



# On the Shelf

John C. Nash

Copyright ©2020 John C. Nash

Minor re-edit May 2021

Major re-edit Dec 2021

nashjc @ ncf.ca

18 Spyglass Ridge

Ottawa, ON K2S 1R6

Canada

Cover image from

<http://www.public-domain-image.com/public-domain-images-pictures-free-stock-photos/objects-public-domain-images-pictures/books-public-domain-images-pictures/bookshelves-at-the-library.jpg>

Mother's funeral took place an hour after the deposit of several millions I got from selling the business that had been my primary preoccupation for a quarter century. And a few months earlier, my personal life had undergone a sea change. So here I was, middle-aged and adrift, comfortable financially but at a loose end. That is, except for a strange letter Mother left to be given to me upon her death.

Some doors had closed with a loud bang, but others were now ajar.



## Preamble

*On the Shelf* is a work of fiction. The initial text was written in 2020. This is a second version, prompted by the discovery of Rodney Martin's self-published biography of Wolfgang Heyda. This book appears to be catalogued in only four libraries in North America. I was able to get a copy second-hand. It did not appreciably change the narrative, but with some comments from a friend led to a re-edit. Changes in the text are relatively minor but do alter the stress on some subjects.

This novel is an exploration of four themes.

- Many people lead unconventional private lives that may nonetheless be rich and satisfying, even as they are driven or dictated by outside forces and events beyond the immediate control of the players.
- Conventional popular narratives tend to conflate such important ideas as intimacy with sex, or love and physical affection, but the ways in which people satisfy their deep-seated needs for these often diverge from the stereotype of the nuclear family.
- Canada's Second World War had a number of interesting and yet largely unknown adventures that deserve to be better known. Operation Kiebitz is one of these, and this novel provides a fictional view of how the Canadian response may have unfolded.
- At a remove of over half a century, documents and artifacts, along with partial memories, may be used to build up the threads of a story.

If there are historical details about the events on which my fiction is built, I would be delighted to learn about them. I may be contacted at [nashjc\\_at\\_ncf.ca](mailto:nashjc_at_ncf.ca).

*John Nash*, Ottawa, 2021-12-28

---



In October 2005 my mother died the same week I sold my software business for a tidy sum of cash. Nothing like the \$1.65 billion Google paid for YouTube a year later. But the buyers – a Chicago outfit that really just wanted to close me down so they’d not have competition – offered me \$30 million in their stock or half that in cash.

I took the cash, which was deposited to the account of my new “company” an hour before the funeral for my mother. That was Tuesday, October 11. One day after Canadian Thanksgiving, which had delayed the settlement of the business transaction and had meant my mother was, as they say, “resting” at the funeral home an extra day.

As you might expect, it was an emotional time for me. I’d put a quarter-century into my business, half my life, and before I founded it as a 1-man consultancy when I was 25 years old, I’d only had one real job. Letting it go, along with three dozen employees, had my insides churning a bit. The buyers were a bit surprised I took the cash. I was not confident that their shares would retain their valuation, or that I could sell them easily, though to date they have not declined as fast as I thought they might. Since I have had no stock to sell, I cannot say if they were a liquid asset. There was additionally a condition that I couldn’t start or participate in any business in a similar market area for 5 years. Fortunately, I didn’t want to. I figured at my half-century mark it would be a good idea to try my hand at something different.

You might also expect that my mother’s passing was a further cause of upset, but she and I had talked a lot about life and death, among other things. I was her only child, born when she was 45 years old and my Dad was 63. He died when I was 8, and while I remember a cheerful, kindly man with whom I shared a number of activities and outings, he was not someone I could say I really knew. On the other hand, I shared a lively intellectual and social life with my mother, who somehow included me in her day-to-day life. In her final year, we were both aware that her heart was failing, and that its beat would stop in a very finite number of days, but she insisted that we appreciate the life she had lived and not diminish the days she had left by bemoaning their limited number. So I was saddened – indeed very saddened – by her passing, but I wouldn’t say I was upset.

Mother was to be cremated, and we didn’t have an open casket. She

wasn't particularly religious, but somehow had come to friendship with a local Unitarian minister who conducted a simple and dignified ceremony attended by two mini-bus loads from her retirement home, a couple of my former employees who I'd been friends with and who had come to know mother also, and Joanne and Kelly with whom I'd shared a good bit of life in the past decade. The funeral home provided a room for a modest reception after the service where I was the solitary member of a receiving line. Joanne, Kelly and my former work-mates said a quick "sorry" and returned to other obligations. Then there was a parade of the retirement home friends. I knew some of them, but had to be careful about what I said, as I always confused who was who. I knew the names and the faces, but had frequently mixed them up. The last person to express their condolences was a thirty-something woman who informed me that she was one of the administrators of the retirement home. She handed me a quite fat but business-sized envelope marked "To be given to my son, Joseph Cotton, upon my death".

I thanked the lady – it embarrasses me, as someone in a business that relies on contacts, that I failed to register her name – and put the envelope in my jacket pocket. As soon as I reasonably could, I let the funeral director know I was leaving and would arrange to pick up my mother's ashes and any documents when they were ready.

I went home to my condo. 3:30 p.m. on a quite ordinary, rainy October day in Ottawa. My condo was a modest two storey plus basement end-unit that had been advertised as an "executive town home". That is, it was 1400 square feet plus a single garage in a grouping of 40 in a western suburb. Despite my role as the CEO of a reasonably successful hi-tech firm, I drove a 5-year old Subaru.

You might wonder where I had hidden my family. Well, in university I'd had a wonderful girlfriend. Emma and I spent six weeks one summer travelling through Europe. After graduation, she went to UBC for graduate work in marine biology while I did a Masters' in computer science at Waterloo. We'd had a pretty intense friendship and more when we were travelling, but somehow it didn't migrate to the pages of letters. Except for the one that arrived the day after my thesis defence. A Dear Joe rather than Dear John letter.

I worked for two years for a pretty interesting software firm, then started my own outfit. That meant my priorities were such that social life took the number two place. But turning thirty, I met a nice woman who I dated for a year, then lived with for eighteen months. Jessica liked to skate, and had a tumble on the Rideau Canal ice soon after we started living together. Her broken collar was tricky and painful. In what I consider retrospectively to be malpractice, some doctor prescribed a painkiller that became an addiction that led to a changed personality and residential treatment for substance



abuse. She decided not to return to me after she was discharged. Some years later I learned she had taken her own life in a flea-bag hotel in Vancouver.

With both Emma and Jessica, there seemed to be wide-ranging conversations about the issues, ideas and events important in our lives. Even work matters that were bothersome, even if the technicalities had to be glossed over. Somehow that seemed to be part and parcel of being a couple. Though maybe this opinion formed in the times when I was alone again.

Doing things by myself must have become second nature. I'm sure I could have found great comfort in talking through the big decisions that I made in building Cotton Software with a true partner. Would I have made different decisions? Probably not. The types of conversations I'm thinking about are those where one person tells the other how they came to their current viewpoint. The listener in such conversations has the role of devil's advocate. I guess I learned to play both roles.

My Dad had been an orphan, and my mother was the youngest of three sisters. I have cousins in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but they are a generation older than I. I'd be hard pressed to find an address or phone number.

What I've said so far might make it seem like I lead a pretty sad life.

Not true. You shouldn't think I'm lonely or that someone could die of boredom living my life. I'm a member of a creative writers' group, a sailing club, and dance fairly regularly at the Old Sod Contra dances, through which I've built a circle of friends. After Jessica and I split, I dated four women over half a decade. Even went on holiday in St Lucia with Tanya, but it was really a matter of both of us wanting company. We decided amicably to move on after our return. Essentially, my attention was divided between my business and whoever I was currently dating. It was clear I couldn't – or wouldn't – give anyone enough of myself to make a good partnership.

I'd bought my condo in the late 80s, and sometime around 1993 there was a community meeting to oppose a silly and ultimately abandoned development proposal, and there I met a pair of sisters who lived together nearby. One was widowed. The other divorced from a lawyer who'd run off with the trust account money and ended up in prison. Between them, by 1995 when I got to know them better, they had four kids, 6 to 14. Two boys and two girls.

Where I lived I could walk to a decent supermarket and my route passed their condo which was similar to mine but in a different cluster. I guess we started yakking one night that they were going to barbecue and one of them – I forget which – said why don't I take my groceries home and bring back something to contribute to the meal and we could continue the conversation.

It turned out that Joanne and Kelly were respectively a year and three years younger than I. The town home units had basements that were unfinished when initially sold. Most folk turned them into a family room with

varying levels of finish. Joanne and Kelly managed a quite small family room and turned the rest of the space into a bedroom and a bathroom alongside the washer and drier. Joanne had that bedroom. Kelly had the middle sized upstairs bedroom, Margaret, who was 14 – Joanne’s oldest – had the smallest bedroom, and the boys – Charles, 6, who was Kelly’s oldest, and Gerald 12, who was Joanne’s boy – had the master bedroom and ensuite. Heather, Kelly’s 10 year old, was in what had been the laundry room, which initially was upstairs. The washer and drier had been taken out, but the plumbing was still in place. The new laundry room was in the basement. The setup was tight, but it seemed to be workable.

Joanne is an admin officer in a government department. I don’t think she’s changed jobs except for a minor promotion, but the name of the unit has changed four times since we met. She’s one of the army of folk riding the buses each workday. Kelly had initially acted as the stay-at-home Mom for all four kids. The rationale for moving in together when Joanne’s husband dropped dead of a very early heart attack was primarily economic.

After a year or two, with everyday life settling down, Kelly had started doing some decorating and painting. She’d worked for a home decor company selling paint and wallpaper and decorative items before “slime”, as she called him, had decamped with his clients’ money. When I first got to know them, she would get somewhat irregular jobs in the neighbourhood, mostly painting or wallpapering. Over time she got a bit more of the design end of that sort of work. It wasn’t going to make her rich, but it gave the household a few extras, and by the time Mother died she was making a tolerable income.

The two sisters were unremarkable physically. They didn’t have time or inclination to dress up or worry about make-up or hair-dos, but I never saw them sloppily dressed or untidy. At that first potluck meal to which I got invited, I noticed they ate well, but neither was overweight nor skinny. They were handsome rather than pretty. I was quite pleasantly surprised that while the kids were lively, a quiet directive from one or other of the sisters was acted on immediately. It was clear that they ran a tight ship.

That first night, after the meal was finished and the kids had been despatched to bed, homework or TV, Joanne said “I’m glad you joined us tonight. The kids need to see some men around. So do Kelly and I, I suppose.”

Joanne had been widowed in 1990. Kelly finalized her divorce just a couple of years later, though “Slime” had left the month after the death of Joanne’s husband Gerald, after which her son, 10 when I met them, was named.

At that time, I was, like most actors, “between engagements” on the dating front. Somehow I wasn’t bothered by this. Perhaps I was just used to being self-sufficient emotionally, though I knew that in time I’d start to want

companionship and affection, and – well – sex. But for the moment I was comfortable with a casual social life through my different activities. Meals and movies with Joanne and Kelly were a bonus. Fairly regularly we'd get together to eat or watch a hockey or football game or a movie and share a drink or two. Nobody had to drive home, so we could enjoy a glass or two without worrying about being over the limit.

Sometime early in 1996, I asked Kelly her rate to help me repaint my place. She looked flustered and said she'd have to come and prepare an estimate.

"I prefer to work time and materials," I said, and saw the relief spread over her face. She quoted her hourly rate, which I figured I'd have to tell her was too low, but which I agreed to right away. We'd sort out – or I'd insist on – a bonus later.

She turned out to be very good at suggesting small adjustments in the decor that made a big difference to the overall appearance of my place. I liked the results. At work, I wasn't too pressed right then, even though it was the government end-of-budget-year silly season. Somehow we had our contracts set up on a longer cycle, and I never much liked the "Help us spend it now" run-around. That got in the way of writing good code. In any event, I was able to meet Kelly briefly before I went in to the office and come home around 3 and do some of the work with her.

My office was actually in the suburbs too. At a pinch, I could walk to it. When weather allowed, I'd ride my bike. However, it was late January when we did the painting and decorating. Partly I'd chosen the timing because I knew it was a slow time for Kelly.

This day I got home about 3:15. I found Kelly in one of the bedrooms finishing up some drywall repairs. The condo units had been built in the usual throw-them-up fashion, and the Ottawa cycle of hot and humid then cold and dry caused a fair bit of movement and cracking. Kelly was going to fix things then put on some crown mouldings to hide some of the future shifting.

"I'm afraid drywall is not my best skill," she said as I came in.

