a small Chinese lady said "Upstairs prease" in an almost unintelligible accent. We found a small table for two overlooking the graveyard and monument of St. Giles. The restaurant was in several rooms of what had been a house, with tables shoe-horned into rooms that were ill-adapted to a restaurant. The menu offered egg-drop soup, followed by A) chicken curry with rice, B) beef chow mein or C) shrimp fried rice, price 5/6. There was a note at the bottom "Regular menu available".

The lady came and asked "What you like, prease?"

"A please." said Martin pointing.

"C please." I added.

"You like drink something?"

“Can we have a pot of Chinese tea?” Martin asked.

“Chinese tea, OK.” and she disappeared. They heard her clatter downstairs and yell. “One A, One C”, there was the sound of steam escaping, and she clattered back and put a pot and two small, earless cups in front of us and disappeared into another room.

“The price won’t strain our budget.” I said.

“No. Let’s hope it’s good. But all around us are students and University types. I doubt it’s a poor choice given we got the only table left.”

Indeed, the soup, which came quickly, was hot and tasty. And the curry and fried rice were, if unimaginative, pleasant and sufficient in quantity. We traded some mouthfuls.

“I think you did better.” I said.

“I was thinking you did.”

“Better swap then.”

We did this, laughing. The view out the window was entertaining as we watched a student on a truly decrepit bicycle ride by wearing a mortarboard with gown flying out behind.

“Martin, some students have full gowns like our students wear when they get their degrees, but others are really short and they just have strips of cloth and no sleeves.”

“You must wear your gown to any lecture or tutorial or University or college function, including Hall. We missed seeing Wadham’s hall as they were setting up for lunch and had the door closed. I possibly could have gone in. Actually, I’d better find out if I need a gown for Monday. I think we can get away with it on Sunday for Evensong, but I’ll ask the porter if there’s one I can borrow.

Anyway, the short, tattered ones are undergraduates. I heard that the idea was that they got hand-me-downs that were torn and frayed. But it’s now a standard design. I used to have one, and mine was a hand-me-down of one of those – there was no cloth allocation for such frills in the War. I think they may have allowed men, and possibly women, still in the services to wear their uniform instead, but none of that applied to me.

There’s a slightly longer version of the tattered gown for graduate students, with a name like Advanced Status gown. The full ones are students who have an undergraduate scholarship. And for the dons, you’ll see fancy ones. If I’d got my doctorate here – and instead of a Ph. D. (Toronto) I’d have D.Phil.(Oxon.) with the place in Latin

but the degree in English – the gown would be scarlet on the outside with a sky blue lining. Very striking.

And you actually rarely if ever wear the mortarboard in any ceremony, you just carry it.”

“It’s all a bit archaic, but sort of fun too.”

“I’m not sure which way I come down on that. I like to see it here, but it does seem a waste of resources.”

“Spoil-sport.”

We decided to go back to the hotel to freshen up before venturing out to see Jane. Martin walked me up Woodstock Road, pointing out Somerville and the Radcliffe Infirmary.

“I think 1770. The Covered Market is from the same period. You know Penicillin was first tested on patients here in January 1941. The dawn of modern antibiotics.”

At Church Walk, we turned in beside St Philip and St James Church, and then walked along North Parade.

“Look Martin. There’s a laundromat. Let’s check the hours.” We did this, then continued. Our hotel was just the other side of the Banbury Road.

“Martin, if this is North Parade, why didn’t we cross a South Parade. Isn’t North on our left.”

“Well done on navigation. You’re right, we didn’t cross South Parade. The tradition is that this was the front line of the Royalist troops who held Oxford during the Civil War between Parliament or Cromwell and the Royalists or Charles I. South Parade is in Summertown, about a mile North of here.”

In the event, we did not emerge again from the hotel until nearly 4. It seemed appropriate to put our feet up for a while, and we both took a short nap. Jane now lived in a residence about a half mile toward Summertown, actually only 300 yards from her former house, which we detoured to pass along the way.

“Here’s the old folks home.” Martin said, steering me into a wide gate.

“That’s quite ... cold. It sounds institutional. I prefer the French term we use at home: *Résidence de l’age d’or* or *maison de retraite*.”

“I suppose retirement home sounds better, and I’ve heard that in Canada. Also Senior Citizens Residence.”

We found that we needed to ring the doorbell. A middle-aged woman in a sort of nurse’s uniform answered and we asked for Jane

Strong, giving the name Dr. and Mrs. Tremblay.

"She's in her room. Been expecting you. It's on the first floor, number 14. You can take the lift or use the stairs."

We climbed the stairs.

"Martin, Why do they say First Floor? Surely that's at ground level."

"Not here. They number from zero. I'm told the Thom Building that houses Engineering has several levels of basements and actually has a 0 for the ground floor and floors with minus numbers. Someone also said they'd installed a crazy elevator called a Paternoster that is like an elongated Ferris wheel and you jump on and off.

We'll go and have a look sometime. Probably Monday when the building will be open."

We knocked on Number 14, and the door opened to reveal a Jane older than the photos Martin had but still recognizable and spry.

"Martin! And you must be Michelle. Come in, come in. I've a kettle and some biscuits to ply you with, and I want to hear all about you both. Put your things over there."

"Before we go too far, are we set for tomorrow night." Martin asked.

"Yes. But I'm worried it might be too expensive. It's a place called Elizabeth down St. Aldates more or less opposite Christ Church. Supposed to be very swish. I've a reservation for 7 pm and I can meet you there."

"No you won't. I plan to take a taxi from our hotel which is nearby, and we'll pick you up at a quarter to the hour. And no arguments."

"I'll not object if you show me some photos of Annje." I noticed she used the Flemish name.

"Deal!"

We organized tea and biscuits, this time including Bourbon creams. I had not had them before. Another plus checked. Martin had his backpack and took out an envelope of photos.

"Here's some of our wedding with that of Des and Sharon, whose story we'll have to tell you. I'm afraid we only got one film developed quickly so we could bring along a few snaps. The rest are still being processed."

As Jane leafed through the photos and I pointed and named people, giving their relationship. Martin gave a capsule story behind

Des and Sharon.

"But you two got married at the same time. You didn't HAVE to get married did you?"

"Not a chance." Michelle said. "Martin wanted to show me some of the places he'd been, and ... well ... the Conference was now.

Actually, I don't think Martin would have put it in a letter, but my ex-husband got gonorrhoea from a prostitute and I had to have an emergency hysterectomy."

"Oh my! I am sorry."

"Well, as you see, I do have a daughter."

"Actually WE now have two daughters." Martin said.

"Annje is all grown up." Jane said.

"Yes. She used Annie because it's easier for Canadians to say. But as a New Year's resolution she has decided to use her full original name Anna. She wants a career, so Anna is more appropriate. Annie is the name of a comic-strip character – Little Orphan Annie."

"Which she was." I said. "But I don't think you'd ever qualify as Daddy Warbucks."

"Here's a picture of her in your gown, Jane. Andrea took the picture on New Years Eve. Annie wondered when it was made."

"1911. Before I was married. But mostly I remember wearing it for a Ball I went to with Geoffrey. One of the happiest nights of my life. We danced all night, then came home and made love. I hope I don't shock you, but it is still such a special memory."

"It's reassuring that you remember that and are willing to tell us." I responded. "After the operation, I thought all that was over for me. Martin showed me otherwise and I'll love him forever for that."

"Good for you both. Now I see a bigger picture, what's that."

"Annie went to a New Years party at the Chateau Laurier with Peter Sinclair, the son of my old 247 Squadron Medical Officer who is now my physician - and our Best Man a couple of weeks ago. They had their picture taken. He's rather indistinct in the wedding pictures. New Years was the first occasion where Annie – oops, I should say Anna – wore the gown."

"Oh. He's so handsome!" Jane exclaimed. "Even if I'm now an old woman, I know that in her place I'd have had trouble keeping the dress on by the end of the evening."

Martin and I laughed and looked at each other, and Jane sensed

it.

“Oh no. Don’t tell me something like that happened? She doesn’t need a disaster at this stage in her life.”

“There shouldn’t be a disaster. Anna and I have discussed contraception, and we made sure there were some condoms in the house. They’re not so easy to get in Canada, especially for a young woman.

Anna told me what happened with Peter, but they had taken precautions. She didn’t want me to find out by ... other sources. But then Michelle stumbled on an opened packet of condoms in a drawer, and put two and two together. But I don’t think Anna is aware she knows.”

“Actually we had a quiet talk about Peter before we came to England. She and Peter think they may be right for each other, but are going to make sure they don’t endanger their educations. However, I do wonder if her bed will need new springs when we get home.” I said.

We all laughed.

“It’s nice to see children grow up, and hopefully to find their way in life.”

“You never had children?” I asked.

“You’ve not told Michelle about me?”

“Quite a lot, but not about that.” Martin answered.

“Well, Michelle. I had several miscarriages, then couldn’t get pregnant. The War came – the Great War – and Geoffrey volunteered. He was killed. I didn’t quite know what to do. I ended up sleeping with a lot of younger men, boys really – often boys who were dead shortly thereafter – until I realized that did not cure the pain I felt, though sometimes it hid it for a while. Then I never did find someone else like Geoffrey, but so many men had been killed and I was getting older. You’ve been fortunate to find another.”

“Actually Martin is the real first for me, I now realize. But I think he had a genuine marriage and partnership with Clara. I’m both sorry he lost her but grateful he did for selfish reasons. I hope that doesn’t sound terrible.”

“Not at all. And Martin’s arm round you shows he doesn’t think so either.”

There was a commotion in the hall.

“Oh. They’ll be rounding us up for tea – dinner to you I think.”

“We should go. Remember to be ready at a quarter to 7 tomorrow.” Martin said.

We put on our jackets and made our farewells. It was already getting dark, though only about 5:30.

“Do you want to eat soon, or wait until later?” I asked.

“Let’s go back to the hotel and rest for an hour, then go to a pub and have something simple.”

“There’s the Rose and Crown in North Parade that we passed.”

“So you don’t want to have to walk far?”

“No. I’m feeling lazy. Oh. And if you’re good, I’ve a couple of Fruit and Nut bars in my suitcase. I got them just in case. We can have them for dessert.”

“And if I’m really good?”

“You can have me too.” I said.

Saturday, February 13, 1965 – Martin

We’d got up and had an early breakfast and were at the laundromat before most students were up and about.

“Can we fit everything we want to wash in one machine?” I asked.

“Let’s use two and make sure the stuff is clean. Julia was very kind and gave me some soap powder in a jam jar. Here we are.” That was some of the weight in the cases. We could ditch the jar before we moved on.

I put in the money and the machines started.

“If you want, I’ll stay here to watch – they have a warning sign over there about clothing theft – and you can go for a walk if you want.” I said.

“Actually, I feel like sitting for a bit. And it isn’t nearly as nice without you.”

“Thank you. Shall I go get some newspapers?”

“Yes. That would be good. I forgot my book in the room.”

“I could go back.”

“No. Let’s read the newspapers and watch the people.”

* * *

“What do you fancy?” I asked Jane and Michelle, but mostly Jane, as we sat in a comfortable panelled room in Restaurant Elizabeth. The menu was on a single, almost foolscap sized card, with a coloured theme sketching the restaurant. This was overprinted with the menu choices and dated with today’s date at the top. At the bottom right were some special drink selections. I noticed a vintage port. I’d only ever had it once before. Must remember that for a finishing touch. A note said a 10 percent service charge would apply and there was a small table cover also. All a bit snob, but I suppose it was usual here.

“The choices all look superb.” Jane said, “And I don’t think they are quite as expensive as I feared, though I certainly won’t be eating here every day.”

“Things do look interesting. And we are happy to have you as our guest tonight. Have you ideas what you would like?”

“I think the turbot.” I wonder if Michelle knows about that fish.

“A starter?”

“The avocado with prawns, please.” Jane said.

“Michelle? Have you decided.”

“The chicken cordon bleu. But the leek and potato soup to start.”

“Think I’ll have that soup too.

Since I’m having the veal medallions, will a white wine be suitable?” I asked.

“Of course.” Jane assented.

The waiter came almost at that time.

“Would you like to order aperitifs? Ladies. Sir.” He had an accent, but it did not sound French, like most of the cuisine.

“Not for me.” Jane said.

“I’ll be happy with wine.” Michelle said.

“Then a bottle of this Niersteiner, please.” I said. “And could we have a bottle of San Pellegrino please.”

“Certainly sir. I will bring your wine and take your order.”

He was back very quickly and deftly opened the wine, offered me the cork and a small amount of wine to taste.

“Fine.” I said after tasting. The waiter served Jane, then Michelle, then me.

“And to eat. Madam.” the waiter asked Jane.

We all ordered.

“Will you wish any vegetables. The meals come with a green salad.”

I had noted these were extra.

“Can we have an order of cauliflower and one of courgettes to share, please?”

“An excellent idea monsieur.”

Jane said, “I think a toast is in order. To new love and new life.”

“What a lovely sentiment.” Michelle responded. “Thank you.”

We all clinked glasses. Then Michelle said,

“And to precious memories, particularly of Clara for both of you.”

“Yes. That too is a lovely and unselfish sentiment.” Jane said. Martin noticed she had a little tear in the corner of her eye.

“And we’d better not have any more toasts until I have some food or Martin will have to carry me. Because I’m so tiny, I get drunk on a thimbleful. At least here comes some bread.”

“Est-ce que vous avez votre propre four ici?” I asked.

“Sorry sir, I don’t understand.”

“Oh. My error. I assumed the restaurant staff was French, or possibly Algerian.”

“Actually we are all Greek Cypriots. Four of us – the chef, the maitre-d’hotel, and the two waiters are partners, and we hire a couple of helpers for the kitchen. But what was your question.”

“I wondered if you bake your own bread here.”

“Yes. Each day. That way it is fresh.”

We ate and drank. I was about to order a second bottle of wine when Jane said that she would not drink more wine, but would be interested in some port after the meal. Michelle said she would possibly have some brandy, but was happy not to drink more wine.

We finished our main courses and the salads were brought.

“The order is different here.” Michelle said. “At home the salad comes first.”

“It’s supposed to clear the palate for the dessert.” Jane answered.

“That’s not a bad idea. I’ll have to remember that when we entertain.”

“Promises, promises” I teased.

“Now you two. You’re on honeymoon.”

“I know.” Michelle said. “It’s been really different, but really nice.”

The waiter let us finish our wine before returning with the menu.

“Would you like some dessert, a digestif, coffee?”

“I’ll have dessert if I can keep the menu.” Michelle said.

“Of course, madam. We print them each day, and most are thrown out at the end of the evening.”

“Martin. What is syllabub?”

“Something you will have for dessert. I’ll have the chocolate mousse, please, and if my wife does not like the syllabub, I will trade with her.”

“And madam.” The waiter turned to Jane.

“The syllabub also. I’ve heard you do it very well.”

“Thank you madam. And digestifs?”

“I’ll have a glass of the Quarles Harris 1928 port please.” I said.

“I will also, please.” Jane said.

“I don’t think I like port, so ...”

“Perhaps we should wait until we have our port and my wife can try it before she decides.” I interjected.

“Certainly. It is an extremely good one. I am only sorry it will all have been drunk soon.”

“I think you may find that vintage port is entirely unlike the blended drink you may have had.” I said. “I’ve only had it once, and it was very special.”

The syllabub was a great hit with both ladies. When the port came, Michelle exclaimed,

“But it’s so bright in colour.”

I took a sip to ensure it was good, then passed her the glass.

“Oh. It is different. I think I will have a glass.”

The waiter had been watching from a discreet distance and came to the table.

“My wife will join us in the port. Coffee everyone?”