Indeed, there was drywall mud in her hair, on her face, up her sleeves. Literally everywhere.

"I'll clean myself up when I'm done here," she said.

That took about another hour. I changed into work clothes – I thought I might as well make myself useful with fetch and carry and cleanup – then put on a pot of tea. We drank our tea after we'd got the drywall bucket closed and the tools cleaned off.

"Hope you don't mind if I take a shower here, Joe. I don't want to get drywall on the inside of my winter coat."

"No problem," I said. "Use my shower in the ensuite. It has a pretty

good shower head. I'll find you a towel."

"No hurry. I want to finish my tea – off the clock, by the way."

I'd been telling Kelly to increase her rate, which she'd done, but then got very fussy about timekeeping, always in my favour. I kept quiet about this.

"Hmm, Joe ..."

"Yeah."

"You don't think I might need help in the shower getting this mud out of my hair?" Kelly had sort of a smirk on her face.

I took my time, then answered, "We're not really talking about shampoo, are we?"

"Nah, I guess not. Joanne and I – sharing house like we do – can't bring a date home. And staying out all night is kind of awkward too. We've found it really nice having you around, and the other night were talking about how it might be nice if ... well ... you know."

"You mean if we had sex as kind of an appetizer or dessert?"

Kelly laughed "That's sort of a good way to put it."

I was a bit unsure of what the two sisters had discussed, so I asked "So Joanne is OK with you and me spending a bit of time enjoying some physical pleasure together?"

"Well ... actually we thought we both might ... er .... But not together! Oh. I'm making a hash of this."

"It's not exactly a typical situation," I volunteered. "But I'm very flattered by what you've told me, and I really enjoy my time with you and Joanne. You're both attractive women. But we should make sure we get our ducks in a row. You know, figure out the what-if situations. I don't want to lose your friendship, and I definitely don't want to be the wedge that comes between the two of you."

Kelly said, "Joanne said you'd say something like that. And I should have already asked if you have some condoms. Joanne said that it's kind of likely that you date other women from time to time, and even she and I could theoretically have a fling. And ..."

Kelly sort of ran out of steam, and took refuge in a long sip from her mug of tea.

"It seems that you've both given this some thought," I said.

"Yeah. I just hope we're thinking with our heads and not with what's between our legs," Kelly blurted out.

"I'm sure what's between your legs is very interesting," I said as suggestively as I could, then changed tone to add, "Do you think that there's a danger we'll get – you know – too attached or ...."

Kelly said "Joanne can be very calculating sometimes. I think it's partly her job and partly that she's been widowed, and she isn't without a lot

of feelings. But she said that she thought you didn't really share a lot of interests with the two of us, but that we had the makings of a very important friendship that would last us for many years. She also said she figured that if we got – you know – physical with each other, all three of us, that at some point we'd go our separate ways in the bedroom department, but still stay friends on other levels."

"I think she's right," I said. However, I was feeling distinctly uncomfortable in the crotch. Parts of me were exceedingly interested in the proposition that appeared to be on offer. Other ideas – possibly warnings – I pushed away to the future. The distant future.

I was more immediately a little concerned that Kelly's version of the offer might not be the same as Joanne's. I said, "Should we give Joanne a chance to back out of things? Perhaps I phone and say that you and I are going to clean up, test the ideas you and she have been discussing, and if she is OK with it, we'll bring Chinese dinner around 7."

"You're thinking I've put words in her mouth?" Kelly looked a bit annoyed.

"I guess what I said could be interpreted like that, but it's also possible she might lose her enthusiasm when things are closer to happening. Also I'm having a little trouble getting my head around things. It would be easy to let it drift into a male porno fantasy ..."

Kelly laughed and said "Oh, no .... no ..."

I continued "I didn't think so either. But I'd be more comfortable – less guilty feeling – if I knew there were a green light."

"Yeah. Why do these things have to be so awkward. In the movies they just look at each other and .... well, fuck."

"I suspect the movie writers have very little real experience. Do you know, there was this guy in university who had written a pornographic novel that some back-street outfit published. It did quite well, apparently, and paid for his tuition one term. He got drunk one night and blurted out that he was still a virgin. Go figure."

"Wow!" was Kelly's response.

"Shall I phone Joanne?"

"She'll probably be a work still. Better phone quickly if we want to catch her."

We went in the kitchen and I picked up the phone and Kelly called out the number.

"Hi, Joanne. It's Joe. Kelly's here finishing up some drywall. She's going to get cleaned up here so she doesn't mess up her coat and hat. We thought we'd pick up Chinese take out and bring it for 7. Yes, the kids will enjoy that. And in the meantime, Kelly told me about an idea you'd been discussing. Yes, about the three of us. Yes, I'm definitely OK with trying

out the idea. My concern was to avoid causing any friction between you and Kelly. OK, thanks, I'll relay the message. Bye."

"Sounds like there's no problem," Kelly said.

"No, she told me to tell you to have fun."

"Whoopee!" Kelly said, skipping off towards the stairs, "Last one undressed is still naked."

She stopped halfway up the stairs and looked over the railing. "Oh. You didn't say if you had condoms. I don't want to get all wet and then have to go home horny."

"Let me check, including that they're not expired. I'll run down to the pharmacy if I don't."

"Joe. That's really sweet. A lot of men are really jerks about condoms, and they shouldn't be. Especially when a gal wants it badly."

We got to the bedroom and I went to my bedside table and opened the drawer and took out the package that was there. It was unopened. The date was a little close to the expiry, but we had a month or two.

Kelly said, "One friend of mine made sure she had condoms in her purse in case she got an irresistible opportunity. When it came, she discovered they'd expired a year before. I didn't have the heart to ask her what she did."

We spent quite a bit of time getting Kelly cleaned up. She'd managed – neither of us know how – to get drywall stuff inside her panties. No kidding. And getting it out of her hair was a chore. After that, she always had disposable shower caps with her for doing jobs where she might get stuff in her hair.

After the shower, we had a very nice time on the bed. Kelly put a towel round her hair, and we were both cognizant that we needed to order take out and get her hair dry, but that still left us plenty of time for fun. And fun and laughter seemed to be the order of the day. I don't think we'd have made a very good porn movie. We were simply enjoying ourselves too much to take things very seriously, for which I was immensely relieved. Clearly it had been a while for both of us, and we managed in less than an hour to use three condoms, though the last was more a precaution, as by then we were not trying for any orgasms. Not that we'd been trying particularly hard, but it was clear to me that Kelly was deriving quite a lot of pleasure, though without a lot of moaning and groaning. I had a very pleasant time too.

I phoned a Chinese restaurant I trusted while Kelly dried her hair, then got myself cleaned up and dressed. We took Kelly's minivan to pick up the food. I brought along a bottle of wine.

We got to the sisters' house just before 7 and the kids very efficiently got the food on the table in the dining room. The kids had set tumblers for pop all round plus wine glasses for the adults as well. There was lots of

chatter on this Friday evening about the events of the week, except nothing was said that even hinted at what had transpired at my place. After the fortune cookies had been broken open, the kids disappeared downstairs to watch a video they'd rented.

Joanne said "From Kelly's smile, I gather things worked out OK."

"More than OK," Kelly laughed.

"Definitely," I agreed. "As I said earlier, I don't want to cause friction between you both. There's more than ... you know ... of value in what we share."

Joanne said "I'm hoping things won't be too ... organized ... scheduled. But I suppose we do have to work around the kids' schedules. And our own."

"We'll sort something out," Kelly said. "It's important we all get some joy, and not have to work too hard to get it."

"Amen to that!" I said.

\* \* \*

That weekend, I was working on some extensions of a particular piece of software we wanted to get out by the middle of the year. This is just before the Internet really got going, but we had some file sharing capabilities if we wanted to use them. I'd also cleaned my house on the Saturday – with just me it didn't get too dirty, and with Kelly painting and decorating, a couple of rooms were closed off anyway. The master bedroom was still awaiting redecoration.

Because the bedroom I normally used as my home office was one of those being painted, I was working in the living / dining room at the table. Not ideal, but I was managing. I had a tower machine on the floor and a large monitor on the table, with my keyboard on a TV table to get a reasonable height.

I'd actually had a busy couple of days. The experience with Kelly on Friday afternoon had energized me. I probably put in over 10 hours on the programming on Saturday, and I'd got up at 7:30 on Sunday, gone for a walk, then after a shower and breakfast had been at work from just after 9 except for hourly stretches and tea or coffee breaks. About 1:30 the doorbell rang. I saved my work and went to the door, expecting some charity canvassers or religious proselytizers. Instead, there was Joanne, looking rather awkward.

"Hi Joe. I was out for a walk and thought I'd say hello."

"Come in, come in. It's still winter yet, and it isn't warm out."

"No, but I like to get a bit of exercise every day," Joanne said.

"Me too. I was out this morning early. It was a brisk half hour, but allowed me to clear my brain to get some coding done," I said.

“Oh dear, I’ve interrupted your work.” She now looked very uncomfortable.

“Can I offer you a cup of tea? Or something stronger?”

“Yes, I’d like that.”

“Tea? Sherry? Scotch?” I prompted.

“Maybe a scotch. But not too much. Neat please, even though women aren’t supposed to drink it that way.”

“It’s how I prefer it,” I said, going to the cupboard in the kitchen where I keep my booze. I had a bottle of Johnny Walker Red and a bottle of Vat 69, but the latter wasn’t open, so I took out the Red. I poured us each an inch in a tumbler and offered it to her.

“There’s more if you want, but I feel really bad if a guest leaves any. Actually get rather mad in a buffet restaurant when folk leave stuff, except for small sample amounts they’ve discovered they dislike. Somehow must have been drilled into me as a kid by my Mother who went through the War.”

I was prattling. Now Joanne joined in. “Is your mother still alive?”

“Yes, 86 and going strong. Dad died when I was 8. He was almost two decades older than Mother.”

There was an awkward silence, then we both started to talk at once.

“I wanted ...” said Joanne.

“Should we ...” I was saying at the same time.

Again a pause, and I said “Do you know the film ‘Same Time Next Year’?”

“I’ve seen it. It’s about a couple who meet on out of town business and have a long-term affair but meeting only once a year. Is that the one?”

“Yes. And one of the scenes starts with the Ellen Burstyn character greeting the Alan Alda character with ‘Hey man, wanna fuck’.”

“Oh. How wonderfully helpful. The answer from me is ‘yes’!”

“Do I have time to finish my scotch?” I asked.

At this Joanne, who I should mention is generally the very serious sister compared to Kelly, dissolved in a fit of giggles, spluttering “Yes of course, now that we’ve pushed the elephant outside.”

We decided to adjourn with our scotch to the tub. If I’d predicted this, I’d have used some clear plastic tumblers I have. I dislike having glass in the bathroom where breakage adds to the existing dangers of slipping. However, we had no difficulty on this occasion.

We undressed ourselves – all business – and I was about to get in the tub so we faced the same way when Joanne said “Do you mind if you sit so I can see?”

It meant I got the taps to my back, but I got a good view too, especially when I made sure Joanne’s legs were either side of me. I noticed well-trimmed



pubic hair. Kelly had much more of a rug. Suppose I shouldn't be comparing, but it was impossible not to. My guess was that Joanne was comparing me to her late husband, or some other fellow.

As with Kelly, we spent a light-hearted hour. Joanne, for all her serious and quiet demeanour in everyday situations, got very noisy on a couple of occasions. I found I rather liked it. After her second ... er ... outburst, when she was lying in my arms, I asked, "Are you conscious of how noisy you are when you get excited?"

"I can sort of hear myself, but I don't try to make the noises and shouts. They just sort of come out of me. We won't be able to be ... together ... like this with the kids around."

"Should that sentence have ended with the word 'unfortunately'? I definitely think it should."

"Yes, I suppose so," Joanne said a bit wistfully.

"Unless we tie you up and use a gag," I said.

Joanne looked stricken "Oh. No. No. I couldn't do anything like that. I ..."

"Neither could I," I said. "I'd not be able to talk with you or kiss you," which I then did. Joanne relaxed.

"More seriously, I like sharing, and someone tied up somehow doesn't have the choice to participate, and that seems to me to be leaving out a whole bit of the reason for sharing pleasure, including the pleasure of sex."

"Good thinking," Joanne concurred.

There were a few minutes where we just lay together, then she said "Do you think we'll be able to sort out the logistics of this sort of arrangement?"

"I had been wondering myself. But I'm guessing we'll have to see what works. Probably much more here than at your place. Despite the cliché porn scene of a threesome, I suspect that will not be on the cards. I have no idea whether you and Kelly are comfortable with each other undressed."

"Well, we've seen each other naked from time to time, for example, in a swimming pool changing room, but we don't normally undress together. That's probably in part to establish boundaries for the kids too. But I'm rather relieved that you mentioned that you think a threesome unlikely. It had been in the back of my mind, and I didn't feel that comfortable. You've perhaps noticed my small breasts."

"They're very nice. Very responsive," I said, gently running my free hand over one.

"Kelly's are bigger. I even thought of getting a boob job."

"Please don't. You look nice as you are. The magazines and Hollywood have a lot to answer for, unfortunately. But to return to the threesome concept, I'd be worried about my ... er ... ability to perform."

"Really?" Joanne asked.

“Yes. With both of you – oops, maybe too much information. Oh hell. Well, with both of you I’ve had two ejaculations. With Kelly – and we might as well be pretty open – we put on a third condom, which if you counted you’d have guessed. But that last time was more or less affectionate and not for moans and groans, if you understand what I mean.”

“Yes I do. Ed and I used to do that. We used to call it ”friendly fuck”. And it didn’t make me noisy, so we could do it where others might hear.”

“Do you want to slide another condom on me?”

\* \* \*

We had over eight years where we helped each other get through the trials and annoyances of everyday life and avoided the anxieties of negotiating the troubled waters of dating. After a few months, it was very clear that we shared a common enjoyment of casual family meals, occasional outings, TV sports events or movies on videotape, and – slotted in discreetly – sex. If you dropped the sex, we were in some ways not appreciably more than acquaintances.

This wasn’t perversity, it was simply different interests or different focus. Somehow I didn’t share in any detail concerns I had about business with Kelly and Joanne, and they didn’t confide their own worries about jobs and money with me. Life decisions or crises with the kids got aired over meals and during TV commercials, but I wasn’t privy to the more awkward matters. While I was willing to be helpful, I was uncomfortable that saying anything would be construed as interference.

However, I could see that I could have made a successful marriage with either Joanne or Kelly, but for any of us it would have been a marriage of convenience. Such marriages are disparaged in our society, but my opinion is that many are very successful, with the parties all getting good value for the emotional and other resources they commit. But they aren’t the great love stories so glorified in literature and movies. Mind you, the really great love stories often fail to get any mention in literature or media, largely because it is so hard to really understand those deep alliances of body and soul.

On the other hand, there were episodes intimacy, and those weren’t about sex. That aspect of things really bothers me quite a lot. For example, there was one time Joanne came over. She was terribly worried about Margaret. I won’t go into details – they are Margaret’s private monsters now – but we simply talked for hours. Or rather Joanne did most of the talking. She eventually fell asleep, which was unusual. Neither woman had stayed over. In the morning she shared beans on toast for breakfast, something that is a bit of a favourite for me, but considered a bit strange in Canada. Don’t

know where I picked it up. And somehow that breakfast was an intimate moment between two people who loved each other but weren't in love with each other.

Looking back, I am forever in the debt of Joanne and Kelly, and I know I love them both deeply, and care very much for the kids. But I'm not in love with them, and the intimacy came in lumps rather than a smooth and steady comfort.

Around the millenium, we even went on holiday together for a week to a resort in the Caribbean. We booked three rooms, each with two double beds. The plan was Joanne would share a bed with Margaret and have Gerald in the other bed. Kelly and Heather would share, with Charles in the other. I would be on my own, but we'd thought I should have my own room, just in case. Well, we did plan to have some fun, so I brought along the necessities.

This arrangement lasted one night. On the second morning, Joanne, Kelly and I had a second latte at the end of breakfast and the kids had taken off, supposedly to find out about some excursion or other. After about 20 minutes, Margaret came back and said that the kids wanted to talk to us in Joanne's room.

We duly trotted up to the room and the kids were arrayed like the Spanish Inquisition. Margaret said "We've been talking about the rooms, and all of us are really uncomfortable. So we're going to suggest that Mom and Kelly move in with Joe, Heather and I take this room, and Gerald and Charles the room Kelly's crowd have."

There was a strained silence. I hesitated to say anything, and wondered what the women were thinking. Margaret continued "We all know that Mom and Kelly are pretty thick with Joe. Joe treats you both well, and he's good to us. We don't mind at all. Sometimes when one of you comes back from a walk or visit with Joe you're obviously happy ..."

Joanne groaned "Oh God. The walk of shame, and in front of my own kids."

Kelly laughed "Well, you do have that freshly fucked look sometimes."

"Mom! You'd make me wash my mouth out with soap if I said that," Heather shouted.

I figured I should say something.

"Since the situation is more or less out in the open, I think the suggested change could work if both your Moms are comfortable with it. They mean a lot to me, as do you all."

There was some awkward attempt to say more, but it was mostly about rules for the kids not to be out after an agreed curfew time. The law was laid down with mention of some unpleasant criminality that sometimes occurred near resorts.

Then we moved luggage around. Well, my luggage didn't need to be

moved, but I did have to carry up the ladies' cases as we'd booked my room on a different floor. We'd figured there may be some time for enjoying ourselves without the kids. Now the awkward issue was whether we'd be too awkward when we were all together. It turned out we mostly managed that one or other of the ladies would be with the kids – at least the younger two – while the other lady and I enjoyed each other. But on the last night, Kelly said "Would you two like a last chance before we go home?"

I said simply "Up to Joanne."

Joanne said "I don't want you to have to go. I almost want to share it with you."

Kelly replied "I had a really good time yesterday. Almost an 'I can barely walk' good time. But it might be interesting to see you come. I hope I'm not revealing secrets, but I've heard you can be noisy, and I'd be happy if you can make me green with envy, though from what I've just said, I doubt it."

"Then it's game on if Joe's willing," Joanne said.

I decided to get a bit of a kick, so said "It might be nice if Kelly is close enough to touch, more out of affection than anything else."

That was the closest we came to a threesome, and Kelly took off her nightdress, saying she felt overdressed. Later we all seemed to wake up about 3 a.m. in the same bed cuddled together. And perhaps that few minutes when we all woke together and just cuddled was an intimate moment. We probably didn't need the sex to get there either.

\* \* \*

Arrangements like that evolve. Particular situations can't and don't last. Sometime in late 2003, Joanne went to a conference in Toronto and met a man very much like her late husband. One afternoon when she came over and we were lying together thinking about getting up, she said "Joe. Do you think I should go to Toronto for a long weekend and see if Ralph and I might work?"

She was, in essence, asking my permission. It was clear that she wanted a more traditional arrangement. I asked, "Do you have some condoms?"

"I'm thinking I should go to the drug store and buy some, but it's so embarrassing."

"I'll get some for you."

"Would you? You're really special, Joe. I hate that it seems like I'm dumping you."

"I don't think you are. We're just living our lives, as we should. By the way, do you want your pussy hair trimmed before you go?"

“Yes. I find I enjoy sex more when the hair isn’t in the way. But Kelly seems to like it as is. How do you think men like it?”

“To each his own. I like it trimmed or shaved so I can see and touch and ... well, you know.”

“I’m pleased to say I do know. Thanks.”

“Well, if you get to that point with Ralph, better just ask, then take it from there.”

“Should I get some nice underwear?”

“I usually figure it’s just something to take off, but I guess some men like it. Again, you’ll have to find out. I’d make sure it is easy to take off, so it doesn’t get ripped or damaged. Some men are clumsy, I hear. But if it makes you feel confident and happy, go for it, but not slutty stuff please. I don’t think that’s your style.”

“You’re right. Not me.”

\* \* \*

By summer of 2004, Joanne and Ralph were talking a long-term commitment. It was working out for her. Kelly was a bit upset at first. You’d think we’d spend more time together, that is, bedroom time. We still saw each other quite frequently, but not so often for sex. And this after three of the kids were off to study or work. Margaret was even engaged. She asked me to give her away at her wedding in the summer of 2005.

But before that, early in 2005, Kelly got a commission to decorate a pretty fancy house and one of the people she hired to carry out part of the work was an attractive guy who was also divorced. He was a few years her junior and he had children who were pre-teens. He had a lot of common interests with Kelly. As with Joanne, I told her to grab the chance if the guy were for real.

Mother died before I’d got round to figuring out how to manage my own particular requirements for female companionship. Truthfully, Margaret’s wedding, the negotiations to sell my business, and Mother’s final decline occupied a fair bit of my attention.

\* \* \*

I came in from the funeral and changed into a sweatshirt and pair of slacks. The letter from Mother was on the table in the dining room. I found the letter opener I kept by the phone in the kitchen and opened it. It had

been carefully hand written, with a fountain pen of course, in her clear and well-rounded cursive handwriting.

My dear son Joseph,

Since you are reading this, you will know I have passed on. I had what I consider a very good life. I was able to do most of the things I really wanted to do. However, I have not been able to tell you some important things that I desperately would have liked to. I made a promise that I would never tell some things that I knew. In this time that I expect will be my final few weeks, I have come to the conclusion that while I won't "tell" these secrets, I must at least pass on information that I believe may be important for you to complete your life well.

Let me say first that I am proud of you, both in your accomplishments and in your behaviour as a man. In your early adult life, you had to deal with disappointments -- terrible disappointments -- with Emma and Jessica who both let you down, whether or not blame can be attributed. However, I doubt there was anything you could have done other than what you did. Moreover, you handled yourself with dignity and prudence. Many people lose themselves after such disappointments.

Your business has, I know, been central to your life, and many people may think that you have sacrificed your personal life on that altar. I know that not to be the case, having met Kelly and Joanne. Your efforts to present them as friendly neighbours may have fooled others. I am old enough to have seen the contentment derived from trust and friendship along with pleasure. The three of you navigated a delicate and difficult passage for nearly a decade. You were all good for each other, and that the women have now moved on is temporarily inconvenient, but I sincerely believe no more than that. No matter how good people are, they do not necessarily fulfil each other's needs. You will have to seek your own special lady.

However, that is not the subject of this letter.

You may have some recollection of Michael Cotton, your Dad. He was a fine man, someone of great kindness and integrity. He was, however, gay, to use a word which

did not exist when I married him. We enjoyed a very strong friendship, with shared interests in a number of subjects and activities. And we had a good marriage, despite some obvious limitations.

Michael was not your father. I know that must seem rather blunt.

As you know I was for more than two decades the personal secretary to a man we will refer to as John Smith. I'm sure you will be able to figure out who he was. For most of my time in his employ, I was also his mistress. While many such situations are the result of a man forcing himself on a woman, my arrangement with John was discussed in advance, and set down in a contract that was executed generously. I have no complaints.

John might have some complaint, since he did not want any consequences from our relationship. I, on the other hand, missed having children. When I got into my forties, I figured I'd stop using that confounded rubber disk and messy cream, since my monthlies were so light and irregular. And truthfully, I rather hoped I'd have an "accident". You were definitely wanted. And even John admitted that he felt rather pleased about you.

Michael was also an employee of John's industrial organization, and because he was gay, there was always a question of secrecy and lack of companionship. Michael worked keeping track of details -- financial statements and legal documents -- of John's family conglomerate. Over the years, Michael and I had many conversations together while waiting for meetings to start or end. We were the people who made sure the i's were dotted and the t's crossed. My marriage to Michael meant my pregnancy did not cause a scandal. John did not involve himself with your childhood, but I know he took an interest.

I helped select and train a successor to myself. I found a woman in her thirties who was an extremely competent secretary and assistant and who was handsome without being distractingly -- or perhaps obviously -- pretty. We had a frank talk -- John was generous in sensible and practical ways. Not jewellery or furs, but bonuses and pensions, along with good fountain pens and writing desks. Things that have value without being gaudy. John and Anne got on well, and she was with him until he died 15 years later. By then she had a quite respectable stock portfolio

that she managed herself into several million dollars. I saw her once on the arm of a very handsome man some years her junior. Good for her.

I can honestly say I enjoyed my years with Michael, though of course they lacked some elements of physical enjoyment. I've been lucky enough to find a few male friends since that time who could give me some joy and were also good companions. You probably are well-aware, given your time with Joanne and Kelly, that in life sex is more punctuation than words. One can more easily do without one than the other, though if one can find both, life is so much smoother.

In any event, the purpose of this letter is to provide you with a more complete story for your life. I sincerely hope you will not try to use the information here to seek some gain from the 'John Smith' organization or family. You have done well enough that I believe you do not need such money. I also believe any foray into legal efforts to acquire status with or recognition by the family will only stir up trouble that will rebound upon you in very negative ways. Nevertheless I would not blame you for investigating your past within those limits.

As I have said above, I am proud of you and you have been a good son. I love you dearly and am, without qualification, glad that you came into my life.