All assented, and I asked that coffee be brought when our port was almost finished. Michelle found the glass Cona coffee makers interesting, as well as the Italian macaroons served with the coffee.

As we finished our coffee, I paid the bill, which was just over 20 pounds with the cover and 10 percent service charge. Well, 20 pounds was a common weekly wage here in the UK. But this had been a special meal.

“An excellent meal, thank you.” I said to the waiter. “Would it be possible to call us a taxi?”

“Of course sir. May I ask where you are from. You sound a little like an American, but also speak French.”

“We are Canadian, in fact my name is Tremblay, which is a very common French Canadian name, but I am from an English speaking family, while my wife had an Irish name, but was French-Canadian. Our friend lives here in Oxford, where we met when I was a student.”

“I wish you a pleasant visit, sir, mesdames.”

They got their coats and jackets and descended to the street level, where a taxi was just pulling up. When they had given the address of Jane’s residence, she said,

“Thank you both for this. It will be a happy memory for, I hope, a long time.”

“We enjoyed it too.” Michelle said.

“As good as any meal I can remember.” I agreed.

Sunday, February 14, 1965 – Michelle

We were lying in each others’ arms on Sunday night.

“Warm enough.” Martin asked.

“Just. It feels odd taking baths at night, but I can see that we won’t want to risk no hot water in the morning. Though I should try to wash my hair tomorrow early enough that I can let it dry before getting into bed.”

“Why don’t we go to Stratford Tuesday. In my recollection there’s not a lot there, and if we’re away quickly, we’ll not get back all that late.

We could eat on the way back here, either at a pub or in a cafe. After Saturday, we may need to go easy to avoid excess baggage charges.”

I elbowed him. “Speak for yourself, tubby.”

“We’ll walk it off. I hope I didn’t overtire you today. We went all the way to Marston and back by Cowley Plain, then round Christ Church Meadow and the Isis. Then the Iffley Road and St. Aldates. I’m glad the porter suggested we could sit down in the JCR – Junior Common Room – and have a half hour or so with the newspapers before Evensong.”

“What was that place you said was a men’s swimming area?”

“Parson’s Pleasure. It was as we left the Parks and went down the path to Marston.”

“And men swim nude there?”

“Supposedly. I’ve never been. It was set up in the last century sometime. There are various stories of foreign women going through on rented punts because they don’t understand the warning sign. But I think that whoever made the sign is trying to cause trouble. It reads “Ladies must alight here”. That’s using English that is outside the beginner level foreign language course.”

“So what is supposed to have happened?”

“Well, Warden Bowra – you heard his deep voice when he read one of the lessons in chapel tonight – was apparently there one abnormally warm day with a number of other dons. And inevitably a punt with several foreign girls drifted through. The obvious squealing of girls and rushing around of men to find some covering, except Bowra who put his hands over his face.

Asked why he made no effort to cover himself, his retort was ‘Gentlemen, in Oxford I am known by my face. What you are known by is another matter.’”

“Good one.” Michelle laughed. “By the way, I loved the chapel service. With no electric light and the candles, it was really special. Cold though. I’m glad there were lots of us in the cellar room where we had the Chapel supper. And surely some of the students weren’t even Christians. The chaplain just made everyone welcome. That’s true Christianity.”

“What are you going to do tomorrow?”

“I’m going to take your advice and go to the Bodleian, I want to take a bit of a look through the shops. Particularly Blackwells and Jane mentioned that Debenhams has nice stuff, sort of like Harrods. And I thought I’d go to the Ashmolean.”

“Why don’t we spend our time independently after breakfast and meet here in the afternoon around 3. I’m meeting Bleaney in the lab at 10:30, then we’re having lunch. But I’d like to walk with you across Port Meadow to the Perch and then round by Godstow Abbey and the Thames locks to the Trout. We can eat there. It’s right by Wolvercote where Oxford University Press prints all the bibles.”

“‘All’?”

“Well, a lot. They are one of the major bible printers. We’ll also walk by the OUP building on Waltham Street near Jericho on the way to Port Meadow.”

“”Jericho”. My head is spinning.”

“Sort of a name for a suburb, like Alta Vista in Ottawa.”

“Anyway, I’m learning, and still having fun. It’s opened my eyes to the world you grew up in.”

“We’ve a week that is unplanned. Have you thought of anything you want to do particularly?”

“I was reading something in the Ottawa Citizen a little while ago about Colonel John By who built the Canal. It said he’s buried in St. Alban’s Church yard in Frant. I looked it up. It’s near a town called Tunbridge Wells that sounded interesting.”

“I’ve been to Tunbridge Wells. It’s quite interesting of itself. I didn’t know about John By being buried there. We can certainly go there. Perhaps we can stay there two nights – next Monday and Tuesday nights. Anything else?”

“I’ve heard Winchester is interesting. Something to do with King Arthur.”

“No, King Alfred - the anglo-saxon King of Wessex. The Broadway show Camelot and the Arthurian legend sometimes cause confusion.”

“I’m an example of that.”

“I think we can get to Winchester for a night or two. I’ve only been there for an hour or so when we were at Warmwell in the RAF. Are you willing to take a chance on finding accommodation? We should get there by lunchtime. We could put our cases in left luggage and just use our backpacks for one night. Then we could go on perhaps to Portsmouth on Thursday”

“OK. Sounds like a plan.

By the way, Mrs. Tremblay, there’s two things you may have overlooked today.”

“Really what?”

“It’s Valentine’s Day and I love you.”

“Hmm. I did miss the first, but I’m more aware of the second every day we’re together.”

Sunday, February 14, 1965 – Anna

Susan Grafton’s Mum and Dad were going out for Valentine’s Day. Since the Grafton’s had on a couple of occasions looked after Andrea when I had class or some things that had to be done, I’d agreed to

look after – I won't say babysit – Susan with Andrea while the Graftons enjoyed their dinner.

With Marcia and Bill and Peter we were going to have our own dinner. Not a party or a romantic event, and we wouldn't run late with school and work on Monday morning. We decided we'd have a bunch of small dishes and each of us would contribute effectively one dish, though all of them ended up being collaborations. I contributed to no less than 4.

There was a salad, a spaghetti, some bacon-wrapped scallops (Peter!), Ukrainian pierogies, an apple pie and a cheese plate. Susan and Andrea had a great time in the kitchen, and we all enjoyed the dishes and some pretty fluffy conversation.

Since we weren't doing romance, we called it a flag raising, in honour of the new Canadian flag that was being inaugurated tomorrow.

We broke up pretty early. Susan's folks picked her up before nine, and that was the signal for all to depart. However, the crowd had been really good and done all the dishes. Andrea and I were left with a tidy kitchen.

"It was nice that everyone helped clear away. Saved us that sort of 'oh do I have to' experience." I said.

"Yes. Worked nicely, and with everyone chipping in, the whole evening didn't feel like work, but we did all that cooking and then the cleanup."

"Bet Dad and Michelle aren't cooking. At least I hope not. They both need a bit of a holiday to get them started well."

"I kind of have trouble thinking of Mum and Martin ... you know ... doing it."

"I guess it's always awkward to think about your parents wanting that."

"It seems so icky, yet when I look at some boys, I think I wouldn't mind."

"It's kind of messy I guess, but probably worth it." Oops. Maybe I've opened my mouth without engaging the brain gear. But Andrea didn't react in the way I expected.

"Better be careful not to get a baby out of it."

"Thanks. I'll do my best to take care. And when you get to that point, please look after yourself too, Andrea."

"Annie Anna Do you think I'd be better to ask Martin

about that rather than Mum? I know he's a man, and not my Dad, but somehow I find I can talk to him. He doesn't get all upset and mad. Just answers me directly."

"Yes. He's good that way. But I think your Mum would like to try. You may have to ask the questions rather gently at first. Try to make it woman to woman rather than daughter to mother."

"Good advice. Actually, I may ask you too, but I don't want you to get into trouble. Even if you give me good advice, it may not be what Mum or Martin thinks is right."

"You're getting pretty good at reading the tea-leaves Andrea. Now, let's get ready for the working week."

Monday, February 15, 1965 – Martin

I was back in the hotel before Michelle. I had just flushed the toilet and was washing my hands when she came in.

"Oooh. Good job you're off the toilet. I need it badly." She rushed into the little bathroom and was seated in a flash.

"That's better!"

I bought you a present. It's in my backpack, in the paper bag on the top."

I looked and found a bag labelled Castell and Sons, 13 Broad Street.

"Oh. Nice. Thank you." It was a Wadham College scarf. Long, flannel, black with blue and yellow stripes.

"But I get to wear it until we get home. I want to keep the cold air off my neck."

I laughed. The dynamics of married life were forever intricate.

Michelle said "Like you asked, I cashed a hundred dollars. The clerk thought that was a lot of money."

"True, but we've a lot of travel to do this week. And it's our honeymoon."

"About time we did some honeymoon stuff. I'm starting to wonder if you really still love me or are just saying it."

"I'd better provide a demonstration."

Sunday, February 21, 1965 – Anna

Sunday evening. Andrea was back at 5:30 and Peter was already gone – laundry again. I was in a funny mood – was I sad-happy or happy-sad?

We'd been together from Friday evening to Sunday just after lunch. The sex was good most of the time. When it wasn't good, it was fantastic! I had to say that, didn't I. But it really was very pleasant, even if the full violin section was only there part of the time.

As before, we did it less than I expected. I wasn't disappointed by that. If I was sad, it was because it didn't seem right that Peter went home.

Not that I wanted him glued to me all the time. It was the artificiality of our togetherness that bugged me.

We'd started to talk quite a bit about what we might want to do about 'us'. Not all the time. But the future possibilities kind of popped up quite a lot here and there as we talked. It was kind of like Dad and Michelle. They realized – slower than Andrea and I – that they were good for each other, and waiting wasn't going to bring any percentage happiness interest on the fixed capital of how many days of life you had.

Peter and I might be in a similar boat to them. Was it possibly better to work out a way to be a couple and still get our educations? It would limit some chances for scholarships, fellowships and jobs. Would babies get in the way, especially if they came along unexpectedly? Peter mentioned that we were pretty young, and lost that argument when I pointed out that Mum was younger than me by a lot when she married and took on the Farm. Well, had it land on her practically. And his Mum was younger than he was now when she married, and his Dad not too much older.

Andrea, when she got home, picked up on it almost right away.

"You're wondering if Peter's the one," she declared.

"That's about the sum of it," I admitted.

"I hope you don't get into trouble – you know, have a baby, like we talked about last week."

"You have to – you know – have sex to do that." I tried to deflect the topic.

"The way you look at him and he looks at you, something's going

on. I don't want my sister hurt."

Wow, that was said really seriously. Like a real sister, not just a cutesy expression.

"Thanks Andrea. I appreciate it. And we are taking precautions. We both want our educations, so it's difficult. Perhaps you can keep that to yourself. It's hard enough between just Peter and I, and we know we won't be able to sort it out overnight."

"I'll keep my mouth shut." Somehow I knew she would.

Tuesday, February 23, 1965 – Michelle

We were in our room of the Royal Wells Hotel on Mount Ephraim in Tunbridge Wells. We were carefully organizing our packing. The main problem was the dirty laundry.

"I think we need to fold it to make it less bulky." Martin said.

"But tomorrow – or Thursday at the latest if Esther doesn't have a washing machine – we're going to wash it." I replied.

"True. But we only need a crude fold to get things to fit. Do you want your new knitted suit to wear before we go home."

"It depends what we do with David and Esther. If we go out, it might be nice, but I don't want to risk getting it dirty or damaged on a train or bus."

"Even if it's at the bottom of a case, it's not really a difficulty to get it out there – we'll be packing from scratch to make sure everything fits."

"Martin, the suit really is nice. Thank you." I gave him a long kiss.

"More of that and we won't get packed. Give me that Castell's bag. It has your souvenir brochures, and they can go in the very bottom of my suitcase so they stay flat."

"Have I bought too many?" I asked.

"Of course you have! But we'll manage. That was a good loop round Winchester and Portsmouth and ..."

"Yes, I'd never realized how ... cluttered ... a sailing ship was. The Victory had stuff everywhere to bump into."

"Now you know why the order was "Clear for action"."

"Yes. And speaking of clutter, the Royal Pavillion in Brighton was fantastic. All that effort to create a fake Chinese experience."

"It was about the same time as the Victory was in action."

By the way, we totally missed the new Canadian flag inauguration on February 15. Having too much fun.” Martin said.

“Well, we didn’t do as much honeymoon fun as we might have, partly because of the cold rooms and partly because we’ve been busy doing things. I’ve really enjoyed being here, despite the lack of some comforts, but I think today was a bit sad for you.”

“How so?”

I tried to explain. “Well, yesterday we took the train to Sevenoaks – I still find it strange that we left Tunbridge Wells from a different station from the one we arrived at ...”

“Yes, we came from Brighton to the West Station. Probably the result of separate railway companies. I always find the Central Station odd that it is between two tunnels.”

“Anyway, we’d looked at Tunbridge Wells when we came here on Monday because we were here early. That awful water from the Pantiles. Why did the 18th century people think it helped you? But the restaurant there was nice, and it is a pretty town.

Then, as I was saying, we went to Sevenoaks to see Knole, and after lunch we took the bus to the top of Tonbridge and walked down through the town past the castle which is now part of the public school that I still want to call private.”

“Which it would be in Canada. Here you say ”state school” and ”public school” means open to anyone who can pay.”

“Then today after we took a taxi to Frant and found the grave of Colonel By – I think they should tidy it up and make a bit of a fuss of a hero like that – you know we took that long walk along the public footpaths to ... is it Pembury? In some places I didn’t think there was a way through. And there were a few muddy patches from the sprinkling of snow the other night. But we came out by that tiny shop you said had been owned by an RAF buddy.”

“Yes. Harry. He actually put me up there for a couple of nights in ’46.”

“Well, Martin, I couldn’t help noting how quiet you became after we went in the pub next door.”

“The King William.”

“Yes. And they said they didn’t know where Harry had gone, but thought he’d moved to Canada.”

“Yes. I suppose when they told me his father-in-law had an off-license in Tonbridge that we must have walked right by, I realized

how I've lost touch with people I shared a lot with."

"Where do you think he'll have gone?"

"Probably out west. George – his father-in-law with the off-license in Tonbridge – lived in Gleichen, not far from Calgary."

"We can look in the phone book at home, or we can spend some time tomorrow to find George here."

"We'll look in the phone book. I'd feel bad meeting George again and admitting to be a Canadian looking to find someone who went to Canada probably a while ago. Just shows how much and how easily we lose touch."

"Don't get too down. You then got them to call a taxi and we went to the old High Street again. It's marvellous that it still has the feel of being out of the 18th century. And we found that wonderful women's wear shop and you bought me this." I pointed at a paper bag on the bed.

We both were quiet for a moment. I was remembering how we'd made the purchase, and I guess Martin was too. We'd gone in the store just 'to look around'. But the shop lady had asked

"Is there anything particular madame is looking for?"

I had replied, "That knitted skirt and sweater set in the window with the grey wool with silver in it looks lovely."

"Would madam take off her coat and we'll see if we have something in her size."

The shop lady had a good eye. As soon as she saw how small I was, she said

"I think that madam may be too small for our regular ladies' line, but we do carry some similar ensembles for younger women, and I have a lambswool knitted suit of a slightly different design she may like. It is a quite conservative design. May I bring it out?"

When it was shown, in black with a gold thread through it, I immediately wanted to try it on. Despite having no stockings – I was in slacks and socks and flat shoes – I tried it on. However, the appearance was still stunning.

"Let me change back." I said, and disappeared into the changing room.

When I came back, I asked "Can you ask the price Martin? And do you think we should buy it?"

"Of course we should buy it. But you'll have to ask the new owner." he said.

“How so? ... Oh. You bought it. Martin. Thank you.” I threw my arms round him and kissed him.

The shop lady smiled, embarrassed.

“We’re newlyweds.” I explained. “On honeymoon.”

“Then perhaps madam will accept our congratulations and our small gift of these lavender sachets to put in with her costume to keep it smelling nice.” The lady produced a package with a few small muslin bags which clearly contained some lavender.

“Thank you. Oh. Where is the outfit?”

“In my backpack, carefully folded.” Martin said. He put in the sachets too.

In the street, I asked how much it had cost.

“Thirteen guineas.”

“Oh. That means thirteen pounds and thirteen shillings. That’s quite a lot here.”

“You mean you’re not worth it?”

“No! It’s lovely. And of course I’m worth it! I’ll prove it to you later.

Now can we have a warm drink and something decadent to eat?”

We’d been standing quietly for almost two minutes as we both thought about the afternoon visit to the shop. Then we just embraced and kissed all at once.

February 23, 1965 – Anna

February 23, 1965

Dear Fred,

Sorry I’ve been so slow in writing. Things have been quite busy for me with Dad and Michelle on honeymoon.

Andrea and I are looking after the house and each other. I’m nominally in charge, but she hasn’t given me any cause to play policeman. Michelle insisted she phones or visits her Grandma or Nicole (Dad’s secretary, you may remember) every day, and I think that’s helping to give her direction. But in any case, she’s not a bad kid.

I'm not sure quite how to introduce this, but I've been seeing quite a bit of an old family friend, Peter Sinclair, the son of Dad's doctor and RAF buddy. We seem to get along. His mother is Dutch by origin, and with the history our dads had, we've quite a lot of shared background.

I don't know where the friendship with Peter will lead. I don't want to lose my friendship with you, but I do want some social life. Being a hermit won't do you any good either. But I'll admit to some feelings of confusion.

Studies seem to be going OK. I got pretty good marks in the Christmas exams. Got to start thinking of graduate school soon. Hope you are doing well with your studies at UBC.

Affectionately,

Anna (I decided that Annie sounds youngish, and am trying out the name on my baptismal certificate.)

Wednesday, February 24, 1965 – Martin

We decided not to leave for Hatfield until after the commuters were out of the way, so dawdled over breakfast and took a train just before 10. While we could have taken the Tube from Charing Cross to Kings Cross, I decided carrying the suitcases through the tunnels and up and down the escalators was not comfortable, and we took a taxi. Buying a ticket for Hatfield took a bit longer than I anticipated – at some point British Rail should arrange through tickets including the Tube – and we almost missed a train we wanted. It was around 1 when our taxi delivered us to David and Esther's house.

"How good to see you Martin and to meet Michelle." David said.

"What a lovely tiny wife you 'ave, Martin. Ooh I wish I could remember when I 'ad a trim figure like that. 'Onest truf, I never did!" Esther laughed.

We went in the house, and Esther showed us our room – my old room – and Esther announced

“Lunch in 10 minutes to give you time to freshen up.”

Home-made soup and (tinned) salmon sandwiches were the fare. David asked

“Have you anything particular you wanted to do while you were here?”

“Mostly I wanted to catch up with you and introduce Michelle. I also knew that with you both I would not have to be embarrassed that we needed to do some laundry and some last-minute shopping for presents for Annie and for our other daughter Andrea.”

“You must show us some snaps.” Esther jumped in.

“I’d love to. Martin has spoken of you both with such affection.”

“It’s mutual. We loved ’aving him with us from time to time.” Esther responded. “And I ’ave an automatic washer. David said he didn’t want me struggling wiv’ an old copper. But we ’ang the wash out the back, then air it in the kitchen where there’s warmth. We can start after lunch on that if you want.”

“It will give Martin a chance to talk radio – er, wireless – with David.”

“I also thought we might go back into town to see a couple more sights. We didn’t look at Oxford Street, or Highgate Cemetery, the Wallace Collection, the National Gallery, The British Museum, or the Silver Vaults.” I said.

“What are they? The Silver Vaults?”

“Martin may be teasing you to get a reaction. But they are jewellery shops that are actually in safes underground. He’d better take some money if you decide you want anything.” David explained with a smile, then continued “I think the Public Records Office across the road from the vaults is more interesting. They have, I think, an exhibit of the Great Seals going back almost to the Norman conquest.”

“There’s so much to do here. I’m almost dizzy trying to choose.” Michelle commented.

“I used to work at Foyle’s bookshop on Charing Cross Road – that’s where I met Martin before the War. And then and afterwards I often saw tourists try to fit in too much, so they spent most of their time on the Tube or a bus or walking. If they planned a more modest route, they could see a lot more, though possibly not things that are so prominent in the American cinema when it portrays England.”

“Martin has been quite good in getting me to plan a route, and I certainly agree with you. There’s lots to see in every block.”

“”Block” probably doesn’t mean much here,” I said. “The towns and cities are not on a grid. North American cities are often on a grid, with each unit two to three hundred yards.”

“We see enough American programs on television to grasp the idea.” David said.

“If I can suggest a plan, perhaps we do our chores this afternoon, with some time for chatting and showing photos. We’d like one evening to take you out for dinner somewhere nice – our treat of course. I think we should see the old town and Hatfield House, and maybe take a bus to St. Albans, and there’s the shopping Michelle mentioned.

As I said, one day would be London. And we need to arrange how to get to Heathrow on Saturday. We could use the train, then Tube to Victoria, then the special bus from the West London Air Terminal.”

“Not necessary.” said David. “There’s a Green Line bus with three stops in Hatfield, Number 724, goes right to Heathrow, but takes about 2 hours. I’ve a timetable somewhere. And a local taxi company does a 5 pound per person flat rate. They’ll pick you up from the door, but we’ll need to ring them a day in advance.”

“That seems the more convenient solution. I’ve been cursing the suitcases, even though we packed very carefully.” I said

“And I haven’t really been shopping yet. But I’m dying to wear my new suit, which I can do when we take David and Esther to dinner.

Perhaps we could see some local sights today and also pass by the shops.” Michelle said.

“Wednesday.” Esther said. “Some shops ’av early closing. But we could walk over to the ol’ town and ’atfield ’ouse this afternoon.”

After a few more minutes of discussion, we decided laundry could wait until the evening, and we would do precisely this.

On our way back we passed a fish and chip shop.

“That’s the shop where I introduced Clara and Annie to fish and chips.” I commented.

“You’ll have to introduce me too. I’ve heard British fish and chips are supposed to be special.” Michelle said.

“It’s hardly taking David and Esther out to a nice restaurant.

And this is only a take-away.”

“Well, we could do fish an’ chips one night. It’s only a couple of ’undred yards to bring them ’ome. What I was planning for tonight is a steak pudding. No kidneys because I don’t like touching ’em, and they’re actually not kosher, though I’d use ’em if I liked ’em. I remember I left a tinned one for you and Clara when you stayed here in ’47 and we were still on our belated honeymoon.”

Michelle said “We had steak and kidney pie in a pub for lunch one day. There was a lot of gravy, not much meat, but it tasted quite nice.”

“Shop ones aren’t as nice as ’ome-made. They fill ’em up with sauce. An’ I put in some veg too.

Never know why I sometimes say pudding. In the olden days they put on a suet crust and steamed it, but I do a pastry crust and bake it, so it’s a pie.”

“Perhaps we can plan on eating out tomorrow which would avoid Friday night, and have fish on Friday. I used to be Catholic, and still sort of hold to the Friday rule.” Michelle solidified the plan.

Saturday morning, February 27, 1965 – Michelle

“Eager to get home?” Martin asked me as the hired car to Heathrow worked its way out of Hatfield.

“Yes. Though I’ve enjoyed my honeymoon. It’s not at all been like I expected.”

“I’d actually forgotten how cold and uncomfortable England in winter can be.”

“Yes. Even with snow and ice, I’ll be warmer at home. But I liked the people who are important to you, Joe and Julia, and especially David and Esther, and of course Jane. They’re of an age where”

“That has been on my mind.”

“I know. You were very quiet for a bit last night, after we finished the fish and chips.”

“It was partly thinking that David and Esther are getting older. But also I was remembering when Clara and Annie and I spent a day in St. Albans and had fish and chips for supper.”

“Oh. ...”

“No not really Clara. And not sadness. More ... wistfulness. And that awful difficulty of remembering details that seem to just be behind some mental bush or gate.”

“Perhaps you’ll have the same trouble remembering what we did in 20 years.”

“Probably. Is that good or bad?”

“Perhaps good if you want to remember the nice times. It would mean I am important to you.”

“You know you are.”

“Martin. I know you love me, but I sometimes wonder if it’s a different love than you had for Clara. And I don’t mean it in that accusative sort of ‘Do you love her more than me?’ sense. We’ve talked enough – and about other things – that I know ‘more’ isn’t a useful word in that context.

But is there a different ... colour or texture to how you feel or felt about the two of us?”

“That’s a tough question, and a good one. I suppose it’s also one I’ve had in my mind, perhaps not in those words.

I’m sure my feelings are very similar – the same intensity, the same anxiety if you are at risk, the same flood of gratitude that you love me – but the two women are unique and special in their own way. Like you said, ‘more’ isn’t useful. There are some things I remember about Clara – how she talked, how she moved – where you are quite different. But different is neither better nor worse. Just different. So ‘colour’ and ‘texture’ are perhaps the right words.

But for the life of me, I can’t describe those colours and textures.”

We were holding hands, and he squeezed gently and I reciprocated. We remained silent, each with our thoughts, as the car wound through the Saturday morning traffic of North London. I thought how this was an ordinary situation, with ordinary people, people who had – after loss and struggle – regained the blessing of a love and contentment that was at the same time ordinary yet miraculous.

Saturday afternoon, February 27, 1965 – Anna

The plane from Montreal got in late this afternoon. Andrea and I went to meet it. Dad and Michelle looked a bit tired, but kind of happy. We did the hugs and greetings and stood near the luggage carousel waiting for their cases.

“Hope you had a good time.” I said after the greetings were over.

“Really nice.” Dad said.

“Oh. Much more than really nice.” Michelle gushed. “Though it was so cold in the houses there, it was hard to er ... ”

We all laughed and she turned very red. Andrea saved things with “You were on honeymoon, Mum, so I think we know what you meant.”

“Oh but I didn’t ... well, maybe. Anyway. It was pretty cold indoors there, and it took some getting used to. But they sell really nice woolies – er, woollens – I’ve picked up some of the British expressions. And at great prices. I’ve got some for both of you. And I bought Martin his Wadham College scarf, but I wore it to keep warm.” Indeed she had it on now.

While we waited for the cases, which wasn’t long, I don’t think Dad got in more than 5 words. Michelle was full of enthusiasm for the trip and the places and people. Andrea and I gave each other a knowing look – relief. It would have been awful if they’d not had a good time. Mind you, we did get a postcard from Oxford ‘Having a fantastic time’ etc. Though postcard messages are almost obligated to deceive in some way.

“And did you girls behave yourselves?”

Andrea shot back sarcastically “Oh no. Wild parties every night. Mum! Of course we behaved ourselves. Anna was terrific, and I did my best to make sure things worked out OK for everyone.”

“I guess I shouldn’t have worried.” Michelle answered.

“I didn’t notice that you did.” Dad got a sentence in, and Michelle shot him an icy glare, then saw him smiling at her.

“Actually, Martin is right. I didn’t worry. Maybe a couple of brief moments wondering what you were up to, but that’s all.”

* * *

When we got home, Michelle was eager to unpack and show us some of the treasures and gifts.

She – well they – had bought a skirt and sweater set for Andrea that suited her extremely well. I got a nice twin set. It would look good with one of Mum’s skirts. Both Andrea and I were drooling over the woollen suit Dad had bought Michelle. And both of us were

too big to wear it. Michelle was so petite, she didn't have to worry we'd borrow her nice stuff.

We had a good laugh over the big jar of Marmite they'd brought. It was well wrapped – would have made a horrible mess if it had broken. And there were lots of colour brochures of the cathedrals and castles. Andrea was looking green with jealousy. I could appreciate that – I'd been to some of the places.

There was a Cadbury's Fruit and Nut bar for each of Andrea and I. I'd had one in England. Great choice Dad! Turned out it was Michelle who'd thought of it, though. Dad had pushed her into a tiny newsagent on their first day in Slough and bought her one.

Andrea and I had made some baked beans in the same fashion as Boxing Day. We figured that would allow for a large or small appetite. The smell had been a welcome to Dad and particularly Michelle. She'd said, "Oh. What a really homey smell. I hope it's more than just the smell though." After the initial wave of unpacking gifts, we had our dinner – Dad and Michelle both ended up having seconds after starting with a small serving. They went to bed about 9, but both took a shower – I think they were in the bathroom together – to get the smoke out of hair and beard. I'd called it 'bus dust' with Sharon. If we were Brits, I could say 'plane pong'. Didn't quite work here.

Sunday, February 28, 1965 – Martin

Sunday was a big day of laundry and tidying and getting ready for work and school on Monday. I'd sort of hoped for a quiet conversation with Anna, but somehow there was never quite the right time. She didn't avoid me or anything, in fact just the opposite, but there wasn't a time when we had some time to just talk to each other without something or someone else – I can't say intruding – being present to keep us from talking about how we felt.

Still, it turned out to be a good day overall. Michelle and I woke about 7:30, which was good, since we'd got used to waking at what in Ottawa was the middle of the night. We managed to get in a couple of loads of laundry before church as well as a nice family breakfast. Anna had made sure there were plenty of choices, including some nice bread, plenty of eggs and some bacon. Andrea helped prepare breakfast. The girls seem to get along pretty well.

“Martin, I just realized how different the bacon is in England.” Michelle said.

“You mean the back bacon. The stuff we have here is generally called ‘streaky’ bacon in England. But I don’t think they cut it as thinly as we do, and they leave the rind on.”

“Oh yes. We had it in one of the places – I think Winchester – and I didn’t like it as much. But I also found that sometimes there were bones in the bacon. I didn’t like that either – well, it required more work with knife and fork, as did cutting off the rind. I liked the nice back bacon that had the bone and rind removed.”

“Getting fussy, Mum.” Andrea chipped in.

“Just all sorts of new and different things. Martin said we’d have to take you girls sometime, and I now see the wisdom in that.”

“Really! When? I can’t wait.” Andrea was hardly able to stay in her chair.

“It would have to be in the summer time. And we’d have to save a bit. Maybe summer of 1966.” I said.

Anna kept quiet. Somehow I got a feeling she didn’t think she’d be part of that trip. I wondered how things were developing with Peter.

After breakfast, it was time for church, and we all went together. I’ll have to do better at remembering names! A lot of people greeted us and asked about our ‘trip’.

In the evening, Nicole, Bernard and Charlotte came for dinner – Stephane was away somewhere, I didn’t hear where. Anna and Andrea had prepared a welcome-home dinner. Baked ham – that keeps it simple. Michelle and I had managed to get a few small gifts for her family, a twinset like Anna’s for Nicole, a nice scarf for Charlotte, and a leather notebook folder for Bernard, which zipped up and held pen and pencil. He’d be able to use it when he went to consider bidding on contracts to keep his notes tidy.

Before the Lacroix’ arrived went through papers and things in the dining room. There were some bills to pay – Anna had actually done some, as I’d left cheques addressed and signed but the amount empty for the phone and utilities. Those bills and amounts were paper-clipped together for me. Must thank Anna for a job well done. I also put all the Instamatic cartridges together along with my 35 mm canisters. I’d take them in tomorrow to get them developed. Hope they turned out.

Michelle joined me.

“Oh. It’s nice you’re so organized with the bills and photos and other things. I’m starting to feel spoiled.” she said.