My love forever,

Your mother, Katherine Rivers-Cotton

P.S. It occurs to me that I will be cremated and have not specified the disposition of my ashes. If it is not too much of an inconvenience, can you perhaps keep them until you venture to the Maritimes and scatter me in the sea somewhere?

\* \* \*

I put the letter down and made myself a mug of instant coffee. I started the CD player with some historical English dance tunes by a band called Bare Necessities. I'd picked it up at a Contra dance in Syracuse, New York, a few years before. There weren't lyrics and with the volume at a modest level I could allow myself to think for a while.



A lot had happened in the past few months, topped off by Mother's letter.

Did it bother me at all that Dad wasn't actually my father, biologically speaking. Frankly, no. Dad – Michael – had died before I was cognizant of the mechanisms of human reproduction. What counted in a parent was their obvious caring and love, and Michael gave me that unequivocally. He was Dad. John Smith – whoever he was – was simply a name in a letter, and in this case, an alias rather than a real name.

But something did bother me. Mother had had a life much beyond what I knew about. There were stories – she said secrets – and I somehow wanted to know about them.

Did I want money or recognition from the John Smith family or companies. No, though if there were mutual interest in getting to know each other, I would welcome that. But I decided that apart from my private notes, I would never use a name other than John Smith to refer to the man who had, with my mother's collaboration, given me life.

Curiosity – raw, nosy, persistent curiosity – was going to drive me to learn as much as I could about my mother's life with my Dad, and about John Smith and his life and interaction with my mother. I realized I would at least have a few months distraction and respite from the need to find a new career or life task.

\* \* \*

I was fairly busy over the next few weeks. First, there were some details of the purchase of my business that required my attention. To minimize capital gains, some months before I'd up a new corporation that would pay me a salary and provide a vehicle for new activities. I called it MKJ Inc. from the initials of Michael, Katherine and Joseph.

I – well MKJ – was allowed to keep copies of all my files, and the buyers had arranged a sign-off procedure. It was rather tedious, but since I had a copy of the inventory, it would also protect me. The purchase conditions did not prevent me from using my own code, just not commercially for five years. And I had made sure I was allowed to use it for my own purposes.

This was important, as well over 90% of my code was for generic kinds of problems in cleaning, searching and sorting data. I planned to convert many of them to open-source code under a different programming language, probably Python or R, maybe both. There were already packages available on public repositories for the same tasks, but my code would likely be more efficient and perhaps easier to maintain. I planned to get involved with the free software movement – meaning free as in speech rather than free as

in beer. It would preserve my work, which the buyers mostly wanted to bury so they could exercise a *de facto* monopoly at least in the proprietary software market. My guess was that the open source software would erode that possibility faster than they imagined. Anyone who wished would be able to use my software for carrying out tasks related to managing data, and who would know the code as well as I?

On top of this, there were some matters of my mother's estate to look after. There was her unit in the retirement home to clear of her personal furniture, clothing and other things. I had already made an appointment the day after her funeral – the Wednesday – to do that.

\* \* \*

My appointment at the retirement home was at 10. I noticed it was with Melanie Jansen. It turned out this was the woman who had given me Mother's letter. It occurred to me that she could have given it to me today,

I'd rented a van – it would be enough for the furniture I was keeping; the rest would be offered to the retirement home or charity. Fortunately the rental place would pick me up, and did so at 9. I had enough time to return to my house to get boxes, then got a coffee from Tim's before I went to the retirement home.

I presented myself to the reception desk and was sent through to Ms. Jansen's office.

"Good morning, Mr. Cotton. I'll get the key for your mother's unit and we'll go straight up."

She returned with mother's purse and her door key which she gave to me, saying, "I found the key on the bedside table, but when your mother was found unconscious, I took her purse and locked it in our safe. I'm sorry that I forgot to mention that yesterday. I've also taken the liberty of cancelling her telephone and her cable subscriptions. I have your address. Is that the one we should use to forward any correspondence?"

I answered that would be fine, but that I would be happy to pick up anything that came if the residence left me a message on my answering machine or sent me an email.

As we got into the elevator, Ms. Jansen said, "I didn't know whether to wait until this morning to give you the letter from your mother, but when she gave it to me, she seemed anxious that you got it as soon as possible."

"Thank you. It was rather a long letter and reading it would have taken time from what I need to do today."

"My records show that Ms. Cotton had only one key signed out. Is that correct?"

“Yes. She figured the staff could let me in if there were an emergency. I think it was a sort of statement of independence.”

“Yes. She liked to be her own person.” Ms. Jansen summarized my mother well.

Ms. Jansen had given me the key so I could come and go, and I would turn it in when I left. She had some masking tape, and we used it to tag the bed and shower chair and kitchen furniture that belonged to the home. We made a list of the bigger items I would not be taking: a sofa, a LazyBoy chair, coffee table, a bedside stand, a standard lamp, two table lamps, a VCR/DVD player and a TV in a sort of entertainment center. There was a modest bookcase of real wood, not the IKEA variety. I’d keep that and some books as mementos of Mother. The rest could go.

We went back down to the lobby. I needed to get my toolbox in case anything needed dismantling, and I also wanted some collapsed packing boxes and tape, as well as the two wheel movers’ dolly.

Overall, it took me about two hours to pack and move Mother’s things. Not a lot of time really to pack up what was left of a long lifetime’s accumulation of items.

When I got back upstairs with the dolly etc., I checked the purse. The wallet was still there, with her health card, the identity card that served like a driver’s license for ID since she stopped driving, her VISA and Mastercard, and about \$200 in notes. Her change purse must have had about \$20 in loonies and toonies. A lipstick, some tissues, a notepad, two pens, one of which was her Conway Stewart fountain pen, and a sort of address book. I set it on the tall-boy in the bedroom.

As mentioned, I’d decided to keep the small bookcase and some of the books – hardbacks with nice bindings. For those I was discarding I rifled the pages to make sure there was nothing between the pages. I found two \$50 and two \$20 bills in total in some paperbacks. Mother liked to have some spare money around. I put the books I didn’t want in a box.

In the kitchen, I emptied the kettle. It was a high-end electric jug type. I could use it myself. Also her toaster oven and coffee maker. The microwave was an inexpensive one. It may even belong to the residence. There was a stick-type blender. Mother liked to make herself smoothies of fruit and yogurt. Might as well keep that, though I did have one already. There were a few good kitchen knives and utensils; the rest could go to charity. Dishes the same – mostly Corelle, since it was lighter and easier for her to handle. I kept a couple of fancy plates and bowls, ones that had memories from my childhood, along with the Wedgewood sugar bowl and creamer. The cutlery was decent enough stainless, and it was in a good divider tray that fitted perfectly in a packing box. Easier to simply take the whole thing. I could change my mind later, but spare cutlery was often useful.

There were some canned goods and some cookies and candy in the cupboards which I packed, since I could use them up. Some tea bags, condiments and instant coffee. Nothing much in the fridge except some milk that I dumped, and some ground coffee, which I didn't. A shrivelled apple and a blackened banana went in the garbage – there was a bin under the sink with a bag in it. I had a separate bag for dry rubbish like the old underwear. While under the sink, I found a few cleaning supplies which I packed up. I'd use them. In fact, I could hear my mother's "Waste not; want not" dictum in my head as I put them in a box inside double plastic bags in case of leakage.

I now opened all the cupboard doors and made sure things were empty by standing on a chair and checking to corners. Then I opened the kitchen drawers one by one and made sure they were clear. Oh. Under the stove. Yes a couple of cookie trays and a decent glass pie dish. Hadn't been used for several decades probably. Altogether there were two saucepans and a frying pan and cover. I put them on top of the cutlery. There was a small toolbox with some minor tools. I kept those. Maybe useful as a set for the car, though I already had one. Somehow I can't resist hanging on to tools.

Broom closet. Just a broom and a dustpan and brush. Dollar store varieties. I left them as they would be helpful to the staff or the next tenant.

The bedroom.

I took clothes off the hangers and put those that were reasonable to give away in boxes appropriately marked that was in one corner of the living room. I sorted the hangers – mother liked to have good quality hangers for some of her better clothes, so I put those in a box to keep. The rest I put in a bag with the charity items.

I decided to keep her tall-boy. It would serve ultimately to keep her things that I wanted to sort through. In the top drawer I found her other purses – two of them now – and her jewellery box. She didn't have much that was expensive except for a decent dress ring and a string of good pearls. I'd already been given her wedding and engagement rings by the funeral parlour.

I checked the extra purses. Both were almost empty. In one there was a damaged wallet. I almost threw it out, but decided to check it more carefully later. If Mother kept it, there was likely a reason.

In the other was a cellophane package of tissues and a half-empty box of condoms, expired about 10 years. Good for Mother! The absurd thought came to mind that it might have been worth celebrating with a marching band if they'd been up to date. Mother would have approved of that.

I felt awkward as I tossed underwear and stockings in a big garbage bag. Less so with some sweaters and scarves – charity box. A few handkerchiefs – we didn't use them now, but these were lacy and monogrammed. Hmm. There were some with initials I didn't recognize. I left them in the drawer.

One drawer had a sewing box. Mostly empty now, but it did have some

odds and ends. I decided to keep it for now.

In the closet, I found several hat boxes. It brought back a vague memory from when I was a toddler of my mother and father at church – had we really gone to church then? – and mother was wearing a hat. Looking in one of the hat boxes, there it was. I thought of keeping it, then decided not, then changed my mind again and decided to take it home and photograph it before giving it away. Probably useful for a theatre company costume collection. The other hats I put for charity in their characteristic drum-like boxes.

On the closet shelf, I found a couple of photo albums and a metal deed box. Locked. I went to the bedside stand and I found a set of keys in the drawer and one of them fitted the box. There were a couple of other keys on the ring, one of which I recognized as for her safety deposit box. That reminds me ... Well, not today. I already had signing access so I was fairly sure what was there.

I put the keys in her purse and put the purse, the photo albums and the metal box in one of the cardboard boxes to go, then used a marker to put an asterisk on this box. It would be kept apart so it didn't get mixed up with any of the other boxes.

Front closet. Mother's coats and jackets, shoes and boots. I checked all the pockets. Had I done that with the other clothes? Hmm. Yes, I remember checking the one or two items that had pockets. Women generally used purses, and I had the one she used regularly, and the special event ones were likely in the tall-boy. However, I know she also liked to wear clothes with pockets. I went back to the bags and double-checked.

There was a knock at the door. It was Ms. Jansen.

"Hi. I was on the floor, so thought I'd check if there were any questions."

I did have a couple. "Thanks. Can I ask if it's OK to leave here anything for charity? And also where to put garbage?"

"Yes, if we can assume anything here is to be given away, that would be fine. Though I hope you won't be leaving stuff we really have to throw away. But I see you have at least one heavy duty garbage bag, and you've marked 'charity' on some boxes. Please leave the garbage bag outside the door, assuming it's dry garbage. I'll put a form at the front desk that you can sign on your way out to state that we may dispose of anything left in the unit as we see fit. "

"There's also the kitchen garbage. There was some rather out of date fruit ..."

"If it's in an appropriate bag, you can put it in the chute down the hall."

"Thanks. I'll make sure it's tied up properly. There isn't much. Mother didn't like a lot of waste."

"She was a remarkably organized woman," Ms. Jansen said as she departed.

The tall boy was pretty well empty, but I moved everything that was left to the bottom drawer, then put a strap around vertically to keep the drawers closed. It was then pretty easy to put the tall boy on the dolly, and I put a strap around horizontally to make life easier. I took this down right away, locking the unit door behind me. There was, after all, money and credit cards in the purse.

When I returned, I saw that I had just 3 packing boxes and the hat box.

The bathroom? I'd nearly forgot, but a need to pee pointed me in that direction.

After I washed my hands, I opened the cabinet that was behind the mirror. Soap, toothpaste, etc. I took unopened packages, including a couple of toothbrushes, and dumped the rest in the waste bin. Oh. Better consolidate that with the kitchen garbage. There were two drawers in the vanity. I found mother's prescription drugs there. There was a bag of plastic bags hanging in the front hall closet, so I got a suitable one and put the four sets of pills in it. I'd take it to the pharmacy sometime.

There were some over-the-counter items and vitamins. I tossed the bottles that seemed old or nearly empty, and put the rest in with the kitchen stuff. There were two boxes of tissues in one drawer, and an unused toothbrush in its sealed package.

Looked in the shower. There was a back scrubber; I left it. The linen closet had some towels, but most were marked with the residence logo. There were some good quality towel sets I took out and packed in boxes, along with a few tea towels that I remembered Mother using.

Final bathroom check. All drawers and cupboards empty except for the residence towels.