“Really this doesn’t feel like it’s gone rotten.” I said and she gave a little squeal as I squeezed her bum.

“Still, we’re going to have to work out who does what with the bills and household expenses.” Michelle said. Real life jumping up again. Guess nobody could avoid that.

“Why don’t you make a list of all the things like that you can think of, I’ll see if there’s anything we should add, then we’ll divvy up the tasks. You could add some of the household chores and we’ll include the girls too.” I said.

“Yes. Easier if we know who’s doing what.”

Real life always was serious. And seemingly more so after such a nice ... honeymoon.

There was quite a lot of noise over dinner. Everyone seemed to have lots to say, news to share and so on. And all at the same time. Anna seemed a bit quiet, but joined in when appropriate. I’ll have to find some time to talk to her. She seems to be enjoying the company and general joy that is present, but also to be a bit somewhere else.

Bernard reported some progress on the cottage “Réal and I did some measurements and we think that we can get a bathroom added without too much trouble. We actually think the easiest way would be to put an extension on the west end of the cottage. A simple V roof that fits under the eaves of the existing roof, about 16 feet long and the width of the cottage which is 20 feet. We think you could then have a bedroom about 15 by 10 and a bathroom behind about 10 by 9 and a 5 by 9 entrance at the back of the cottage with some storage space.”

“Wouldn’t that extra space cost a lot more?” Michelle asked.

“Probably not.” I jumped in. “New construction would be a lot easier for the piping and such, and we wouldn’t be trying to adjust existing walls.”

“Exactement Martin.” Bernard responded.

“Then you’d better do the estimates Papa, and Martin and I will try to put the money aside.”

“We can just do the basics for now, and leave you to decorate and paint yourselves.” Bernard said. “The time depends on when

the snow is gone.”

March 8, 1965 – Anna

I found a letter from Fred waiting when I got home.

March 3, 1965

Dear Anna,

Indeed if you get into academic or business life or government, ‘Anna’ will have more weight than ‘Annie’.

I’m glad you have started going out with someone. It’s difficult being so far apart to maintain the same closeness, no matter how much one would like to.

It is also a bit of a relief, as I have also been going out with a nice Czech grad student. Well, she was born in Prague, but her family got out in 1952, so I should say Canadian. But as you point out about Peter, there is a shared background.

I, too, was having a bit of confusion. It would be good to stay friends, but maybe we knew that it would be difficult to maintain the closeness at such a distance.

I hope you will keep writing to me, as you have such a good perspective on life. Being able to share ideas with you will be a help to making good choices.

Affectionately,

Fred

As I read it, I was both relieved and ... steaming mad! Fred was dumping me for this grad student. But he was also not being awkward about Peter. Not quite the song ‘Anna’ on the Beatles first LP, though I don’t think it’s one of their own tunes.

I made a cup of tea, reread the letter, and decided that maybe things were working out as they should, and I could stay friends

with Fred and move on with Peter. Fred probably felt the same way, if I knew him at all.

Michelle came in almost as soon as I'd sat down with my tea.

"There's tea in the pot." I said.

"Thanks. I need to catch my breath. Work was a bit hectic today."

"Sometimes it's like that."

"Letter from Fred?" Michelle asked.

"Yeah. He has a new girlfriend."

"Jealous? You have Peter."

"Here, you can read it. I think Fred and I are having similar feelings."

Michelle read it, then said.

"He wants to stay friends."

"So do I. He was important to me – helped me at a time when I was feeling ... well, when I was getting over Mum's death."

"And now Peter's come into your life."

"Yeah. That was a bit of a surprise."

"Hope you are taking care of yourself. Well, that both of you are."

"Well, you know about the Though now I'm taking the Pill."

"Does it agree with you? I know a friend who found it made her feel bloated and ... well, not in the mood." The way Michelle had hesitated, I suspect the 'friend' is Nicole. Well, no need to open that up.

"It seems to. I've felt OK." Maybe I'd noticed I was a little less wet when excited, but sometimes I'd been a bit sloppy before I started the Pill. And my period had come in more or less as usual. Possibly a bit lighter flow, which if it was due to the Pill could be considered a small bonus.

"Does Andrea know?" The loaded question.

"Andrea's pretty smart, and she sensed my mood when she came home from Bryan's. Peter had gone home – Ellie makes the boys do their own laundry. We'd been careful to not leave any signs he'd been here, but somehow she knew, and she knew I felt a bit lonely and uncertain after he'd gone. She told me to look after myself and make sure I didn't get a baby."

"I guess I'd rather she didn't know about you, but given my own behaviour with Martin, I can't really say much."

“Even though you’d like to.” I teased, but made sure I was smiling.

“Yes.” she laughed. “I suppose I’m not ready for Andrea to be ... well, having sex with boys.”

“I don’t think she will, but she did say that when the time came for a decision she hoped she could talk to you or Dad about it.”

“To Martin?”

“I think she finds him easier to talk to. Probably he seems less involved, and he treats her like any other kid. Well, actually any other young woman, which is more to the point. You’re her Mum. You’re expected to be fiercely protective, you know rip the balls off any whoops, I’m getting carried away.”

Michelle was laughing. She added,

“I think I get the drift. And, yes, Mums are like that. I’ll try to make sure she knows I want to be able to talk to her woman to woman.”

“That’s sort of what I told her. That if she asked questions, she should let you know she wanted advice as one woman to another.”

“And I hope I can talk to you also. Martin – your Dad – wants us to both be involved with both of you girls. It’s a bit new to me.”

“Isn’t this conversation part of it.”

“Yes. It is.” she brightened.

March 13, 1965 – Anna

Ellie Sinclair had phoned during the week and invited me to dinner. Robert – Peter’s younger brother – was back from Scotland. I’d not seen him for several years. He was just a little older than I was.

Peter offered to pick me up, but I suggested I come on the bus and he drive me home. I got there about 5:30 after doing some shopping at Carlingwood. I needed some puss-plugs and wanted to browse a bit. Given the weather – high just above freezing and no rain or snow, I had a nice walk from the shopping centre to the Sinclairs’ house. Gave me some time to think about how I should behave. Was I family friend, son’s girlfriend, incipient daughter-in-law, or shameless hussy. All of the above – no, that was an expression I shared with Fred.

While walking, I more or less arrived at the decision that I’d be as straightforward as possible, without saying anything blatant about

how Peter and I enjoyed our time together. I'd not be coy about the fact we did enjoy our time together, and that we – well I anyway – wanted it to continue and probably long-term. But there'd be no juicy details. Seemed like a plan, anyway.

“Oh Hellooo Anna.” Ellie greeted me with a big hug. “You're looking well. I hope you survived Martin and Michelle's honeymoon looking after Andrea – I've not met her yet, but Peter says she's a nice girl.”

“Yeah. Not having had a sister or brother, I think she's OK. We get along pretty well. I think we're both old enough to be able to talk to each other and work things out.”

“Hello there Anna. You've a red face. Did you walk far?” Jim had come from somewhere, and I saw Peter and Robert following.

There were greetings. Peter gave me a kiss without it being forced or embarrassing. Tick girlfriend box on form, at least from his perspective.

The meal was trad. English. Oops. Trad. British. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Maybe it was Trad. English.

“Is Yorkshire pudding traditional in Scotland?” I asked.

Jim answered “Probably not. But we all like it, so Ellie asked a friend in Falkirk to show her how. One of the things I really love about my wife is how she can pick up how to make good things to eat. Good job I don't run to fat, or I'd be a poor advertisement for a physician.” He beamed a smile at Ellie and she reciprocated. Nice!

We talked quite a bit about traditional foods. You could say hutzpot to haggis. Robert said he'd tried haggis and not been impressed. Jim explained what it was – not to be repeated. Clearly a dish made by poor folk to keep body and soul together, but not for eating if you had other choices.

After a dessert of a fluffy lemon chiffon pudding – this likely from the Dutch repertoire, and I must learn how to make it – Jim put the spotlight on Peter and I.

“Peter and Anna seem to be getting along like a house on fire. Are you managing to keep up your studies?”

“I'm still doing the comprehensive work, but I've begun to prepare a bibliography of papers related to trying to filter through administrative records for useful epidemiological information.” Peter said. This was truthful. Even when we were spending time to-

gether – well, what we jokingly called the BS time for ‘between sex’ – he worked hard on his studies and the preparation for research. I worked on my coursework during those times. Perhaps we felt an obligation not to let fun get in the way of good marks. But it was time for me to say something, so I said

“When we’re with each other, we spend quite a bit of time working on our studies. I think we feel an obligation to keep our marks up, but we enjoy the company, and sometimes discuss our work.”

Well, that was honest, without anything scandalous.

“Being with someone is important.” Ellie said. “When I went to Scotland in 1939, the dark days of winter made me feel so alone until Jim asked me out. It was wonderful until he was posted away, and I was alone with the boys until he came home. But I worry that the two of you will want to be together and miss some opportunities.”

“We’ve talked a couple of times about how opportunities might not arise in the same city.” I said. “And also how we’d want to share this important and formative time of our lives if we are to have a life together later. Dad took Mum to England before coming to Canada because he was afraid she’d feel left out if he talked about people and places in England she’d never seen. I think he took Michelle on honeymoon there for similar reasons.”

“That’s not unreasonable.” Jim said, and I guess it switched off the spotlight, because he continued “Did they have a good time? Or more importantly, was their time together happy for them?”

I told how Dad couldn’t get a word in edgewise when they got home, with Michelle effusive about how she’d enjoyed things. And Dad smiling as she rattled on. Ellie smiled. Jim laughed,

“Good for them. It sounds like they had a good time together.”

Conversation turned to Robert’s trip. I hadn’t heard of some of the places in Scotland. I knew a bit about the geography of southern England, but almost nothing about Scotland. I realized I didn’t know a lot about Belgium either. I’d mentioned to Dad that I wanted to know a bit more, but just now I had one of those lightning bolt moments of life, realizing I truly needed to know more, to really find out what I could about Luc, my biological father. Learn more about my aunts Wil and Joke and their families. I was somewhere off in this stream of thought, when I caught Ellie asking me if I wanted more beef. Whew! Just heard it in time.

Later as Peter was driving me home, he asked me about that.

“You seemed miles away for a minute or so at dinner.”

“I had a sudden thought that I didn’t know much about my Belgian origins. You know, my father Luc, and also my Mum’s family. It was when we were talking about Dad taking both Mum and Michelle to England so they’d know something of his background.”

“That’s why Robert was back there. I should do a bit of that too. It hasn’t seemed as ... imperative as he found the need.”

“Were you OK with how I explained how we studied together?” I wondered if I’d said more than he’d like.

“Sure. In fact, brilliant. You told the truth without anything that could cause offence.

Tell me. When we’ve been together, we didn’t ... er ... spend all our time, you know ...”

“Fucking?” Got to let him know I can hold my own with the common crowd.

“That puts it bluntly.” he laughed.

“I was sort of surprised that we weren’t at it all the time, but I really liked our times together and want a lot more of them.” Oops. Maybe that was premature, but Peter came back with what must be considered the right answer.

“Yeah. If you’d told me in advance that we’d spend maybe a total of two hours at the outside in a full weekend having sex when we both really wanted each other, I’d have thought you were crazy. But I didn’t feel we were avoiding it, in fact we did it whenever we felt like it, which is really wonderful. And we got on and did lots of other stuff too, including our university work. In retrospect, we possibly did more than we would have in a normal weekend. Sex sort of charged things up.”

“My feeling too. Except we’re talking about it, and right now we can’t do much about it. And don’t even think of taking your hand off the steering wheel!”

“You’re right. I’ve wondered what it would be like to be married and have our own place.” Peter said.

“So you don’t believe in just living together.”

“It wouldn’t feel right. Not how I think of things, I guess.”

“Me too. But would we be boxing ourselves in and later on regret that we missed a good job or scholarship because we were married. Some scholarships require that you are single, even.”

“Yeah. And like we’ve talked about your Dad and Michelle,

there's the other side that you miss out by waiting. It's not easy."

"Let's keep talking and try to figure out what our options are. And we can't complain that your folks are treating me as the hussy trying to ruin their son's life. Your Mum also told us how she was lonely when she got to Scotland. I'd like to see how Dad and Michelle think. Even if we don't always agree with our folks, you and I are really lucky that we can talk to them."

We'd arrived at home. We smooched a bit, but cars are not great places for romance, no matter what the commercials try to hint at. I think both of us were a bit frustrated when I went in the house and Peter drove home.

Saturday, March 27, 1965 – Martin

Both Andrea and Anna had tipped me off that today was Michelle's birthday. Frankly, I'd not paid enough attention. Andrea knew the date, of course, and asked if I had any special plans. I had to say 'working on them', which was – at least until that moment – untrue. Anna had managed to sneak a look at Michelle's passport, and by coincidence asked almost the same question as Andrea and within an hour of Andrea's asking.

I asked Anna what she was thinking for Michelle, and she said that as it was the end of the school year, her finances were pretty stretched, but she and Andrea had talked about what they might get or make her as a present.

It turned out that it was an offhand comment by Andrea that her Mum tried to be very organized, but then often got impatient and just put things anywhere in her closets or drawers. Certainly I'd had to move skirts and stuff out of 'my' side of the closet. Clara was rather regimented – she made me have suits, jackets, pants, shirts, and so forth in their proper place and don't ever get things in the wrong order!

Apparently, Andrea and Anna found some canvas-like material in the sewing stuff, and with the help of a solid hanger and some blue and pink ribbon and some sew-on felt letters they cut out, had made a divider with 'Thine' on one side and 'Mine' on the other. A bit of a gag, but they added some pockets for shoes, so it was practical.

I had a quiet word with Michelle one night in bed. With all the

things we'd bought in England, she'd told me that I mustn't buy anything for her just now, but wait until there was something she genuinely wanted. I can understand that. Anna says stuff you don't really want hangs around like the awkward girl at a school dance. Great expression. So I got her a nice card, and created a home-made ticket to 'dinner and a movie', and another 'for something you really want'.

Andrea and Anna got up a bit early and hung the divider on a hook on the kitchen door with a birthday card. Then they made sure breakfast was all ready for her when she came down. She was a bit late. I knew what they were up to so arranged a delay with some connubial fun. However, it did ensure things were in place.

"Oh. This is nice. And you did it together! That's really wonderful. It underlines how well we've managed to merge our families." Michelle was genuinely touched.

After breakfast, Michelle went to take a shower – she'd come to breakfast in her dressing gown – and I came into the kitchen where Andrea and I were clearing away.

"That was really special of you girls to collaborate on a present for Michelle. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness."

"But Martin, it was so much easier to do it together." Andrea protested.

"I'm still grateful." I said, and gave her, then Anna, a hug. Andrea could have wriggled away – girls her age often shy from affection. But I try not to be kissy-kissy or clingy. I kept the hugs short and polite, without being offhand.

"Andrea's right" Anna said. "It was easier together – it is easier together. And I mean that for more than just making the closet divider."

Thursday, April 1, 1965 – Anna

My birthday. My TWENTY FIRST birthday. I'm a full adult.

Yeah. But I'm still living at home, too. On Michelle's birthday, I felt quite envious when she and Dad seemed to be a long time getting up for breakfast. Peter and I haven't had any chance to be together in private for a few weeks.

There's a party on Saturday for me – Dad and Michelle and Andrea put out the word and there'll be quite a crowd, including

the Bakers and Des and Sharon.

So here I am lying in bed. It's early, sometime around 6:30. I'm thinking of getting up. Kind of wondering what reception I'll get. It IS April First, after all. So there may be a few pranks. Well, let's face them.

I got up and went to the bathroom to take a shower. After using the porcelain throne, I pulled back the shower curtain to find a big cardboard fish. On it was written

Happy Birthday to our
own April Fool /
Poisson d'Avril
Presents to come.