Final bedroom check. Oh, the bedside stand. The drawer had a flashlight, and there was the radio. I packed them up. Mother's hearing aid. I packed it, as I knew they were costly. I guessed there were charities that could use them, and later found that was correct. Some batteries for the flashlight and hearing aid. A few trinkets. In a small cupboard were mother's slippers – two pairs. Into the charity bag.

Under the bed – nothing. That was good. Back to the living room and check under the sofa and chair. Found a loony and some cookie crumbs. There was a vacuum cleaner in the front closet. It was an old one, so I'd left it there. It might actually be part of the residence equipment, but I didn't think so.

I moved three boxes down on the dolly. The strap was really useful for this.

I moved the heavy-duty garbage bag to the corridor, but didn't tie it yet. Then I checked for any other garbage. Oh., there were two waste baskets I remember mother buying one day we were out together. I emptied them into

the kitchen garbage – there were only a couple of tissues and a toothpick – then tied the bag with its built-in ribbon and dumped it in the chute down the hall. There remained the asterisk box and the hat box and the waste baskets. One more walk round – there was nothing left to take, so I tied the garbage bag, straightened the boxes and bags for charity in the living room, made sure doors were closed and lights were off, and trundled out with the last items on the dolly, returning the key and signing the release form on the way out.

It didn't take much time to unload the van, but I used the dolly to get the tall boy up to the room I had up to now used for storage. I now planned to use it for Mother's things for a while while I went through them. I'd cleared it out over the weekend, tossing some things I should have disposed of many moons ago and moving the rest to a pair of metal shelves I'd found on sale at Walmart earlier in the year but only assembled this weekend and set up in the basement.

Thanks to the straps, the dolly, and the fact the drawers were mostly empty, I was able on my own to get the tall-boy upstairs fairly easily. Time was getting on, and the van was on the clock, so I left all but the asterisk box in the garage. That box I put inside. The other three could be stacked in the corner of the garage for now while I drove the van back to the rental agency and they gave me a lift home.

It was now mid-afternoon. I took a shower, then made a pot of tea. While it was steeping, I carried the asterisk box up to the storage room. Maybe for now I'd call it Mother's room. Easier to think of it that way.

I took my tea into the next room, which I used as an office. It had a single bed if I wanted to use it as a guest room. If I had a couple to stay, I'd use it and let them have the master bedroom and ensuite. My place was pretty good, with a powder room downstairs and a full bath plus a full ensuite upstairs. My laundry was up here too, which saved a lot of stair climbing.

I checked my email. Several condolence emails, a message from the funeral director that Mother's ashes and various documents would be ready for me tomorrow afternoon, and some well-wishing from colleagues at the business I'd just sold. Finally a pair of emails from Kelly and from Joanne with their quite personal messages of sorrow, as well as mentioning that work had prevented their staying longer at the funeral reception.

There were a few of my staff I had told about the business sale in advance, and they had already arranged to discreetly move to other companies at an appropriate time. It suited them to get the severance they were due before leaving. I'd negotiated a good package for my people. There were a couple who would be annoyed, but truthfully I'd been thinking of letting them go rather soon as their estimate of their abilities was grossly exaggerated.

Overall, most of the staff should do reasonably well.

I had put in a call when mother died to James Goodstreet, Mother's lawyer. Actually I used him too for my personal matters. He'd returned my call, via the answer-machine, and said to call him when I had the death certificate. I picked up my phone – the land-line one – and called his office. On informing his secretary that the funeral director said I could pick up Mother's ashes and documents tomorrow, she said that would almost certainly include copies of the death certificate, since she herself had phoned the funeral director's office to ask for these – she had Mother's pre-arrangement details beforehand. Then she asked if I was available at 2 p.m. Friday to see Mr. Goodstreet.

\* \* \*

There are times when you should be doing things but can't seem to get round to them. For the rest of Wednesday, the most productive thing I registered doing was to move the boxes from the garage to Mother's room. Well, I did take a trip to Canadian Tire and found a couple of plastic folding tables about 5 feet long by two feet wide. I set these up in Mother's room so I could use them to sort things.

Perhaps I should also note that I remembered that I had a couple of laptops in addition to my main one – and also in addition to my tower computer. These extra laptops I'd brought from my business, along with several external hard drives. I set these up in my office and transferred all the files that were not operating-system related to a pair of external drives. They were slightly clunky ones, but good sized for the time – 150 GB each. I'd have to sort through and organize those files. And think of a good off-site storage.

When I was sure one of the laptops was clean, I installed Debian Linux from a CD I'd burned from a download. One of the external drives was empty, and I formatted that to check its integrity. That took about an hour, during which I went for a walk.

It was around supper time, so I took myself by McDonalds. Yes, not good for me, but occasionally one has to break the rules. I had a Big Mac, no fries, and a coffee. On my way home I passed by Kelly's place – Joanne had moved to a similar unit nearby and Ralph had found a job in Ottawa. They weren't married yet, but we all wondered when we would hear that they were going to.

Kelly was sitting on her front steps. It wasn't very cold, and today there'd been a sprinkle of rain. She had a jacket on, as did I.

"Hi," I said. "Tom not home?"



“He’s got a big job they want to finish. We’ll probably not eat until after 9. I’m trying to avoid attacking the cookie jar. Charlie ate a whole frozen pizza and has gone off to one of his friends to work on math homework together. Thought I’d sit out here for a bit and get some air.”

“Thanks for the condolences, and for relaying the message to Joanne.” Kelly had been the first person I’d phoned after learning Mother had died.

“It’s probably why I’m sitting out here thinking. Joanne and I both liked your Mom.”

“She liked you too. Wanna know something – she’d figured out that the three of us were, well, more than friends, and she was OK with it. She’d left a letter to be given to me after she died, and I got it yesterday and she mentioned you both.”

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Kelly said. “She had a pretty good idea how things worked.”

“I also learned that my Dad wasn’t my biological father.”

“Really!”

“Yeah. For about 20 years she was the personal secretary – and it turns out mistress – of a pretty big industrialist. The man I called Dad worked for the same outfit, and he and Mother were friends. Dad was – she told me in the letter – gay and getting near retirement, and they got along, so he provided a respectable outcome. From what she wrote, rather more than that. My Dad was a good man.”

“And your father – the industrialist?” Kelly asked.

“Mother said I’m to use the name John Smith to refer to him, and not seek money or recognition from the family or the businesses. However, I do rather think I’d like to learn more about him, and I’ll see what I can find out without being a nuisance.”

“Yeah. You should. It’s good to know about yourself. By the way, did I hear correctly that you sold your business.”

“Yep, I’m out on the street.”

“They don’t want you to stay on?” Kelly asked.

“No. And I don’t want to. They offered me the chance. In fact, double the money in stock than I took in cash.”

“Double! Can I be rude and ask how much?”

“Since it’s you, and only you – don’t tell anyone else please – I took 15 million in cash. Actually US. So I don’t have to find myself a job. I’ve quite a few things I’d like to do, though, and I like to be helpful.”

“That’s a pretty good chunk of change as long as you’re not silly in how you spend it. Though ten years ago, I’d have thought it impossible to spend that much, I know now it can be squandered quickly.”

I got an idea that would help me out. “Kelly. Now I don’t have the business, I’m looking for a place to keep a disk drive off-site for backup. You

know, in case of fire. Any chance you have a drawer where such a drive could be kept?"

"Better. There's a filing cabinet with a lockable drawer, and it's in the garage."

She got up and went to the garage door, where there was a touchpad. She said "Watch!", then touched four numbers for which I recognized the sequence as the two digit year and month of her birth. The door opened and at the back corner of the garage there was a filing cabinet. A key was in one of the drawers. A second drawer also had a lock. Kelly took the key and gave it to me.

"There you go. Tom uses the other drawer to exchange documents and drawings with his workers or with me. He's bolted the cabinet to the wall."

"Thanks Kelly. Let me know if I can return a favour sometime."

"I will. Don't worry. You're not out of my life completely, Joe."

"I'm glad," I said.

"Now get along before the neighbours think we're making out in here."

\* \* \*

James Goodstreet welcomed me into his office on Friday afternoon. After we were seated either side of his desk, he took the documents I had handed him and selected one of the death certificates.

"I'm sorry that Katherine is gone, Mr. Cotton. In the many years she was my client, we got to know each other more than most people. I admired her immensely, and will miss her."

"Thank you," I said. There really wasn't much else I could say, of course.

"Now in preparation for meeting you I went over your mother's will, and it is pretty simple. She has directed that you get 60 % of her estate, and the Nature Conservancy the rest, but you are to have any of her physical possessions you wish. I think those are relatively few. She expressed a distinct lack of interest in objects, and she had disposed of all real estate some years ago."

Goodstreet had, until now, not told me anything I did not already know.

"So we come now to the rest of her estate. I believe you are aware – indeed are a co-signatory – on her bank account and the Royal Bank Dominion Securities retirement account."

"Yes. The bank account had about \$25,000 in it as of Tuesday. I hope I did nothing wrong in using it to pay the roughly \$8,500 for her funeral yesterday afternoon."

"Strictly, I suppose, you should have waited until the account was released to the executor, which is you, or else paid it yourself to be reimbursed

later, but it is the estate that is normally responsible for disposition of the deceased. And the account is joint with you for signing as we noted. Once the death is registered, of course, we have to wait for probate, but there are provisions for burial etc., and I shall write to the bank to ensure there is at least half the balance available to you.”

I said “The retirement account, when I last looked, was about \$175,000. She thought it would see her out, and it has done more than that.”

“Yes, yes. That’s about right. And indeed she told me the same. However, there’s the Edward Jones account.”

This was a shock!

“Really! She never said anything about that.” It seemed her successor Anna was not the only secretary to John Smith to have investments.

“Well, she was an independent soul. And she loved her investments. Was rather good at them too. She has them with a man named O’Connor out in one of the suburbs. He used to visit her every quarter in the residence.”

“Is there much in the account?” I asked.

“Well, there are rumours you have sold your company, so the amount may not seem so great, but the last balance was approximately \$5 million.”

“That’s quite a surprise!”

“Yes. She did quite well. There’ll be some taxes due, and some fees etc., along with the Nature Conservancy portion, but I’d expect the net to you to be at least 2.5 million. What I wanted to know from you – since you are her executor – was how we should proceed.”

I said “Mother used my accountant – the name and address are on your file I expect.” Goodstreet nodded. “I’ll suggest you forward all the relevant information to them, asking that they get all the material in order as quickly as is reasonable. I expect we won’t be able to do all the tax filings until year end, but we can have everything set up and hope there are no glitches.”

“Yes, that should be fine.”

“I’ve also realized that my own will is now out-of-date. Mother was my beneficiary.”

“You do have a subsidiary set of dispositions,” Goodstreet interjected. “Have you altered your intentions.”

“No, so we will wait until Mother’s estate has been settled.”

“I believe, Mr. Cotton, that it should go fairly smoothly, which will mean my fees are less, but also that I will not have to work very hard.”

We bade our farewells and I came home. Friday night. I made a call to one of my former senior programmers, Harry McCormick, recently divorced, and we arranged to meet at a nearby pub for a meal and drinks. Harry and I get together a couple of times a year to catch up. Our conversations are probably two-thirds technical, since we seem to use each other to compare notes on developments in computer technology and try to guess which ones

will be important in the future. And we jawbone a bit about life, love, sports and politics, not necessarily in that order. I must confess, I came home a little less than sober, but since I wasn't driving, I posed a danger only to myself. I think I managed a sherry, two glasses of wine, and a scotch over the evening, when I rarely exceed two small glasses of wine. Some people might say I'm no fun at a party.

\* \* \*

In the rest of the year of 2005, if I look at concrete accomplishments, I did not do very much. I did make Mother's room rather tidy, and unpacked all the boxes, distributing the appliances and other household objects. I left the handkerchiefs in the tall-boy after noting them in an inventory in the laptop I nicknamed John. It was to be for all my investigations of John Smith. I also labelled the external drive of the copy of material as JohnDisk1, having found another spare that I labelled JohnDisk2. Every week or so I'd take one to Kelly's and bring the other back. Sometimes I'd do the same with my regular backups, though they somehow did not change nearly so rapidly. I suppose I could have used an online backup, but I liked to take a walk every day, and swapping disks gave me one reason to do so.

One thing I did do during the run up to Christmas 2005 was read. It had been some years since I could read purely for my own pleasure. I became a frequent visitor to our local branch of the Ottawa Public Library, and also took the bus downtown to the main branch on Laurier at Metcalfe, where I could look at the old newspapers on microfilm. I was keen to find out how Canada saw itself in the period Mother worked for John Smith, namely from 1934 to 1954.

The period covered the Second World War and Korea. The John Smith companies did a lot of War work. They weren't the biggest firms, but they had fingers in lots of pies. I began to wonder how much Mother had been involved in all the events, plans and secrets. When I saw interesting pieces of information that might be relevant, I made notes. Eventually I included these in the data collection I'll talk a bit about later.

This library activity reflected on my review of the material in the box, the photo albums, and the letter I had been given. Even some of the odds and ends in the jewellery box, the sewing box, and other items like the handkerchiefs. The monogram on two of these was KR, which I assumed was Katherine Rivers – Mother. There was one that I shall say was JS, which I took for John Smith. Then there were a couple of women's ones with initials FB. That I could not figure out.

There were a number of letters, seemingly of a personal nature. There was also a small box, rather like one to contain a necklace or brooch, with two compartments. There were two blobs of metal in each compartment. Above the first, which had the shape of a bullet, was written, seemingly in my mother's hand, "Mauser Gewehr 98 / April 9, 1917". In the other compartment was a more mangled piece of metal, with the inscription "Beretta M1935, September 26, 1943".

I registered all this inventory in a PostgreSQL database. That would let me search it. Not that easy to use, but I could write scripts for different tasks, and it had several graphical interfaces, in particular pgAdmin. I'd be able to cross-link different ideas once I had more information. I also purchased a relatively inexpensive flatbed scanner for this project. I figured it would be easiest to have the scanner right there. An early Christmas present from Mother!

I also emptied and closed the safety deposit box. There wasn't much in it apart from civil documents – birth and marriage ones, along with Michael's death – but they were part of the story. I brought the material to Mother's room nonetheless.

It did occur to me that I might be getting in deeper than I should. However, I did want to renovate my computer skills. I'd installed some Python tools and the R interpreter, and downloaded some open tutorial material. There was plenty for me to do.

Despite my keenness to get on with the investigation, in this last couple of months of 2005 I did quite a lot of just following my nose into different books, a lot of them pure escapist nonsense. I also watched much more TV than I'd ever done before, and rented some movies.

I felt that I was possibly a bit withdrawn on the social front, but I did manage to go to several concerts – mostly classical or choral. I danced at every contra that Fall, and joined some of the dancers at the after-party in a local restaurant bar. As this was Saturday night, and I had to drive to the venue, my drinks were all non-alcoholic.

My attendance record at the creative writers' group was perfect, and I always had a small contribution. I found the task of writing was getting easier, and since I was reading a lot, I seemed to have plenty of ideas. I had two meals with one of my fellow writers, Beth Zabrowski – "I should have made him change his name to mine, which was Shaw" – a widow of nearly 70 who was lively and fun to be with. We could talk easily, and I told Beth about Mother's letter, but not all the details. We'd call each other too from time to time to chat.

I also got together with Kelly and Tom, Joanne and Ralph. Larry Amata, a friend since grade 4, and his wife Jennifer had me over for dinner once. I must remember to invite them sometime. And there were a couple of

Christmas parties that were partly from my old business. So I kept busy.

In recalling those waning months of 2005, I guess I also spent more time than I remember putting the money from the sale of the business to work for me in MKJ Inc.. Since I had to communicate with Bill O'Connor of Edward Jones about my mother's portfolio – as the executor I had management of the account, and more than half would eventually come to me – I decided to put about 2/3 of the proceeds in an account with O'Connor. The rest I decided to put with Eric Phillips, the man who handled my mother's retirement account at Royal Bank, Dominion Securities. I had meetings with both men. I actually needed to talk to Phillips as he handled my own RRSP, which had received a lump sum from the Cotton Computing retirement plan. That was quite large given my age and the fact I'd set up a sensible plan early at my business. Indeed, it was over \$600,000. However, I found O'Connor more interesting and lively. With Phillips I nevertheless set up a portfolio that would give me access to about a million quickly if I needed it. Not that my ordinary bank account was suffering – I'd spent very little over the last year or so for some reason. Actually hadn't been on vacation for 18 months with the long-winded back and forth to sell Cotton Computing.

Christmas is, of course, not an easy time for a single person. I could have invited myself somewhere, but decided instead to take a Christmas cruise in the Caribbean that covered December 22 to Dec 29 round trip sailing from Fort Lauderdale. I chose a smaller ship, booked an upscale cabin, took lots of books, a good notebook and some pens. I'd never done a cruise. I likely won't again, but the single experience was still worthwhile.

Getting away was partly for distraction, partly to provide a different context in which to consider a new direction for my life. One can be a passenger or a pilot when it comes to living. I prefer to try to direct where I go, so I want to be a pilot. Of course, before I went on the cruise I got some knowing looks that I took to mean that a cruise was a good way to pick up women. In reality, I wasn't looking for casual sex, though it was, as far as I could discern, easily available. On the ship I did find a couple of nice ladies to share some meals and dancing. The movement of the ship made dancing an interesting sensation.

Watching people and listening, I realized that what I was doing in researching John Smith, in learning new skills in my computing area, and in catching up on reading and thinking were all appropriate at this point in my life. Since I did not have to chase an income, I could take the time to consider my options.

In the event, the cruise presented no woman who remotely fell into the category of potential life-partner. Had one popped up, I would have made sure to give her my attention. But none did.

That doesn't mean there weren't potential distractions. On one occasion,

a moderately attractive New Englander was one of my dinner companions. She suggested a walk on the deck after dinner, but asked if she could get her wrap. I accompanied her to her cabin, and she said she wanted to use the bathroom. When she came out, the halter top fastening behind her neck just happened to come undone, and the bodice of her dress fell down.

“Oh dear,” Daphne said. “Well at least my plastic surgeon did a nice boob job, don’t you think?”

I said “Definitely. Shall I do up the fastening so it stays put?”

Our walk on the deck didn’t last long. I think she thought I was gay. In reality, despite her delightfully well-formed though artificial breasts, I had come to the point of knowing that I didn’t want a casual fling that would evaporate at the end of the voyage. I felt my home to be in Canada, probably but not necessarily in Ottawa, and I did not want the confusion of having my nether parts dragging me off on short term diversions. Even though my relationship with Kelly and Joanne drew strongly on physical activities, we were friends. Had it suited us all, we could have continued for the longer term. As it was, we shared most of a decade.

For New Year’s I actually had an invitation to Kelly’s. A fairly big but not too boozy party. It was good to see all the kids again. Kids? Margaret was expecting in June or July, though you’d need to be told to notice, and Heather was entwined with a fellow in a Harvard jacket, though it was almost certain he wasn’t a student there. I was able to catch up with what the kids were doing and talk to Tom and Ralph and wish them and their ladies well in 2006.

\* \* \*

I’d found John Smith’s capsule biography in Wikipedia and more information from some odd web sites from the Maritimes. On one I found a brief mention that his papers had been donated to the University of Ottawa, where John Smith had been given an honorary doctorate. Lucky for me.

The bio said he’d been wounded at Vimy Ridge. Well, that explained the bullet and the date. Apparently he was a junior officer and was hit almost as the battle began. Probably saved his life, especially as it seemed he had been assigned administrative duties for the rest of the war. I wondered if the wound meant he was partly disabled.

I didn’t find anything about the other slug in the bio. It was, of course, from the time of the second war. I looked up the Beretta M1935. It seemed to be a very compact .32 calibre pistol. In fact it used a cartridge designated as .32 ACP for Automatic Colt Pistol, which was equivalent to a 7.65x17mmSR Browning. The gun was used by both sides of the conflict, especially for

situations where one wanted a small, concealed weapon for close range use. A woman could carry it in a small purse or tucked in the top of her stockings.

In mid-December, I'd spent a morning phoning to try to figure out how I could access the John Smith archive papers. I discovered that I could order up the papers and peruse them in a reading room. Not being a member of the University could have been an obstacle. I had, however, been made an Adjunct Professor a couple of years before when I helped teach a software engineering course. The IT school had active coop programs and my company took one or two students fairly regularly. Apparently my library card was still in force. I also looked up the email of the University Librarian, and if the papers proved worth studying, I would offer a donation to support the operation of the archives.

I also phoned the Archives reading room and talked to a woman archivist who told me I should come in and fill out the form to request that the materials be brought in. I could then come to the reading room with just a pencil and notebook and read the papers.

When the University opened in January, I took the bus to the U of O one morning. Parking there was exquisitely scarce and expensive, while the transitway buses were convenient for me. I knew the reading room for archives was in the Morriset Library, but it took me nearly 20 minutes to find the reading room itself, mainly because the library parts of the building were segregated from the common university parts, with some elevators skipping floors that were outside their "part" of the building. It was confusing until you knew which way to go.

I came in the archives reading room, approached the desk and asked the woman librarian – or maybe she was an archivist, I was unsure – how I should request the papers of John Smith. She answered "I believe you phoned before. You should fill in this form, and we'll bring the papers up here. You should read the guide to handling archives, noting that you may only use a pencil and notebook when using the materials."

"Thanks. I did call before, and I assume it was you I talked to. I'm Joseph Cotton. My mother used to be the private secretary to John Smith fifty years ago. She died last Fall at 95, and left me a letter that has me curious about the man and his company.

Also, I found a similar guide from another archive. I've brought along some cotton gloves in case they help."

The librarian was quiet for a moment, then said "That would be very sensible."

A label on the desk said 'M Baird'. I asked "Are you Ms. Baird?"

She looked flustered. "Er. Yes."

"It's useful to know who I've talked to."

"I'm afraid the papers you want may be in storage and need to be fetched,



which may take a few days,” Ms. Baird said.

“I checked the box on the form asking for an email when they’re ready.

For this morning, I planned to check the catalog for background material. Can you suggest the best place to do that?”

“There are catalog terminals on each of the floors, but you probably will find it easiest to be close to the Canadian history section which is Library of Congress classification F. There are signs with the classification groupings, including at and on the elevators.”

“Thank you Ms. Baird. I’ll probably see you again when the papers are here.”

\* \* \*

That morning I managed to find some mention of the John Smith companies in a few books and papers, some of which were online. In the afternoon, at home, I entered my notes into my database that was growing.

A few days later I got an email and then started going in to the library quite frequently, about three times a week. It was a nuisance having to write everything down in pencil, then bring it home and enter into my database. Foreseeing that would be very tedious, I first decided to make an inventory with very short notes. There was enough material that just doing the inventory took me about a month or so.

I went to the reading room one day in February 2006, Tuesday the 7th as I recall, which was cool but dry, though there’d been a smattering of snow the day before. I worked steadily through the morning, then went down to the concourse and bought myself a sandwich and coffee. There were students milling about, and I moved to sit in the amphitheatre-like area near the Bookstore. I noticed Ms. Baird already seated, with a space beside her.

“May I join you, Ms. Baird?” I asked, remaining standing so it would not seem I was imposing. She took quite a long time to reply, “Er. Yes .... Of course.”

“Thanks.” I sat and opened my sandwich and placed my coffee on the floor where neither I nor someone else would kick it over.

I said “It’s heavy work, going through the documents.”

Again a long pause, then Ms. Baird said “You seem to be going through the papers in a very systematic way. I think that is the proper approach. Most people try to find something right away, and they mix up the papers too.”

I could hear the edge of complaint in her voice. I said “It’s a lot of work to transcribe things. I guess I could pay for photocopies – I saw a notice to that effect in the Users’ Guide – but I’m going to do an inventory first.”

We both were chewing on our sandwiches. Ms. Baird clearly packed her own, and I must say it looked at least as good as my rather sad offering. Then she said “It will still be quite tedious to find things in your notes, I fear.”

“Oh, I’ve started a database. In fact I’ve dedicated a computer and a pair of external disks to the information, and purchased a scanner for the materials that are my own property. If things look promising, I’ll have to see if the Library will allow scans or photos of material to be made rather than photocopies.”

Ms. Baird looked surprised. “You’re doing all that. It must be important to you. And unless it is part of your work, you must be losing income.”

I got the feeling that this last statement was more than Ms. Baird would normally express. However, I answered truthfully, “I sold my business last year for enough money that I could choose never to work again and still live well if I am moderate in my lifestyle. I’ll probably return to something in a few months. My interest in John Smith is because my mother worked for him as private secretary for about 20 years – I may have mentioned that before – and those years covered the wartime period. When I was younger, I didn’t appreciate what happened back then. Now I’m rather intrigued, and she left some odd mementos that pique my interest.”

Again a pause, but Ms. Baird then said “That sounds like a good project, given you don’t have to scrimp to do it. Perhaps you’ll tell me more as you go on.”

“Sure. You probably know how to find things, so I’ll be glad of any help. But don’t get into trouble with the Library on my account please.”