Well if that was the worst they'd do – and it turned out to be so – I couldn't complain. I took down the fish – I'd keep it as a souvenir – and had my shower. After I'd dressed I went downstairs. Michelle was already up and breakfast was made.

"I made you a Welsh Rarebit for breakfast." she said, giving me a big hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you Michelle, that's above and beyond on a workday."

"You're only 21 once." was her reply.

Dad came down as I was eating. He bent over and kissed me on the cheek.

"Happy 21st Ann...a. Guess I'd better set an example now you're a grown woman." 'Grown woman' – guess that imposes some responsibilities. No more getting away with stuff because I'm 'only a kid'.

"Dad. Michelle made me a Welsh Rarebit – my favourite since I can remember."

"Yes. She told me she was going to."

"When are you home tonight Anna. I need to have a bit of a talk with you... No. Nothing bad. In fact quite good I think. But it's not for the breakfast table."

I told Dad I'd be home for supper, but only just. So we arranged to talk after supper.

Andrea bounced downstairs.

"Happy birthday Sis." She gave me a hug. "I know your party's on Saturday, but I made you this little folder to protect your notes or books."

She gave me a rectangular canvas bag big enough for regular notepaper. It had handles and a zipper, and my initials embroidered on one side. Andrea was getting good with her hands and the sewing machine.

"Thanks Andrea, that's really nice. And I can tell you, it will get used a lot."

"When did you do that, Andrea?" Michelle asked.

"Oh. Over at Susan's. Our sewing machine's in Anna's room, so she might have guessed."

"Well done, Andrea." Dad said.

* * *

As days go, it wasn't very special. Classes were grinding down to the final exams, and there was the usual juvenile 'Is this on the exam?' question hovering in the air. If students just paid attention to how the Prof. presented things, it would be obvious to them what topics were going to be tested. I went to my classes, and spent a bit of time in the Library – I still had a minor job doing literature work for the people I'd worked for last summer. Hopefully I'd go back this summer. I was waiting for the confirmation. I think it depended on whether a grad student got a stipend from a research agency. He/she better get it. I needed a job. I had, however, applied to some other places, though they weren't jobs related to science. Mostly retail or administrative.

I ate lunch in the lobby of Marion Hall. As I was sitting there, Chandra walked by with his lunch bag and decided to join me.

"You still seeing Suneeta?" I asked after we'd exchanged pleasantries.

"Oh yes. We are very much seeing each other often. But now we have to consider how to tell the parents."

"That's even more serious than it is here, I think."

"Yes. We want to get married, but are from different parts of India. And although we are of similar caste, there are possibly some concerns."

"What if you got married here?"

"It may be what we will do. Though we would like the blessing of our families. It would be better if we go back to India."

"Do you intend to do that? Go back to India I mean."

“Not until I have done a post-doc somewhere in the US or Europe and Suneeta has completed her studies. And if there are jobs here or in the States, who knows. And by then we may have children too.”

“Good luck to you both.”

“Thank you, Annie.”

“Chandra, I’ve decided to try to use my proper name, Anna, since it is better for professional purposes. You can use Annie to me, but can I ask you to introduce me or talk about me as Anna?”

“Oh. I can certainly be doing that. It is important to have a good name.

Have you heard from Fred?”

“I get letters from Fred. But both of us are now going out with other people. He met a nice girl with a similar background to his own – from eastern Europe and more or less a refugee from the Communists. And I’ve been going out with an old family friend who has recently returned to Ottawa to do his doctorate in epidemiology.”

“That is very good. You were being too alone I think.”

“Possibly. Anyway. Class in about 10 minutes.”

“Oh yes. I have to give a tutorial. I must run. Goodbye Anna.”

* * *

I got a bit delayed after my last class, and made it in just in time for dinner coming on the table. Good job I wasn’t designated cook tonight. Actually it was Dad, and he’d done fish sticks. Andrea was smiling, Michelle was not so thrilled, but I was OK with them, of course. He’d a store-bought apple pie for dessert, with ice-cream if we wanted. I did – my birthday – so I put on a scoop of chocolate even if it wasn’t normally the choice for apple pie.

After dessert, Andrea disappeared to do some homework. Dad had suggested coffee in the living room. We made the coffee and Dad and Michelle joined me.

“Anna. You may remember that I had quite a bit of correspondence with an insurance company last year. Mum – Clara – had taken out life insurance almost as soon as we got to Toronto in 1948.” The insurance company had tried to suggest that Mum’s illness was there before she purchased the policy. Dad had to write a firm letter that they either provide evidence to show that or else pay

up. He noted that a medical practitioner appointed by the Canadian government had examined Clara and pronounced her healthy immediately prior to her immigration to Canada. With some foot-dragging, the policy was paid out.

“That money – \$7500 – finally came through in January, almost a year late. In fact, because of the delay, I’ve filed a complaint about the company with the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which was only established last year.

Now your Mum always told me she got that insurance mainly to help you if something happened to both of us. You know how she felt about things like that. Michelle and I talked about it, and we think you should have the money as a help to get started in life. And after we made that decision, we talked to Andrea, who told us it was the right thing to do.”

Wow. I sort of sat there. There was a long pause, and I realized it was time for me to say something.

“Sorry. I’m a bit ... flabbergasted. That’s really generous. It will be a huge help whatever I do. But it could have helped all of us. Are you sure you don’t want it in the general pot.”

“We seem to be doing OK without.” Michelle said, “But maybe if it comes to things like a trip to Europe, you could take on some of your own costs.”

“If you’ve given me that money, I think I should take on all my own expenses like that. After all, I got a trip to England a couple of years ago. Andrea’s never been there, and I know she’s itching to.”

“Thanks Annie – Anna – I knew you’d feel that way.” Dad said.

“In fact, I wanted to talk to you about a trip to Europe. I was at the Sinclair’s for dinner a couple of weeks ago as you know. We were talking about Robert’s trip to Scotland so he could learn about his family there. I got this feeling that I didn’t really know a lot about my Belgian roots.

I hope this isn’t upsetting, but I thought maybe Joke or Wil would have some leads on where I could find information about Luc, my biological father. It would be useful to know in case there are any medical issues. Peter is doing work that touches on such things, so I guess I’ve been prodded to think about that.”

I stopped, a little out of breath.

“I think that makes sense.” Dad said. “Neither Wil nor Joke

is getting any younger, and if there is any information, you should have it, even for your own children should they come along.”

“Isn’t that a bit down the road?” Michelle asked.

“Yes. But Mum had me at 21, and you had Andrea about the same age.”

“Too true. But you’re not planning that are you?”

“No, just the opposite. But sometimes life jumps up and ... er... well, kicks you in the ass.”

Dad and Michelle laughed.

“Thank you both so much.” I meant it more than words could say.

My homework didn’t get much attention. Almost as soon as I’d finished talking to Dad and Michelle, the phone rang and Peter wished me a happy birthday, with best wishes from all the Sinclairs. They’d all be coming for some of the time on Saturday. I told Peter I had some interesting news, but left out all the details about the money.

In my room, I had the books open, but my mind was in Belgium. I could go this summer – be nice to do some real work too, of course. But Dad was right. Joke and Wil were getting older. Wil would be around 60 now.

Finally I got up and went down for a cup of tea. I noticed there was moonlight, and took a look out the window. A full moon! Was that a good omen or not? Anyway, I made the tea, drank a bit at the kitchen table, then afterwards, I managed a bit of study – I had to do well on my finals so I could get to a good school for grad work.

April 3, 1965 – Anna

My party was going to be a noon to 4 event so the Baker clan could come. Then Peter was taking me out to dinner and possibly a movie. Pity he couldn’t stay over. I REALLY needed you know what. And my period had come in like clockwork on the 29th of March and wasn’t too heavy, so I was available, so to speak. We’d have to do something about that in the not so distant future.

As might be expected, it was a noisy event with the kids, my friends, some of Dad’s friends who knew me, the Lacroix, Nicole and Stephane, the Sinclairs, Nosey – oops Gail – McPherson from

next door. The invite was to drop in from 2 to 4. From noon to 2 was family, but Peter was included.

I got lots of presents, mostly small, but they amounted to what Marcia refers to as 'keen loot'. Some were of the obvious perfumed soap variety, but I was touched and surprised by the number of thoughtful gifts. Like the book bag Andrea had made, there were items I'd use in my daily personal and professional life.

The Bakers gave me a fireproof document box.

"You're an adult now, and you'll have documents and things that need to be kept carefully." Aunt Penny explained. Good thinking. I could take my birth and baptismal documents and my citizenship out of the drawer where they sat with souvenirs and stray elastic bands and pencils.

Peter gave me a card. Inside there was just a message.

Present later!

I'd already thought of some things I wanted. Not mentionable in public, of course. But I guess I'd have to wait to find out what he actually had for me. And to tell him what I had in mind for later this summer.

* * *

By 4, most of the crowd had gone, and the Bakers were departing. It had been a nice afternoon. I'd been wished well, toasted, celebrated, kissed and hugged.

Peter and I weren't going out until about 6:30, so I said,

"Anybody mind if I take a little nap? I've asked Andrea and Peter can lie down in her room if he likes."

"Go ahead." Peter said, "I'm going to talk to your Dad for a bit."

So I went up and actually got a bit of shut-eye. I woke up at 5:45, had a bit of a wash and changed into Mum's blue suit I like. We were going to the Eastview. They had a nice dinner menu. Old fashioned, but that's how we felt.

It turned out Peter had taken a nap as I suggested, but he'd already gone down before I woke. He had the family's second car tonight. On the weekends he'd stayed over – I'm still not sure what story he gave for not coming home, maybe almost the truth – he'd

gone home by bus. Still, tonight was celebrating my 21st. How did I miss his? Oh, maybe it was term time and he was in Halifax.

As I came into the living room, the doorbell rang. It turned out to be Phil Johnson, a real estate agent with Rhodes. He'd an offer on Michelle's house. Wow. Never rains but it pours. Peter and I decided to skedaddle. I'd find out about the house later.

By now, the temperature was back below freezing. We at least had a clear day, no rain or snow, but there was still some snow on the ground. It would be gone soon. But we didn't need boots for town expeditions. We got to the Eastview and had a bit of a smooch in the parking lot. I'd not kissed Peter properly since ... forever it seemed. Oh. He tasted minty. Must have used the toothbrush we put in one of my bedroom drawers. Funny, I hadn't heard him come and go. Or maybe that's what woke me.

The head waiter seated us and we looked at our menus. I remembered Dad saying he'd had the wiener schnitzel with Margaret McKay and I chose that. Peter took salmon, and he ordered some white wine. I was about to warn him that they might ask for my ID, then realized that now they could. I was legal! Somehow, one suspected the wine wouldn't taste as good any more.

When the wine came, we toasted 'Us and 21'. It seemed like a good toast.

"I've something to tell you." I said.

"That was going to be my line. I've something to tell you too. But ladies first."

I told him about Mum's insurance policy, and the decision by Dad and Michelle to give me the money.

"But what I really wanted to say was that when Robert was talking about how he was learning about his Scottish background recently, I got this feeling that I should look into my Belgian background. You know the story already about my biological father Luc, but I'd still like to try to get a bit more information about him. And my aunts Wil and Joke are getting older. So I'm thinking I should try to go there in the not too distant future."

"When are you thinking?"

"I'd like to work in the lab again this summer. I think it's good for my skills and knowledge. But I thought I might quit at the end of July and have 4 to 6 weeks there."

"Could be interesting? Do you need a porter and general assis-

tant?”

“Sure. But only if his name is Peter. And then, how do I introduce him? I don’t think my aunts would believe ‘porter’ or ‘assistant’. They’d probably believe ‘lover’, but then lock the door on us. But I’ve got to admit the idea is tempting.”

I smiled at him. He smiled back and said, “What about husband?”

Now where did that come from? Might be nice, but how. My brain was churning so fast I’m surprised the waitress didn’t come to tell me to quiet it down. But I guess I was so stopped in my tracks that Peter said “Cat got your tongue?”

“No. Er. Maybe. I know I’d love to have you with me. And in an official capacity, so to speak. We’ve been talking about how we should share this time of our lives, but we both want to keep on with our educations. Do you think it would work?”

“I’ve been talking to Mum and Dad, and also to your Dad. I laid out the situation – minus the juicy details of course, but I think everyone’s guessed the essentials – and nobody said it was a bad idea, just to think things through as carefully as we could.”

“So you really mean it?” I guess I wasn’t quite convinced yet.

“I usually mean what I say.”

“The idea is very attractive, and it could be really helpful to have you with me to try to learn a bit more about Luc and my Mum’s family. We might have to brush up our Dutch/Flemish.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Damn. I’m sort of stuck with the napkin on my lap and you’re too far away to kiss. Oh. In case you hadn’t understood. That’s a yes, assuming we don’t have a fight to the death over the details.”

“Good. With that overly long indication in the affirmative, I’ll shorten our previous toast, and just say ‘To Us’”.

“To us.” I responded.

Poor Peter. I tore into a stream of ideas. Where we could go, what I’d wear, how to get there, how I could ask Dad for Mum’s wedding ring – the one Luc had given her – and was rolling along into ideas for where we might find an apartment when I noticed Peter chuckling. Then I noticed the little box on the table in front of him.

Oops. The verbal tap was shut suddenly.

“Guess I got carried away.”

“Part of what I love about you.”

“Am I supposed to open it?” I asked.

“I hope so. It isn’t anything in the same league as Michelle’s ruby, and not particularly valuable in dollars. But it belonged to my Scottish great-grandmother.”

“Peter, it’s already very nice, even if I haven’t seen it yet. You should know by now I don’t go for wearing expensive stuff. And Michelle didn’t wear her ring to Europe – she didn’t want to have something that might attract the wrong sort of attention. Nor would I. So I will be happy to wear your ring.”

I opened the box. It was a simple band with a small diamond. Not fancy, but it held connections and memories.

“Do you think it will fit?” I asked.

“I measured that ring you said you wore when you got the Pill prescription. This one is the same size, by coincidence.”

Indeed it fit well.

“Guess that makes it official.” I said. “Did you really talk to your folks and to Dad?”

“Anna. How would I get the ring without talking to my Dad? And Mum. She rules in our house. We had a talk and they asked all the right questions about education and jobs, but we’d already been talking about that with them. Also the ring is kind of a family thing. Robert brought it back after his trip there. The family divvied up great-grandma’s things – actually in a very civilized and amicable way. It was Robert’s idea that I give you this ring. But I didn’t feel good about just taking it, so after some discussion I gave him some money. It was odd – I was arguing for more and he for less, the opposite of how bargaining usually goes.”

It was good that the brothers were in accord. Could be a bad start to have a disputed ring.

Our food arrived, and I guess the waitress saw the ring box before Peter put it back in his pocket – hopefully the ring on my finger too. As we finished our main course, the head waiter came over and said

“Is it possible this evening has been special?”

“Yes!” I said rather emphatically, holding up my hand.

“Our congratulations. And may we offer Baked Alaska on the house?”

Well, that was nice. In the end, Peter probably tipped them at least the value of the dessert. But we’d had a really nice meal. I

probably rattled on about all the things we could do and all the things we had to plan. Was I talking with my mouth full too? Peter did respond from time to time, in fact putting solid suggestions to my flights of fancy. This man was going to keep my daydream aerial excursions from crashing! But he didn't stop them from taking off, he somehow helped them stay airborne, with real rather than fantasy suggestions.

I wondered if I was drunk. Peter had ordered a half bottle of wine, so we hadn't consumed that much. Must be the excitement. Before we got up, I asked

"Peter. When do you think we can ...er ... be together again?"

"Pity we both still live at home. But we could, if you wanted, get a room either here or another hotel."