Ms. Baird looked at her watch. I said “Maybe I’m already getting you in trouble?”

“No, no. Not yet. But I’d better head off.”

We said our goodbyes. As she stood up, I realized she was about my height, a little over 68 inches, with a nice, well-balanced figure. Her face was rather angular, and she wore quite severe glasses and had her hair pulled back in a pony tail. Probably around 40. Very simply dressed in clothes that didn’t help her appearance. I guessed she was painfully shy and might have said more to me than to anyone else this week. Her shyness and rather mismatched features did her no favours. Confidence and a change of wardrobe could possibly make her quite handsome.

\* \* \*

A few days later, while I was working through the last few inches of documents, one of the Library staff approached me.

“Mr. Cotton, I’m Jocelyn Francoeur. Myrna tells me you’ve been building an inventory of the John Smith papers.”

“Yes, that’s right. I hope that’s OK.”

“Absolutely, and I’m sure it will help with your work. I also understand that you’d like to possibly scan or photograph some of the documents for your research.”

“Yes. I was wondering how to make that request. I know I can order photocopies, but they often miss detail and, frankly, they’re rather expensive. I’d prefer to have digital images.”

“Actually, so would we. And we’d also love to have a digital inventory. So I’m here to suggest we should talk about what might be possible. There’s no rush – this is really just to let you know we’re interested. Here’s my card with my email.”

I said “I hope we can work something out. Shall I contact you when I’ve done my inventory, suggesting the portions of the collection I think I’d like to have imaged, and how I propose we might proceed? You may or may not know that I was the owner of Cotton Computing, which I sold a few months ago. I’ve some knowledge in handling information.”

“Yes. That would be helpful. We don’t have much budget, so anything that might involve resources has to go through different committees, and then there’s also the issue of copyrights and privacy.”

“I understand. I’ll certainly be willing to offset costs, and I’ll make sure to include some suggestions about those other matters.”

Our conversation had attracted the attention of the rest of the users, all two of them. I went back to work. About another day would complete my notes for the inventory, but I still had to enter and organize the information.

At lunchtime I was seated when I saw Ms. Baird coming with her lunch bag. I motioned for her to join me.

“Jocelyn said she’d talked to you.”

“Yes,” I replied. “If we can navigate the shoals of money, middle managers and excessive caution, I might have a chance.”

Ms. Baird chuckled, then she said “I ... er ... don’t usually talk to people, but ... er ... I’m rather curious about what you might be learning. I think I may have said that already.”

“Then you’d better call me Joe,” I said.

“Myrna.”

“Well, Myrna, I should have the inventory done by the end of the week, then I’ll be trying to figure out what we have and how it may make sense with what my mother gave me.

Would you like to come and see what I have?”

I saw a shadow of concern pass over her face, so I said

“Oh. Possibly you would be uncomfortable coming to my house. I could bring a laptop somewhere if you’d prefer.”

There was a long pause, then Myrna said “Yes, I guess I do feel a bit awkward coming to a private house, though it would be much easier to talk and look at the material without having to find an appropriate place to set up a computer. I ... er ...”

I said, “Perhaps you could give my address and phone number to a friend and also arrange to phone them when you are home safely. I know I’m trustworthy, but you don’t know me well yet, and there are lots of bad people out there.”

Myrna again was quiet for a very long moment. “That might work.

Actually there was a picture of you in the paper about the sale of Cotton Computing.”

Clearly I’d been checked out. I didn’t mind. As I’d said, there were nasty people out there.

\* \* \*

We arranged that Myrna would come around 3 on Sunday and we’d take a look through the documents then we’d share a simple dinner, where I’d provide the main course and Myrna the dessert. Then I’d drive her home. I hoped the shyness would gradually dissipate, or I’d have a very uncomfortable afternoon. In the conversation, I’d told her I lived alone, so dessert was for two people only.

In the event, once she arrived, her curiosity helped move things along. She liked the inventory, but clearly did not follow the SQL commands.

I said “I rather dislike how SQL commands have to be just so, and they have a rather awkward format. Any typo causes a failure. I usually write a script or try to use one of the graphical interfaces.”

“There’s some similar arcane detail with MARC records for library acquisitions,” Myrna said. “I don’t find it very clear, but I can see why something like it is needed.”

I could appreciate the sentiment. SQL or Structured Query Language was very powerful but awfully clumsy to use. At least I thought so. Unless I spent some time working things out first, I preferred to use some sort of interface, but the programs often were set up with a particular usage in mind.

I said “I try to keep some text files with examples that I’ve used before. If I’m very good, I even add some comments. But often I’m in a hurry, so there’s just the example, and of course, the examples aren’t indexed so I have to browse them.”

“Better than nothing, and I’m sure easier than reading the manuals. Even a librarian like me has heard of the acronym ‘RTFM’,” Myrna said.

We both had a small laugh, but didn’t expand the acronym audibly.

We then looked at some of the items from Mother’s deed box, including the bullets.

“Wow!” Myrna said. “How interesting. You know, of course, that April 9, 1917, was Vimy Ridge.”

“Yes, I’d got that one, but I’m a bit surprised you know it too. Not too many women are up on dates of battles.”

“I guess not. I ... er ... I didn’t fit in much at school. Or even after, I’m afraid. Too ... I don’t know ... geeky I guess.”

“Sometimes a change of wardrobe and a bit of confidence can change that,” I volunteered.

“I guess so,” Myrna said in a tiny voice.

She was looking at the second bullet, from the Beretta, and the date. Her face was almost screwed up in concentration. Then she blurted out “Kiebitz. Operation Kiebitz! The key date was September 26, 1943.”

“Wow!” It was now my turn.

Myrna continued, “I grew up in Bathurst, New Brunswick, which isn’t far from Pointe Maisonnette. Kiebitz was a plan for some U-Boat commanders who were prisoners of war at Bowmanville to escape, make their way to Maisonnette and get away on a U-boat. But the authorities learned about the plan and caught all but one of the escapees who were trying to tunnel. The one that got away went over the barbed wire fence by somehow sliding along the electricity wires. We were told he did something like a zip line. Then he got to the rendezvous, over 1400 km away, but the Navy had HMCS Rimouski and some other boats and some people on shore, even a radar, to try to capture the U-boat. But the German U-boat got suspicious and slipped away. The last escapee got caught though. We learned about Kiebitz from an old navy guy who came to our school and talked about it one time before Remembrance Day.”

“Well, we’d better update the database, though I’ll have to put in a record then think hard how to index it, since there’s no direct link to the material I have either from my mother or the archives. Since I have actually a separate database file for the archives and my own stuff, I’ll start another for background material. I can join them if I need to.” I didn’t mention that I had a separate set of records for Mother’s letter.

“Yes. You have a lot of sleuthing to do, and you may not find what you want. Or you may find something you don’t want.”

“Myrna, that’s worth pointing out. And actually when I started this, I decided that I’d accept what came.”

“Am I wrong in thinking you have some personal interest? You don’t seem as ... er ... detached as most of the people who look at archives.”

“Guess I’m busted. Well, if you can promise not to tell anyone else, I’ll show you a letter my mother had delivered to me after her death.”

“OK. I don’t talk much anyway. Umm ... I’ve been surprised how much I talk to you. So I’ve no problem keeping things to myself if you wish.”

I pulled the letter out of the box and handed it to her. While she read, I entered some notes about Kiebitz and found some material on the web about that operation. Interesting. And it wasn’t far from some of the John Smith operations.

“I understand now why you want to learn more,” Myrna said.

“Yes. And what Mother asks – you know, about money and recognition – is what I’d do anyway. I suppose if there were family members wanting to share some notes, I’d like that. But I’ve got enough money for a comfortable life, and I’ve had loving parents.”

“Yes, many are not so fortunate.”

“Shall we get a drink and begin to think about supper?” I asked. It was about 4:15. I’d a slow cooker with stew and I’d made some fresh bread in the bread machine I had. I found the slow cooker useful, but rarely used the bread machine. An impulse purchase I actually regretted. I think I could make bread by hand with less mess. However, it was convenient to set it up and let the timer take care of everything.

“OK,” Myrna looked a little lost.

We traipsed downstairs and I waived her to the armchair. I figured she’d be antsy if I suggested the sofa, and I was already getting to be able to anticipate what made her shy or awkward, namely any social interaction. Oh dear. She was actually very nice, especially when she felt comfortable with a subject.

“What would you like to drink? I’ve some white or red wine, some beer, some cider, sherry dry to sweet, or juice or pop or tea or coffee. ”

Myrna looked flustered. I said “Too much choice?”

“Yes ... I’m afraid so. And I’m not used to drinking. Meaning alcohol. Mainly it’s expensive, and I worry I might get drunk.”

“Well, I said I’d drive you home, though I could pay for a cab, especially if I have more than 1 glass of anything alcoholic. However, I don’t drink much, though I enjoy a glass or two from time to time. Perhaps you’d like to share a can of cider, so we each get a modest glass.”

“I’ve never had cider. Isn’t it just apple juice?”

“What I’m suggesting is called hard cider by Americans. It’s fermented apple juice. Rather nice. Can get you very drunk if you drink too much, just like most other alcoholic drinks, and may even have more kick because

there's apparently something in apples that goes to the motor nerves. I've never got that far, and I don't intend to."

"Well, if you don't mind giving me just a little to try it, I would like to see if it suits me."

I opened a can of Strongbow and poured a glass for myself and an inch for Myrna. I'd some mixed nuts left over from some I got around Christmas and put out a small bowl each, then carried everything through on a tray, including the can of cider with the remainder for Myrna if she liked the cider.

"Here we are," I said, setting the tray down on the coffee table. I sat on the sofa, not too close to the armchair.

Myrna gave the cider a try. "Oh. Fizzy. Rather nice. I'd expected it to be sweet, but this is nicer."

"Some of the Canadian cider tends to be what a friend calls 'Pepsi Generation'. Far too sweet, and often has a nasty after-taste, at least to my tongue."

I saw Myrna looking at a photo of me, Kelly, Joanne and the kids we'd had one of the staff take at the resort in 2000. It was sitting on a sofa table with some other mementos.

"That's Kelly and Joanne that Mother mentioned in the letter," I said. "Do you want me to tell you about them? I sort of guess that you might be uncomfortable asking but would like to know."

Myrna blushed. "Oh, but I shouldn't ... "

"Let me give you the Coles notes version," I said, and proceeded to give an extremely summarized history. I concluded with, "I was with them all at New Year's at Kelly's. Both ladies live not far away. I have an arrangement to store a couple of disks off-site in Kelly's garage in a drawer for which she's given me a key. I still care for them a lot, and I think they care for me too, but we never really shared much on an intellectual level. It was about having companionship and maybe about NOT having to go searching for someone to be with physically, and I mean physically probably more than sexually."

Myrna was looking down at her feet. She'd brought slippers, something I noted with appreciation, but looking at them indicated discomfort.

"I'm afraid I've scandalized you. I'm sorry. Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea."

"No! No! .... er .... I ... er ... I'm glad you've told me. It's just ... I ... I ... don't have ... er ... any experience."

"You mean no boyfriends?"

"Yes. None. And I'm shy. My parents were quite strict, and warned me that men would do all sorts of things just to ... er ..."

"Get into your panties?" I offered.

Myrna laughed. "Yes. And thank you for making me laugh. I know you're not laughing at me."

“No. There are plenty of people around who like to be cruel and laugh at us,” I said.

“Thanks.”

“Would you like the rest of the cider? I already took half the can.”

“Thanks. I can get it.” She poured the rest of the cider into her glass, then took some nuts and ate them.

“Where did you go to school, Myrna?”

“As I said, I grew up in Bathurst, then went to Mount Allison for a BA, then did Library Science at Toronto and got a job here. I’ve been at U of O for over 15 years.”

“Do they pay OK?”

“Probably as well as can be expected. I’ll not get rich, but I won’t be in poverty.”

“Yes. Most salaried jobs are OK but not a lot more than OK. I was very lucky and I also worked hard. Perhaps too hard. I don’t have a family, and Joanne and Kelly allowed me to work very hard and avoid some of the unpleasantness of being what is termed single. A lot of people spend time and energy to find a partner, and sometimes the person they team up with isn’t very good for them.”

“I’ve been too timid – I’ve never told anyone that. I’ve also had some experiences that scared me.”

“Can you elaborate?”