"It's really tempting, but I'm not sure how I feel about it. It's kind of sleazy checking in without luggage, and the law says you are supposed to give your real name and they can check ID."

"To tell the truth, I feel that way too. But Easter's coming up, and my folks are going to Toronto. They'll visit friends and Dad wants to meet some colleagues on the Saturday. I can ask Robert for a bit of privacy – at some point he'll want the same courtesy."

"I hope I can wait that long."

Actually we didn't have to wait that long.

We did a bit of smooching in the car park. I told Peter how happy I was with the evening and how much love I felt for him. That was a new realization, but I did love him. And was in love with him too, I'm sure. He said something the same. I forget the exact words. I was really floating.

It was about 9 when we got back to the house. I'd forgotten that this was a weekend that Andrea went to her Dad. She normally went on Friday night, but with my party, there'd been an adjustment. Fortunately, Michelle and Bryan were able to be a bit more relaxed than some divorced couples where there was a rigid schedule. In fact, Andrea had been to Bryan and Rachel mid-week when they had a visit from one of Bryan's cousins from out of town.

On the kitchen table was a note.

Gone to a late movie.

Back after 11.

Don't wait up.

* * *

It couldn't have been later than 10 that I was lying in Peter's arms and we were talking about the evening.

"I hope we didn't damage the hooks on Mum's suit." I said. "How fast do you think we were up here and undressed after we read the note?"

"6.2357 microseconds" Peter intoned seriously, "6.2377 microseconds to full-stage copulation" and we both broke into a fit of giggles.

"At least you lasted a while. I was afraid it would be like the first time and I wouldn't get that lovely sensation of you stroking me inside."

"We're getting more used to each other, so we can adjust to ... er ... manage is perhaps the word ... the pleasure."

"Hmm. Good. Think you can do it again before we have to make ourselves decent."

He didn't need encouragement. I hope Nosey McPherson didn't hear my rather noisy responses and encouragements. I had a good time. A really good time. Was it the proposal, the ring, the wine, my birthday.

Who cares!

April 4, 1965 – Anna

I'd waited up for Dad and Michelle. They were already aware what Peter had intended – I wonder if they went out on purpose to give us a chance to you know what – but I wanted to thank them for the party, and, of course, show off the ring. It wasn't flashy, but it suited my temperament.

"Do you have an idea when you want to get married?" Michelle asked as we sipped some tea.

"The profs. I worked for last summer are pretty certain they'll hire me again this summer. In fact I should know this week. I'd like to do that, and Peter should try to complete his comprehensive work. He's planning early June.

Well, I mentioned to you before that I wanted to go to Belgium, so Peter and I have been talking possibly taking 5 weeks that cover August for a honeymoon and 'Anna's history project'. So I'd like to work most of the summer, then get married and go. There'd be

some practical details of what to do when we get home, but I think we can sort them out.”

“That would be a month after Nicole’s wedding, approximately.”

“Yes. We made a mental note of that. And I think Peter and I would rather an informal wedding. The one you had was nice.”

“There’s also the fact that a modest wedding leaves you more money to get started together.” Dad said. “We didn’t do it that way for reasons of cost, but a lot of people spend a huge amount of money and are in debt so that they can’t afford household things.”

“I guess that’s also a consideration – saving Dad money!” I teased, but continued “Seriously, I’d rather you two got onto a good financial footing. The cottage will cost some. Oh. What happened with the real estate guy?”

“We got an offer. A bit low so we countered and Phil thinks it will go through. We’ll find out tomorrow or Monday. Or else try again.”

The conversation had then changed to the party and other events of the day. We finished our tea and headed to bed. In my case back to bed. I could still smell Peter on the pillow when I settled in. Nice.

* * *

Today was a study day. Exams were coming soon. I’d fortunately got ahead enough on my assignments that they didn’t require panic measures to get them in before deadlines. Moreover, I could take some time to get a perspective on the assignments and course material and see where the profs. were going with material. I started making notes on the relative amount of time on different topics. Also noting things I didn’t yet feel I had fully under control.

I was actually up at about 8. I showered and washed my hair before heading downstairs. Michelle was already up, but in her dressing gown drinking some tea and writing an aerogram, it turned out to Jane Strong.

“I told her your news.” she said, even before ‘Good morning’.

“Give her my best wishes, and tell her we’re blaming the dress.” I said.

“She’ll have a laugh at that. Yes. I’ll include that.”

I had some tea and made myself a boiled egg. Then had a small piece of my birthday cake. Why not? Then went up to study, though I took a break to join Dad and Michelle at church. I'd have to give some thought to who would officiate for Peter and I. Hmm. This was embarrassing. I didn't know his religion, or even if he had one.

During the service, that thought started to buzz in my head. When we got home, I phoned Peter.

"Hi there, special lady." he said coming on the line.

"Hi there to you too, special man."

"What's up?" he said.

"Oh. I just got back from church with Dad and Michelle, and during the service I had this awful thought that I've no idea what religion you are, if any. I mean, you could be a polygamist Mormon, and then where would I be?"

"In Utah, I think." Peter deadpanned.

"Peter!"

"Actually, we sort of fall into that 'vaguely protestant' category. When we go to church, it's been to a United church. But we're almost heathens."

"Dad and I were similar, but Michelle was quite observant in the Catholic church, as I've told you, but they kind of left her in the lurch. So she started going St. James, and that seems to suit her, and we've got in the habit of going with her. I'm not particularly devout, but I'm happy to go."

"I had sort of figured out that you weren't super religious. Probably we should have at least asked about that. It could be a big obstacle."

"Almost as bad as money. I hope you're not hiding a bunch of debts."

"You mean dishonouring the Scottish tradition?"

"Yes, it would besmirch the family crest, wouldn't it? Time I went back to study."

"Me too. Love you. Bye."

"Love you too. Bye."

April 6, 1965 – Anna

I'd talked to Marcia and Jane separately on the 'phone on Sunday, but they wanted to see the ring and ask all sorts of questions. Also

about the presents I'd got. I'd not told them about Mum's insurance money either. So we got together at Jane's for tea and cookies.

"Wow. You get the man AND the money. What're you going to do with both of them?" Marcia asked in true Marcia fashion.

"We're thinking of going to Belgium on honeymoon so I can see if I can find any information about my biological father. Also my Mum's family."

"You feel you need to know? Won't that hurt your Dad?" Jane asked.

"I've talked to him about that. In part it's a bit prompted by Peter's work in epidemiology. I should try to learn if there are any medical conditions that might be important. But also to just know something about Luc. Dad is still my Dad. I'm talking about a man I never knew. Killed by the Germans when I was a few months old. Dad pulled me out of a bush when the mine went off. The Germans nearly killed me and Mum and Dad too. The mine did get two of Dad's RAF buddies. That's how Michelle got her ruby."

"Really?" Marcia quizzed. I explained the jewellery.

It was time for the others to spill the beans.

"What about you guys? Are Roland and Bill still in the picture?"

"Roland and I haven't made any announcement, but we're planning to end up married. Just working out when and how, and then we'll let folks know. We'd like him to have his CA first, because it may mean he moves to get a job, and we might as well start life together." Jane was, despite her supposedly artsy inclination, the epitome of practicality.

"What about you and Bill?" Jane added to Marcia.

"We're trying to see if I can get a job at a school near where he teaches, or even at his school, though the latter is unlikely, as it's not really big enough for two PE teachers. We can't really be public while I'm looking or tongues will wag. Even though Bill wouldn't be involved in any of the hiring decisions, people could be nasty about it, or the people who are in charge may kill my chances. So we're playing it pretty quiet just yet."

"Not being a Julie Andrews character then? Plenty of love and other indoor sports?" I teased. Julie Andrews and My Fair Lady and Mary Poppins had won a clutch of Oscars last night. It was hard to believe she could be so wholesome in real life. But I needed to hear Marcia's response.

“Why not? My New Year’s resolution is maybe starting to be realized.”

“You’re getting more at ease together?” I asked more seriously.

“Yeah. Not so nervous. Things seem more comfortable and more fun. And we’ve had a chance for some privacy. Bill and his roommate worked out an informal schedule.”

“Good for you. Just don’t get knocked up.” Jane gave a bit of mixed good wishes.

* * *

Talking of NOT getting knocked up, I’d had an appointment with Dr. Howard today given that 2 cycles had passed. She checked blood pressure and such, and had my feet in the stirrups to check the sports equipment.

“No pain or discomfort during sex?” she asked.

“No. Just the opposite.”

“Any breakthrough bleeding. That is, other times of the month.”

“No everything seems as usual. Possibly a bit lighter flow, and I’m not so ... er ... wet.”

“Other patients have said that. What about libido – wanting sex?”

“I’ve heard that it might be lessened, but I haven’t noticed too much.”

“Well, I think the indications are positive. Continue, with the same cautions I stated before. I’ll see you in about 6 months please.”

“By the way, is the ring significant?”

“Yes. We plan to get married at the end of July.”

“Congratulations. I sincerely hope you find a great deal of happiness together. I happen to have met Peter at his parents’ and I thought him a very nice young man.”

“I think he’s pretty nice.”

We both laughed.

* * *

It wasn’t very late when I got home, but everyone was in bed. Andrea’s light was out. There was a glimmer under the master bedroom door and muffled voices. I took my time getting ready for

bed – and getting ready for the next morning too. Always nicer not to be in a panic in the morning. Soon I was lying in bed. Somehow I wasn't quite ready to sleep. There was a lot to sum up in my mind.

I was now 21. A 'responsible' adult. I was engaged to marry a 'dishy' man, to use Michelle's adjective. But he was more than dishy. He made me feel alive and loved and able to take on anything. I hope I give him even a little bit of that.

But it's scary. I've not really done too much yet. Should I really link up with someone for life – for LIFE – already. On the other hand, Dad and Mum didn't get as much time together as they should. I'm glad Dad found Michelle, and I am growing to love her, but Mum's life was cut off, and she had a pretty tough time for a lot of it. Things were just getting comfortable for her. 'Not fair!' as she used to say about lots of things, like not being able to pee standing up like men. She accepted reality, but was keenly aware of it's inconsistencies and inequities.

Of course, if we lived in the States, particularly the South, we'd have the awful violence of the Klansmen, murdering people because their skin was dark or because they were with people who were dark. Nasty as well as 'not fair'.

Well, I can't do much about those things. What I CAN do is get good marks and show Mum what a good job she did. But I just want to think about what Peter and I should do over Easter. We could

April 19, 1965 – Anna

Easter Monday

I was back hitting the books. Still had Mechanics to go, so Synge and Griffith was getting heavily thumbed as I checked all the topics I figured would be on the exam. Page 394 was a bit of a stumbling block. I understood gyro-compasses when I read the material, but I'd better be able to create it from scratch. I read the material, went and got a cup of instant coffee, then tried to write down the equations and the diagrams.

Fiddle! Well, my brain wanted to say something a bit stronger.

Tried again and sort-of got it. The prof. had spent a good deal of time on gyro-compasses and shown us photos of real ones and talked about the design criteria. Probably on the exam.

At 11 I phoned Peter. He was studying too, though without the deadline of a Wednesday morning exam hanging over him.

"Hi there. How's it going?" I asked.

"Not bad, though always slower than I'd like. One of my profs defined pi as the ratio of the time it took you to do something over the time you thought it would take."

"Neat! Though it doesn't apply to some things. I can think of one activity where men have it inverted."

"Good Friday wasn't that good?" Peter asked, seemingly puzzled. We'd spent much of that day together at his place. His parents and Robert had gone to Toronto. They came back yesterday and Dad and Michelle hosted a big dinner. All our household and all the Sinclairs, so 8 in all. A bit tight round the table, but we managed. Ham, scalloped potatoes, the whole shootin' match. I thought of Ellie's lemon chiffon pudding – she'd given me the recipe – but thought better of it and made the upside-down chocolate pudding Mark had brought to the party last Halloween.

But Good Friday had been ... well ... very good.

"Oh. No." I faked a groan "I can hardly remember. You'll have to do it all again so I can judge properly."

"I seem to recall some interesting noises and exclamations."

"Who sir? Me sir?"

"Yes Miss. You Miss."

"Still want to change that to Mrs?"

"I think so. I haven't got bored yet! More seriously, I thought Friday was very nice."

"Thank you."

And we got some study done, as well as some figuring out of what we want to do. That was useful yesterday. We could answer easily when our parents seemed to want to get the show on the road."

"Yes. I thought they seemed quite ready to pack us up and post us to Belgium."

I laughed. Peter could do that to me. Think of a way to describe something that was immensely funny to me. Possibly not to others. It was one of the reasons I loved him. Wow. I almost thought it without thinking, if you understand what I mean.

"Love you Peter. But I'm going back for another round in the fight with Professors Synge and Griffith."

“Love you too. And I won’t stop you. Get those top marks, kiddo!”

We hung up. I noticed an old newspaper. It had some headlines about the Palm Sunday tornadoes. Which way round did they spin? Hmm. Think, think. Yes. Usually counter clockwise due to the ... Coriolis force. And I could sort of do the vector diagram for that. Hey. Maybe mechanics did have something to say to ordinary folk. Of course, some of those with the most direct involvement with its tornado manifestation were dead. Sometimes you had to just say a little prayer.

* * *

Dad came in about 3. He and Michelle had been sorting out final odds and ends at her house. It was conditionally sold, and the buyers wanted to close before the end of the month. There was some furniture to get rid of. Des and Sharon thought that they could use the living room set, and Peter and I had asked if we could have the double bed and the kitchen set. We were going to keep our own chests of drawers and some small stuff. We’d also already grabbed some lamps and such, but there were others for Des to take, plus some things of a ‘maybe’ nature that they could keep if useful, and sell or give away the rest. Joe and Penny could find people to take things. There was always someone in need. Though it wasn’t a day off for non-government types, Des’ boss told him to borrow the truck but fill it with gas.

I’d have liked to see Des and Sharon, but it turned out Sharon stayed in Brockville to help Penny with something, and Joan came along for the ride instead. They wanted to get back and unload before supper-time, so didn’t come over here. I should have gone over for a while. I was a bit annoyed with myself.

“Did the loading go smoothly?” I asked.

“Piece of cake. Des is pretty strong – plumbing work doesn’t hurt. And Joan plays sports I gather. Michelle and I mainly directed traffic and held doors.”

“Where’s Michelle?”

“Gone to see Nicole and her Mum. Planning a wedding. You don’t seem so anxious.”

“Got to get through the exams first. And I think I’m more inclined to want the marriage to work well. The wedding is not really even the start, is it? It’s more an announcement that you’ve already started to be a team.”

“Well said. But you should have a nice day, and some things to remember.”

“Sure. I agree. But it doesn’t have to be a state occasion. Something comfortable and loving and friendly. Oh. I wanted to ask you something.”

“What’s that?”

“Well. I’m planning to have Mum’s engagement ring made into a brooch or pendant. But that can wait for a bit. However, it occurred to me that using her wedding ring for my ceremony and afterwards might be a nice reminder of her and the father I never knew. I hope that isn’t upsetting to you. You know you’re always Dad. But the ... er ... feeling of continuity occurred to me as a nice possibility.”

“It was a similar thought when I suggested Mum keep the ring Luc gave her and we reused it in Belgium in 1947. I think it’s a good idea. Perhaps we should ask Michelle, though, about how much to tell people about it. Some people might think it strange. I know Mum and I just kept it to ourselves, though some of our friends and family certainly knew. The ones who commented were all very positive.”

“Sure. That makes sense. It’s not something everyone would feel good about. But Peter wasn’t sure how I’d receive the idea of being given his great-grandmother’s ring. When I mentioned Mum’s ring and its story, he thought the combination of his great-granny’s ring with Mum’s wedding ring going forward with me was rather special.”

“I do too. I don’t know the dollar worth of your engagement ring, but I suspect it’s sentimental value is much greater.”

“Peter said it was not very valuable in money, and I think he’s right. The stone is nice, but quite small, and the ring is simple and quite a thin band. But I value it ... treasure it.”

“Then I’ll be happy to give you Mum’s ring. We got Michelle a new one – she didn’t have good feelings about the engagement ring or the wedding ring from Bryan. We got new wedding rings. I’d not had one before.”

“What has she decided to do with the old ones, if anything?”

“We’re looking into selling them and putting the money in Andrea’s educational account.”

“Good thinking.”

“You’ve got that Classical Mechanics exam on Wednesday. Better go back to it.”

“Yes boss. But I still love you.”

April 21, 1965 – Anna

Cold and wet!

I got up early and took a look at my mini-notes. I take my notes and summarize them down to a few pages, then down to just one sheet. Writing seems to help get the formulas and key points into the grey matter.

Michelle cooked me an boiled egg and toast. Even the ‘soldiers’. I got away not long after 7:30 so I’d have plenty of time for the bus and traffic. So I was really early. I went into Tabaret Hall and sat in the Chapel and looked over my mini-notes again. Tried to keep the paper dry – given the rain I was dripping a bit. I don’t like umbrellas, as they use up a hand, but I’d brought one today.

After reading the notes, I sat quietly to let things settle and clear my mind. In good time I left the chapel and found a washroom. Don’t want to be anxiously cross-legged at the end of the exam. Then I walked over to the classroom where the exam was to be held. A couple of other students were there already, waiting for the room to be opened. The prof arrived with a janitor who unlocked it. We were a small group, so no proctor in addition to the prof.

The prof said “Good morning. Please seat yourselves with plenty of space between each of you. I don’t think any of you are cheats, but it avoids someone saying something later.”

Colin, one of the students, asked “You ready for this exam, Anna?”

“As well as I will be. Good luck.”

I found a seat where there was good light. Checked that the desk and chair didn’t wobble. That’s a real pain. Got out my slide rule. This prof. let us use them. Two pens, two pencils, an eraser and a small ruler. Hung my coat and stuff on one of the hooks on the wall. Opened the umbrella and put it handle down to dry in

the corner. Good job we were only 11 in the class. The honours physics undergrads like me, a couple of grad students doing some remedial study, and some odd bods from other science or engineering programs.

Clock? Oh. There it was. I could see it easily from my chair.

The prof said “I’m going to hand out the booklets now. Please put your name and student ID on these clearly. And remember if you get a second booklet to do the same with it. In a minute I will pass out the questions. They are on a single sheet which I will put on your desks face down. Please leave it that way until I give the word to begin.”

The well-ordered plan was a bit disrupted by Joshua – I don’t know his last name – who came clattering in in a panic. He wasn’t late, but getting close. And he was soaked. Fortunately, he chose to sit on the other side of the room, and got out of his wet outerwear and plonked himself down. Then got up to get his slide rule out of his briefcase. Then a pen. He was clearly rattled.

“You may begin.” the prof said.

I turned over the question sheet and began to read it. No. 1 was a typical statics question of computing forces. No. 2 was the trajectory of a shell from a gun, first classic flat-earth, then a modification to ask how to get the shell into orbit. No. 3

Wow. Tornado rotation direction! I’d been thinking of that. And No. 4. Gyro-compass. How fast would it precess given da, da and da conditions.

Finally No. 5 on a spring pendulum. That could be tricky, but I’d worked it through the other day. Even talked about it with Peter, who thought it might be fun to build one. At least we only had to solve the simpler modes of motion.

Now to start writing. I decided to do it in order – we didn’t have to. The question paper said we just had to identify which question we were doing clearly.

So I did number 1, leaving some space for additional notes if I wanted.

Number 2 the same, but I wasn’t perfectly happy with my orbiting shell calculation, so I left quite a bit of blank space before number 3.

That one I’m sure I aced. Thank whoever left the newspaper with the tornado headline uppermost.

Gyro-compass – that was OK.

One hour gone. Not bad. Just 1 question then review.

The pendulum took me 40 minutes. Had a couple of false starts. Had to scratch out half a page. Dad taught me to use a ruler and do it cleanly. Told me heavy scratching looked ugly and conveyed a message that you were disorganized.

Then I went back to review. Caught an error in the statics calculation.

Checked it again. Found a minor slide rule inaccuracy in the shell trajectory. Fixed it. Went over the calculations quickly again. Then back to No. 1 and did the same. Can't see any errors.

Tornadoes. The main part of this was theoretical. There was just a small part of the question with calculation.

Gyro-compass. Mostly theory too, but the calculations were there. I checked them twice. OK.

Pendulum. There was one bit I wasn't quite happy with, but it would have to do. That was in the last part where the prof. asked what possible modes of movement could be considered. I recall it's something about eigenvalues and vectors, and I put down those words, but truthfully, I don't know exactly how to set up the equations. If I saw them I'd know them. But I'm guessing this is the 'bonus' question. Not the whole thing, just this part.

Still 50 minutes left. People looking very intense around me. I sat up, took a deep breath, closed my eyes for about a minute. Had a thought about Peter – oops! Not that thought, or physics exam would be kaput. Still, it was nice to think about you know what as an antidote to the brain steaming of the exam.

One more read through questions and answers. Make sure nothing left out.

Is name and ID on booklet? Yes. OK. Might as well hand in.

I gathered slide rule and pens, picked up question paper and answer book and walked to the front and handed my exam to the prof.

"All done, Miss Tremblay?"

"Yes. I think so."

"You can keep the question sheet if you wish." He was looking through the paper. I saw him nod when he saw No. 3. Good sign. But I turned away and got my umbrella and coat and left the room.

When I got outside the room, I felt a bit lost. The exam was

over. What now? Wheeeeeee! I'm done for the year.

Maybe Peter is in the cubbyhole he shares with another grad student over in the Math building on King Edward. I put on my coat and braved the rain and walked over there, nearly getting soaked by a car going through a puddle. Just missed. Now there's a good physics question. 'Work out the splash pattern when a Buick LeSabre hits a 2 foot wide, 5 inch deep parabolic puddle at 25 mph.' Or maybe I'm punch drunk on exam questions.

Peter was in the 'office'. He gave me a big kiss before saying anything. Hmm. That was nice.

"How was it?"

"Not bad. Here's the questions." I pulled out the question sheet from my book bag.

He took only a moment.

"Good guessing. You predicted the gyro-compass."

"And I'd seen a headline about the tornadoes and was thinking about the spin. It's Coriolis forces, so I had that too. Only the pendulum was any problem, and only the last bit. So I think I passed OK."

"Knowing my Anna, more than passed. And probably in need of lunch."

"Lunch would be nice, but only with the nicest man on campus."

"Who would that be?"

I shut him up by kissing him. It wasn't a big smoochy kiss, but we were almost immediately interrupted by Joseph, his office-mate, who actually couldn't get in the tiny room, as my bum was only 4 inches from the door.

With some awkwardness, Peter and I got organized and left. We scrunched together under my umbrella and walked up to Rideau to Nate's. We both ordered the smoked meat sandwich. I had tea, but Peter chose a Coke.

"So now we can get serious about us." Peter said.

"I've always been serious about us." I said "Except, of course, when you make me laugh, or employ wickedly unspeakable methods to make me lose my composure." I grinned at him.

"Hmm. You're saying that here, where your composure is relatively safe, I presume."

"Of course. Don't want any mislaid underwear. Wouldn't do for a nice physics student."

“True. But we can plan for such occasions, for which I believe it is traditional that weddings are a prelude rather than a sequel.”

He had me there. I stuck out my tongue at him briefly. He grinned back.

“Oh. I talked to Dad, and he thinks putting Mum’s wedding ring – the one Luc gave her and Dad and Mum used again – with your great-granny’s engagement ring is a nice idea. So we don’t need to buy a ring for me. We should think of one for you.”

“When it’s not raining, we can go shopping. What about where we’ll live?”

“I’d not really thought about it, except for the furniture from Michelle’s. We do need to find somewhere to put our bed, or we’ll scandalize the city.”

“We’d better look in the paper and see what might be available. Trouble is we don’t really want a place until September, but I’m guessing we’ll have to take it sooner if we want something decent.”

“Peter, do you think your RA stipend and scholarship will be enough for us to live on? I’ll have a bit from my job this summer – I got the confirmation yesterday, by the way – and I have Mum’s insurance money ...”

“That’s for special things like learning about your ... Luc.”

“Thanks for that. Both things – keeping the money special and using ‘Luc’. I really keep Dad for my Dad. Luc is someone who was in Mum’s life and caused me to come along at a particular time. I want to know more about him, but he’s not my Dad. Ever.”

“Yes. I realize that. It’s sort of why Robert was in Scotland, though the situation is very different for us.” Peter countered.

“Anyway, I agree we’d better start looking for an apartment. It doesn’t need to be big, but we need to be able to both sit and study. And, of course, other things. It’d be nice if we could walk to the University, but my guess is the rent will be higher or it’ll be a dump.” I suggested.

“I think it’s a bad idea to start out somewhere we don’t like. I don’t propose to put you as queen in a palace, but if it feels uncomfortable or unsafe, it’ll start us off on the wrong foot.”

This man was like Dad – thinking of the details that made life good. I think I may have hit the boyfriend / fiancé jackpot.

Conversation turned to more trivial issues. We finished our lunch. Peter needed to go back to the ‘office’, but I hopped on a bus home.

I got a nice goodbye kiss – got some looks from the pedestrians and a hoot from a passing car.

Time to clear up the year's papers and books and stuff.

Saturday April 24, 1965 – Martin

Today it was pretty cool. Started off below freezing and only supposed to get to high 40s. But it had been dry for a couple of days and no rain forecast for today.

We were going out to the cottage. Bernard had managed to get the extension built, roofed and the toilet plumbing roughed in. The septic system wasn't complete yet, but was laid out and would be done in the next couple of weeks. Good job Michelle's house had sold. We'd need the money. Windows were in. Siding wasn't on. Just the tar paper. Still we could work.

We got up early and were on the road by 8:15 and got to the cottage before 9:30. We picked up Peter along the way, which made it crowded in the back of Michelle's station waggon. Why did we keep the old names? It was just 'the station waggon' now.

It was nice of Peter to offer. Though I think it's also a nice occasion for Anna and him to be together and also with lots of us around so they can get used to being in the 'family' crowd. About 5 minutes after we got to the cottage, Stephane and Nicole showed up in one of Bernard's small trucks.

"We brought the bathtub and sink and toilet." Nicole announced. Michelle and Nicole had gone to several stores and found a set they thought was OK at Cashway. Anna said something about one of Marcia's former boyfriends working there, but I missed the details.

Peter and Anna went straight away to see how the addition looked.

"Not bad." I heard Peter say. "They've already got the plaster-board in. I thought they might use that prefinished panelling, but it doesn't look as good in the long run, and it isn't fireproof."

"Don't they need to do more work on the joints?" Anna replied. There were raised runs of white plaster where the boards joined.

"Yes, but I didn't think they'd be this far along."

"Brrr. We're going to need our sweaters," Anna said.

As if to underline this I heard Michelle yell "Andrea. Open the damper! Open the damper!"

Andrea and Michelle were lighting a wood fire in the stove. They'd forgotten to open the chimney pipe damper. The living room was smoky. We opened the doors and with the damper open, things soon cleared.

I said "Let's gather round and decide what we're going to do so we don't tread on each other's toes."

"What do we need to do?" Michelle asked. I answered

"The main thing is to get the floor of the new bathroom in, and that means plywood sub-floor and lino. The plywood is here against the wall in the living room. We need to move the furniture out of here I think so a pattern can be made to cut the lino. And we should sub-floor the bedroom. It's going to have broadloom, which we still have to select and buy. Once the lino is in the bathroom, we'll put in the fixtures. I don't know if we'll get everything done today."

I continued, "Bernard's plaster man is coming to sand and finish the walls next week. If we can, we should tape down a drop sheet in the bathroom to avoid too much cleanup in there. Since we'll only have the plywood sub-floor in the new bedroom, I'm not so worried about that."

"Do we have a drop sheet?" Michelle asked.

"Hmm. No. I think we'll have to send you into Arnprior. But let's wait until lunchtime and you and Nicole can make a trip. We may remember some other things we need before then.

So here's a suggestion. Nicole and Michelle. You be in charge of coffee and creature comforts and keeping things tidy. Andrea, I'll ask if you'll be the gopher to run for tools and nails and things from the truck or wherever. Peter and Annie, I'd like you to take the brown paper we brought along with the masking tape and make a pattern for the lino, then use the pattern to mark the back of the lino with that black wax crayon – be careful to avoid getting things upside down. But Annie is in physics and you're in math. Then cut it out. The roll is 12 feet wide, and the room about 9. You'll need all the living room and better put the furniture in the old bedrooms. We can all help do that right away, then Peter and Annie can get on with measuring in the bathroom.

Stephane and I can lay down the plywood in the new bedroom and cut the awkward bits out on the veranda. But as soon as Peter and Annie are out of the bathroom, we'll work on the plywood there while Peter and Annie do the lino in here. The toilet and sink places

are awkward. And then we'll put in the lino and see how far we get with the fixtures. Peter and Annie can do the same for the lino in the entrance hallway, which I realize we should start on with the plywood."

We got busy with the furniture, and had it all in the old bedrooms in 5 minutes. We'd have to sit on the floor to eat our lunch. So be it. The living room was 12 feet across. We'd be tight with the lino.

"Where's the lino?" Anna asked.

"In the truck", Stephane said. "But I don't think you should get it out until you're ready. We also need to get this plywood out of here before you work with the lino, but once we've a row of sheets down in the bedroom, it can go in there, and Andrea and Nicole can move a sheet at a time. And a couple of sheets we'll put down really quickly for the entrance way."

Peter and Anna got the paper and went in the bathroom. There were no doors yet – that was a blessing. Stephane and I brought in a couple of sheets of plywood to the new bedroom and laid them down and put a few nails in the corners to stop them moving. If need be, they could be lifted and repositioned. Then we measured the entrance way and went on the veranda. We'd a couple of saw horses out there that Bernard's men had set up. We made quick work of the cuts with a Skilsaw. Soon we were back and laying down a sheet. Then back to the veranda. More sawing. Second sheet. Then lots of nailing. We each had an apron with pockets for nails and a loop for holding our hammer.

Meanwhile, Peter and Anna spread out the brown paper. It was a yard wide, so they needed to tape strips together, and overlap carefully. Anna had a pair of large scissors. the 10 feet long was easy. 9 across meant they needed 4 strips of paper so they could overlap.

"Dad. What should we do about the tub? Do you want the lino all the way under it?" Anna asked. I was just in the entrance way, so came to look. I had to shout over the hammering though.

"No. Just go under 4 - 6 inches. But go as tight as you can to the bulkhead. We'll put on a moulding, but it's better that we cut away lino than try to cover the gap."

"You've got the taps on the inside end of the tub, and the tub is on the house side rather than the outside wall." Anna said.

"Warmer for the occupants and less chance of frozen pipes. But

we'll need to drain the pipes and put antifreeze in the traps for winter," I answered.

Peter and Anna got the template made in about 40 minutes. They were careful to mark TOP on it in several places. The black crayon was good. They double taped, that is, on the bottom as well so the joints in our paper wouldn't separate. And it seemed they'd measured as well as fitted it.

By this time – about 11 – we were all ready for coffee and gathered in the empty living room. Michelle had made the coffee and found some cushions. They'd be helpful when we were crawling around on the lino.

As we held our coffee, we heard hammering. Turned out Andrea wanted to try nailing down the floor panels. I went to see and gave her some tips.

I came back and said "She was trying to hit the nail too hard to start. Good job she didn't smash a finger. I showed her how to put her thumb on the top of the handle and hold the hammer by the end of the handle. Then a light tap to get it started, and get your fingers out the way. Then partial nailing, check it's straight, then finish."

It turned out Andrea was quite good at the nailing, and was left at this job.

Peter and Anna got Nicole to help them bring in the lino and partially unroll it, face down. They positioned the template, also face down, and taped it to the lino, then cut off the length.

"I think I'd prefer the shears to the lino knife." Peter said. The knife was one of those with a small curved blade. The shears were actually tin-snips, but had good handles.

"It'll be slower, but less chance of a big error or a nasty accident." I heard Anna say. Well, that was good – those lino knives could cause nasty cuts if they slipped.

When I had a chance to look, I saw that Peter worked slowly along the line of the template and they finally got the end of the roll out the way. Nicole and Anna then steadied the lino on the floor and the roll respectively. Mainly they did this by using their weight. They both were sitting on their parts of the lino.

"You can get off your bums now." Peter said.

Nicole and Anna tied a string round the roll. The lino on the floor sprang up, of course, trying to curl itself back into its cosy roll.

They smoothed it back down and aligned and taped the template to it properly. Then they used the crayon to mark the edges and the awkward holes for pipes and such.

“You did a good job on the two ends, Peter. We don’t need to cut those any more,” Nicole said.

“I was trying to be careful. Less work the better.”

Meantime, back in the bathroom, Stephane and I were putting down plywood, going out to the veranda through the other end of the room to saw a couple of times. More hammering. Seems there were three hammers going now.

By noon, we had the lino cut, and the plywood flooring was ready, so after checking one more time, the template was untaped and the cut lino was carefully folded in three – sort of a loose roll but no sharp folds, and four of us – myself and Stephane joining Anna and Peter, carried it into the bathroom. I made sure we carried it in so it could be unrolled into the right position. The edge that was farthest from the door was the one that went down first and then we could just unroll. This had taken a couple of tries in the living room to get organized, but in the end proved very wise. Michelle and Nicole watched from near the bathroom door – there were too many cooks! Somehow Andrea appeared as well.

From the doorway, I said “I think Stephane and Annie should try to duck under the lino but keep hold of the edge that has to go against the far wall.”

It was a bit awkward but we managed. Of course it wasn’t perfect.

“Can you jiggle it a bit to see if it will go into the corner?” I asked.

“It’s not too heavy now, so if Annie and Stephane hold at the ends so it doesn’t fall, I can jiggle.” Peter said.

“I think Andrea can come out now.” I said.

We did as planned, and the lino went into the corner. We gently laid it down, then there was just the final fold.

“Everyone out but me.” Anna said, and – surprise, no objection – Peter and Stephane left the room. Anna held the edge, stepped over onto the laid section, and dropped the last fold. It fitted!

She knelt down and smoothed out some bumps, but hey, ‘We have liftoff’.

“Good work everyone. Peter, Annie. Can you continue with the

entrance way? I see we need a strip to join the pieces in the doorway. I think it's called a transition. Better put that on the list, Michelle."

"Do we need to get moulding, Martin?"

"You can if you want. Where's your list? We'd better measure."

Peter and Anna were putting some glue on corners and edges in the bathroom as I quickly measured the perimeters, so I had to step around them. Stephane and Andrea were back to flooring, and Michelle had disappeared to find her list and likely to find other jobs wanting to be done.

I said, "It's 15 by 10 for the bedroom, and the closet bulkhead will add 6 feet approximately, so say 56 feet. We'll ignore the door – there's always some waste. The bathroom is 10 by 9, so say 40 feet. and the entrance 9 by 5 but lots of doors. Still say 25 feet. I think we can get away with 120 linear feet of moulding and quarter round. 15 lengths of 8 feet each. You'll need to put them on the roof using the ratchet belts. Good job I went to the bank, too. I don't know prices, but I think the moulding could be \$2 a length and the quarter round maybe a bit over a dollar. Here's \$80. I think that will be plenty. And there's the drop-sheet and better get some more wide masking tape to hold it down. Oh. And some 1 and a half and 2 inch finishing nails for the moulding."

"Do you need anything for the plumbing?" Nicole asked. Where had she gone for the past few minutes?

Stephane and I rummaged in the trailer. There was enough stuff to work with, so on returning Stephane said,

"No all the stuff's there, plus a few extra bits in case. And we have two propane cylinders for the torch, just in case."

"There's sandwiches in the cooler." Michelle said. "I'm taking our lunch along. One of us can drive and the other eat."

Saturday April 24, 1965 – Anna

Afternoon

Nicole and Michelle drove off. They weren't back until almost 2:30, but it turned out we had all the materials we needed. Dad, with some prescience, had brought his mitre box and a couple of back-saws.

About 10 minutes after Michelle and Nicole left, the nailing was finished. While the nailing crew was still doing that, Peter and I

had had a short break and walked down to the river. We stood on the river side of a couple of trees. Out of sight of the cottage, we had a quick smooch.

“Where’s your ring?” Peter said in a bit of a panic.

“At home. I didn’t want to risk damage or dirt or losing it with the work today.”

“Oh. OK. Good thinking. Just had me worried.”

“I was wanting to avoid the real panic, actually.”

“Yes. Guess we’d better go back and see about sandwiches.”

We walked back, got the sandwiches and called the others. We opened some pop and some chips too. A thoroughly nice picnic lunch with bananas and oatmeal raisin cookies (who baked those, I wonder?) for dessert.

Peter and I quite quickly repeated the exercise with brown paper and lino for the entrance hall, which was smaller. There was the issue of keeping the direction of the pattern and matching it up somewhat. Andrea helped either us or Dad and Stephane as needed. We used a bit more glue here to make sure the lino would be fixed in the corners and edges. There’d be traffic, and we didn’t want it shifting or curling up.

Well before Michelle and Nicole returned, Dad and Stephane had the bathtub in place, with copper pipe ready for the taps and copper drain and trap connected and through under the cottage. They also put in the vanity, and hooked it up with stop valves to pipes Stephane pushed through holes he had drilled earlier and we had marked on the lino.

When Michelle and Nicole pulled up, Stephane was under the cottage and Andrea was passing him parts and tools to run the pipes to the water supply and the location of the water heater. The water heater was going to go in the entrance way. It would be electrical, and, for the time being, sit in the open in the entrance vestibule. However, I noticed a copper pipe sticking out the wall where it would go. Someone had thought to put that in before putting on plaster board. Later I learned that Stephane had thought of this and come out one night last week.

There had been some discussion about the power. At the moment there was an electric stove. By replacing it with a propane one, there’d be enough power on the existing, rather small, panel for the water heater. The water heater would be delivered in a week or so.

The panel had a single empty circuit they'd used for the extension. Close to the line on code, but only 2 rooms. We had bulbs hanging from the ceiling in each room. Not very good light, but we didn't need so much during the day. I even noticed a fan in the bathroom ceiling. Wonder if there was a good vent.

The toilet drain had been installed already, but ended in an open pipe a few feet from where the septic tank would go. Someone had remembered the wax ring, and we got the toilet on quickly, and hooked it up. Stephane had worked quickly to put a small valve on a pipe he pushed up from below. Even had a chrome disk to hide the hole. I found a caulking gun and filled the gaps in the pipes going down into the floor. This one and the two supply and one drain from the vanity. Stephane had worked fast.

Damn. We'd missed caulking the holes for the bath pipes before we put in the bath. I think the toilet drain was sealed up with tar paper. Hope so.

I had gone outside and crawled under the cottage. It was low and dim. I went back out and found a flashlight, and called for Andrea to come help. Together we got the gaps blocked, but working from below got caulk all over, and I had to use my fingers. When we got out I wiped them on the grass, then went and found a rag and worked at them before going inside to wash thoroughly.

"I see why you didn't wear the ring." Peter said.

"Also because the caulking gun is stiff, and if I'd used my left hand I could have broken the ring on the lever."

As Michelle came in, she saw the bathroom, with the fixtures in, including the vanity.

"Oh, it's more or less done." She said. It was actually far from complete, but the room was looking like a bathroom. "Nicole. Come and look."

They were excited, but time was moving on. We set up a sawing station in the living room, clamping Dad's mitre box to a piece of plywood across the saw horses. Andrea and I measured and marked, Dad sawed, and Peter and Stephane nailed on the moulding. It went quickly, and we repeated with the quarter round in the bathroom and entrance way, but just cut it for the bedroom and placed it. It would be nailed on after carpet was installed.

We stopped for a cup of tea and more cookies.

"Who's the baker?" I asked.

“Me.” said Nicole.

“She’s planning to make me fat.” said Stephane.

“With cookies this good, fat and happy.” Peter joined in.

“We’ve done a lot today.” Dad said. “I think we should clear up and make sure things are ready for the plasterer and the people bringing the water heater.”

“Yes. I could use a shower after being under the cottage.” I said.

“Me too.” said Stephane.

“You can shower at my place. Deirdre’s away, so there’ll be a chance to get in the bathroom.” Nicole said. Did I see a twinkle in her eye?

“I think it’s best if you drop me off.” Peter said. “I’d come back with you, but I need to clean up too, and I’m not ashamed to say that I’m a bit tired out. Shall we see each other tomorrow after you get home from church, Anna?”

“Sure. That’ll work. Tonight I plan to start going through my stuff to see if I can toss anything. Might as well start off together without a lot of clobber. By the way, are you following the Stanley Cup series? I think there’s another game tomorrow.”

“I’ll watch or listen if it’s broadcast and I’m not doing something else, but it’s not a matter of life and death for me. And Montreal’s ahead 2 games to 1 so we’ve a few more face-offs yet.”

We spent quite a bit of time tidying up. Michelle and Nicole taped down the drop-sheet in the bathroom while Dad cut and installed the metal strip for the doorway that covered the join in the lino. They decided the entrance hall lino would have to suffer the plaster dust and be cleaned after. As would the plywood in the bedroom. I numbered the quarter-round and put numbers discretely on the baseboard in the bedroom, then gathered up the pieces and tied them together and put them in one of the old bedrooms.

It was close to 6 when we pulled away, and after 7 when we got home. I went straight into the shower. I was sweaty and a bit smelly. Wow. Not your usual Annie ... er... Anna.

I’d heard Dad drive off after we got out the waggon. Turned out that once we got the important stuff unloaded, he and Andrea took off to get Chinese takeout. By the time I was decent and had my hair under control, they were back. Great!

Andrea took a shower after dinner, and I heard Dad and Michelle in the bathroom later, after Andrea and I had gone to bed. We’d

all worked hard. My good intentions to sort stuff got derailed. I did start, but came across a trashy novel I'd picked up last summer and never read. Fatal. But I enjoyed the read, fell asleep at one point and realized I should get into PJ's and brush teeth. Phoned Peter to say thank you for his good work, also to tell him I loved him. A short and sweet call. Started reading again, but

May 7, 1965 – Anna

Friday

I was already back working with the semiconductor laser group. It was interesting work, trying to figure out what materials would work and whether we could get them to function at room temperature rather than that of liquid nitrogen. We didn't have the resources of IBM or GE, nor even some of the American universities. But we could explore some possibilities. I'd dug up a paper from last year's Applied Physics Letters on Yttrium doped garnets. We were trying to set up low-cost rigs to allow such crystals to be made. A couple of the team members were working on calculations of what might work. I was the gopher, of course, but I tried to learn what I could.

Around 11, I asked if anyone minded if I went to see if my marks were posted.

"Better go look." said one of the two profs "Otherwise you'll be distracted." Hmm. He seemed to know something. I hope I'd done OK.

Marks were on a bulletin board by the Physics office. No names, just student numbers. I found the Mechanics course. Went down the numbers, found mine – A+. Great! And ... nobody else had one, or even an A. The next mark was an A-.

"Nice work, Miss Tremblay". It was the Mechanics prof.

"Thank you. I enjoyed the course." I replied. "Excuse me. I think I need the washroom."

I dashed into the washroom and burst into tears. Why did I do that? Shock at getting top mark, I guess. I'd not done that before. I'd been good, but not the best. The tears subsided quickly. I washed my face with a paper towel and went back to look at the rest of the marks. Two As. That was OK. There was still a math course and an English course I was taking as my Arts elective. Except

it wasn't really elective. You had to take an arts or humanities course. I chose a course on the English novel, even though it meant being in with honours English students, because I couldn't stand the thought of taking what was termed a Mickey-Mouse course. They were typically called 'Western philosophy for science students'. Taught by the instructor with the least seniority as a punishment detail.

So I walked over to the English department and found I'd pulled an A-. There were no A+ marks here, but all the others in the course were honours English students and a couple of them got As. I was probably not allowed to get the top mark anyway – that would rub the wrong way. Still, A- was better than I'd feared. Sometimes in class, I got the feeling a science student wasn't supposed to have literary opinions. How about C. P. Snow? Actually I'd done one of my essays on one of his novels.

Finally over to King Eddy to the Maths Department for the maths course. Differential equations. Hadn't found it much fun, but knew it was essential for physics. I figure I'd done OK. Mark was A+. Wow. And again, nobody else. A couple of As from the maths undergrads I think. From the student numbers – they sort of coded your year of graduating high school in the early digits of your student number – it looked like the grad students doing remedial managed a B+ at best.

Peter was away at Tunney's pasture today, talking to someone about access to epidemiological data he might be allowed to use for his thesis work. Drat. I wanted to tell someone. It wasn't quite noon, so I went to a pay phone in the lobby and called Dad. Nicole answered and put me through right away.

"Hi Dad, it's Anna."

"Annie. Anna. What's wrong." There was concern in his voice.

"Nothing's wrong except I just went and looked at my marks and Peter's not here so I need to tell someone."

"Good or bad?" I think he might be teasing, but a car went by outside and I couldn't hear the nuances.

"Good. I got 2 A+ marks in Mechanics and Maths. And in those courses I was the only A+. An A- in English novels. And As in the other two courses, Electromagnetics and Thermodynamics."

"Those are good – correction excellent – marks. Well done, daughter."

“Thanks Dad. Love you.”

“See you tonight. Bye.”

I went back to the lab and got my sandwiches. It had been cool at night, but now was getting warm. I decided to walk down Somerset to Strathcona Park by the Rideau River. It was a bit of a way, maybe 15 minutes, but a nice view of the river and well-treed. I found a bench and ate my sandwiches and drank some cold milk I had in a thermos. Mostly I sort of let my mind go blank ... well, not blank, but unfocussed. I'd done better than I'd hoped. I was engaged to a really nice guy. I had money from Oh. That wasn't so good. I couldn't share all this good fortune with Mum. I wiped away a tear, and decided it was too nice a day to blub in public. And I had set out to get good marks as a kind of memorial to her. I'll see if Dad and Michelle want to have a scotch to toast that tonight. Well, to toast my good marks. I'll keep the fact it's for Mum to myself or maybe share it with just Peter. I think he'll understand and appreciate that. Other people might think it's silly. And Dad might get emotional. That makes me feel uncomfortable, probably because I can get the same way.

Less and less, though. Does it mean I'm forgetting? I don't think so. Maybe just putting Mum in perspective in my life. It's not been a year and a half. A lot's happened to us. Dad and Michelle. Me and Peter! Losing my virginity. Phooey. Why is it lost? I gained a lot more. Better to say 'Gaining my sexuality'. But for so many girls it's a disaster, like Sharon. Or not very successful, as it seemed to start with for Marcia. Or maybe Michelle even. I don't really know, but I get these hints from her and Dad sometime. Love to be able to ask, but I don't think I should.

In any case, here I am. I'm doing OK. Dodged most of the potholes that were there, at least for now.

Pity it's time to go back and get to work.