There was a pause that I thought might not end. Then she said “In the summer after my first year at Mount A, I had a job sorting books that were going to be sent to third-world universities. We did this in a big barn on the outskirts of Sackville. There was a bit of a heat wave, and there was no air conditioning, so we left the doors open to the barn and we wore comfortable clothing. I had some shorts and a halter top. I’d made the top myself so it would fit me properly. A lot of them ... oh, this is awkward ... come loose at the sides, and I’m ... er ... ”

“The old word ‘buxom’ comes to mind, though it doesn’t quite fit you. You are just a little bit larger on top than most women with your frame.”

“That’s sort of it. My rib cage is a bit small for my general height, but my ... er ... bust measurement is close to average, so things look a bit bigger. Especially if I’m wearing summer clothes. Anyway, these two guys who worked at a service station saw me walking home and whistled. They knew my name and yelled, ‘Hey, look at Myrna’s mammaries. Great boobs Myrna. How about we come home and give them a massage?’”

“Not nice,” I said.

“No, but I could have probably ignored it except they followed me home, and if it hadn’t been for my landlady happening to come round the house



and yell at them to go home, I think they might have actually forced their way in. It really scared me.”

“And made it much more difficult to be with someone like me who won’t push you to anything you don’t wish. Though I will try to interest you in trying things. For instance, my very special stew with whole-wheat bread.”

Myrna laughed, and her laugh was clearly one of someone comfortable. We enjoyed the stew – she even had a second helping. Then we ate some of Myrna’s pie. She’d made a blackberry and apple pie, and it was very good. Afterwards I made some decaf coffee in Mother’s coffee machine while we talked about books. Sometime between 7:30 and 8 I drove her home. She hadn’t given me her address or phone number, and when I asked where to take her, she pulled a card from her purse and gave it to me, saying “I guess I don’t normally give it out to men.”

I figured that meant I’d passed another test.

\* \* \*

For the next few days I worked on organizing the material. I concocted some rather crude scripts to generate reports from searches on the database. They were not easy to use and I had to keep refining them. However, I knew from experience that in a situation where the scripts had to find rather special information there would be a lot of trial and error. Once the job was done, the script would be unlikely to be launched again, but would likely be copied and edited to serve a different task.

As a break from trying to script some of the data organization, I looked at some of the letters in Mother’s box. There were a couple from someone named Swenson in the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General.

---

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

January 7, 1943

File: #236554092

Dear Miss Rivers,

Please forgive the informality of a handwritten letter,  
but there is some urgency in communicating this to you.

It is extremely important for the good management of proposed contracts that any documents submitted be precise. We have found this principle to be critical in achieving the required objectives. Possession of clearance to SECRET level will be verified by Unit 30. No prior inmates of internment camps should be engaged.

I remain, Miss Rivers, much obliged for your continuing and faithful assistance, and am,

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

February 22, 1943

File: #112622-80

Dear Miss Rivers,

Once again I must resort to a handwritten letter.

I believe the E 10 14 C contract will be signed tomorrow. Your close cooperation is to be commended. Documents related to this contract must be handled with extreme caution.

I will communicate once the Minister has signed.

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

There was something about these letters that seemed to be related to my childhood. I struggled to remember something just there, slightly but tantalizingly out of reach of recollection.

\* \* \*

On March 18 there was a contra dance and a few days beforehand I phoned Myrna to ask if she would be interested in coming.

"I've heard about contra dancing, but don't know how it's done," Myrna said.

"Have you done any sort of dancing," I asked with some trepidation.

"I used to do Scottish dancing."

That was a relief. "You should be fine. Contra is derivative of English Country Dancing after the American revolution. The English tunes are often semi-classical, and the musicians of the new American republic often played by ear, and didn't know the tunes. So they substituted various jigs and reels, often drawn from Scottish and Irish traditions, as well as American compositions. The dancers also didn't have access to the dancing masters, so the dances got simplified as well. Anyway, if we arrive half an hour early, there's a short instructional session, though if you remember some of the figures from Scottish dancing, you'll probably be able to get the dances right away, because they are all called. Sort of like square dancing, but with less of the patter and not as detailed. Also I think square dancing is not as strictly phrased to the music. Contra dance follows the bar structure of the music and repeats. Most of the tunes are 32 bars, often in 4 verses of 8 bars ABAB or AABB." I sensed I was talking too much. Oh dear.

Anyway, Myrna said she'd come. We had an early dinner at a Chinese restaurant I like – not too large a meal, as contra dance is vigorous. I told Myrna to wear comfortable clothes and flat, indoor shoes. She decided to wear the white dress and dancing slippers she still had from Scottish dancing.

We participated in the introductory session, and she was fine. The experienced dancers participated, which meant the newcomers got a better idea where to go.

I introduced Myrna to some of my dance acquaintances, and many called hello to me as we moved into line for the first dance. Beside us were two people I knew only by first names, John and Susan.

When Myrna said she had done Scottish, Susan said "I've done that for many years. You'll have no trouble with contra."

John said "Do you realize, Susan, we met at Scottish dancing, and I'm not sure if I'm pleased or horrified that it was over 30 years ago?"

"Wow. I guess you're right." Susan replied. "Good for us."

Later Myrna asked me if John and Susan were a couple. I knew they weren't, and that Susan had been widowed about 15 years before. I knew John's wife was named Mary and that they did English dance together. Maybe Myrna and I would try that sometime. Somehow I also knew Mary

found contra a bit too rough and ready. Also that we had common acquaintances who played jigs and reels in the local Celtic Slow Jam.

I probably danced about half the time with Myrna, but she didn't get left to sit out. Various men came to ask her to dance. In truth I asked experienced male dancers to ask her to dance. Since she was a rather natural and economical dancer, this was not such a big favour to ask. Her major difficulty was that she did not have the background to know the general pattern and flow of the dances, so an experienced partner was a great help. I told her to ask prospective dance partners if they were experienced, and to politely suggest that novices should not dance together. At one point we had such a pair next to us, and there was a royal mess during that particular 32 bar round, which we abandoned and set ourselves up for the next round which involved some better dancers.

Normally I stay to the end of the second half, but most newcomers run out of steam well before that. When I sensed Myrna was flagging, I asked if she wanted to stay. We decided to do one more dance, then went to find my car.

"Have a good time?" I asked, though I already knew the answer.

"Yes. It was fun. But I know that I now need a shower. Thank you for bringing me, and for dinner."

"You're more than welcome, Myrna. You're easy to dance with. Some women I have to carry through the swings, and my right hip gets sore."

When we got to her apartment, I asked if I should accompany her to the door.

"No. No. You don't have to." She seemed flustered. I sensed she was worried that I might try to kiss her or come inside.

"Do you want a goodnight kiss?" I asked, unable to resist a slight tease.

I got the usual long pause, but this time no verbal reply. Then she leaned over and gave me a quick kiss on the lips. Nice.

\* \* \*

Tuesday following the dance, I ran into one of the contra dancers in the street near the University. Marvin. He liked to dance in a very stylized way, lots of twirls and kicks. Not my way at all.

"See you brought a newcomer to the dance Saturday," he said.

"Yes, an archivist who's been helping me with some research into family history."

"Not a bad dancer, but bit of a plain jane."

That surprised me. "Her features are a bit angular, but she's a warm smile and a nice figure," I said by way of Myrna's defence.

“Nah. I’d almost say ugly. I like pretty women.”

“Guess it’s good that tastes vary,” I said as the traffic light changed and we were swept apart in the crowd.

As I walked back to the reading room, I wondered if most men were like Marvin and judged women so superficially. Yet a lot of men never looked in the mirror to see how they might seem to women. I’d had some conversations with Kelly and Joanne about what was attractive or not to the opposite sex. It was clear there was a great diversity of interest and opinion, but cleanliness and cheerfulness were among the important qualities. Maybe I should be glad I found lots of women attractive, each for her particular self.

\* \* \*

Myrna invited me to her place for dinner the next Saturday. It was a sort of return engagement for our Chinese meal and contra dance. She cooked some salmon fillets with potatoes and vegetables. Simple and very nicely done. I brought some chocolate biscuits and a bottle of white wine, and I took the bus. I don’t like to take a chance with driving and alcohol on Saturday night. Where I live there are several bus routes I can use that go near enough where Myrna lived to make this a no-brainer.

Guessing that Myrna might not have one, I brought a small corkscrew. My prediction was correct.

“Well, Now I have an idea for a birthday present if I needed one,” I quipped.

Myrna looked a bit confused, and said “You don’t have to.”

“I suppose no present worth having is one that I’d have to give. Isn’t it the optional nature of a birthday gift that is part of its importance,” I said.

Myrna gave me one of her characteristic pauses while she thought about this, then said “Yes. If you are required to give something, the essence of a gift is lost.”

“I wonder how we evolved the particular occasions of presents. You know, birthdays and Christmas and weddings and baptisms.”

“I suppose it’s a mark of affection or respect,” Myrna said.

“I find getting presents often rather embarrassing, though I must say I like the moment of getting something. Actually, I prefer to get something small but useful, or else a nice card, especially if the message is personal and not written by some hack at Hallmark.”

“Yes, I like small gifts best,” Myrna agreed.

“So when should I wrap up a corkscrew?” I asked, possibly risking causing embarrassment.

Again a pause, then “Next month, April 21.”

“Really! That’s my birthday too. I’ll be 51.”

“41 for me.”

“Well, we can think about a joint party, or at least share a nice meal.”

A very long pause, then “That would be nice.”

While Myrna was setting out our meal I looked around her living room. There were a couple of craft-made quilts on the wall, as well as some miniature ones in frames about 18 by 12 inches.

“You do quilting, Myrna?” I called out to the kitchen.

“Yes, I really like it, but you’ll notice I’m now doing miniatures. I live in an apartment, and you really can’t have too many quilts about.”

“Is it as much the process as the product?”

“I suppose so. It keeps my hands and my mind occupied, and I like working with the colours and patterns. And I can do it with the radio or CD or the TV.” There was a small, old-fashioned TV on a small table in the corner.

“I’m afraid it hasn’t captured my imagination yet, but I’d guess it’s a lot like the fascination I have for elegant computer code. I gather there are quite a few quilting shows and workshops.”

“Yes there’s one over Easter weekend down near Syracuse, but you need a car to get to it. But come and eat and bring your wine glass.”

“Shall I top you up?” I asked.

“Well OK, but just a half.”

When we were eating, I said “We could maybe go together to Syracuse. Look up some other things we might do. There’s also the Carnegie library in Watertown that’s worth seeing on the way there or back, though Easter weekend it could be closed.”

Whether the pause now was so Myrna could finish her mouthful or just her usual thinking before speaking – a quality that was as commendable as it was disconcerting – there were some seconds before she said, very quietly, “It sounds like a nice idea.”

Myrna’s nervousness was palpable. This time I took time to think a bit.

“Are you a little apprehensive that we’d have to get a hotel? Perhaps more specifically, the sleeping arrangements?”

“I guess so. As I’ve said, I’ve not much experience.” Another pause. “I’m afraid it’s new territory for me.”

“Myrna, I think our best course is to be rather direct with each other. So whatever you think to ask, go ahead. If it really is too outrageous, I’ll tell you, but I’ll bet it won’t be. And I’ll have to try very hard to avoid making assumptions. But I’ll promise you I won’t be playing games to try to have sex with you.”

“You haven’t hidden things from me. I don’t think many men would have been as open about Kelly and Joanne. Or else they’d be bragging

about having two women at once. What you said about intimacy and sex with them has really given me quite a different view of things. I'd always sort of assumed they went together."

I took a few seconds to sip some wine.

"Beforehand, I'd sort of taken the two as almost synonymous too. But now I can even see how sex could be used to push intimacy away, or at least distract from the process of getting truly close in spirit.

Myrna. I think sex with you would probably be very nice. My experience is that good sex comes from enthusiasm on both sides. So I would anticipate that if you really are interested, it would be good for both of us. The intimacy part we can only find out about over time, and as I've told you, I'm not sure sex is needed for that."

Myrna now took a sip of wine. Then she said "I have realized that you like me as a woman. I guess I'm a bit concerned – though our time together sort of says otherwise – that ... er ... you know ... "

"I'm only after your body?" I suggested.

Myrna laughed. "Yes!"

"If you recall my mother's letter, sex is more like punctuation than words. Important for meaning, but doesn't use up a lot of the space. I think companionship and friendship are more critical, but it's really nice to have the whole kit and caboodle."

"I think I've known that all along, but haven't had an opportunity to find out."

"Perhaps a mix of limited opportunity, shyness and reluctance to take a chance?"

"I suppose," she answered.

"Well, we're talking about it now.

Have you given any thought to whether you'd like to try sex with me?"

"Oh. No! ... er ... well, that isn't quite true. I haven't ... you know ... thought about actually doing it. But I've wondered what it might be like, I suppose."

"For you, it's probably important that you feel that you always can say yes or no. That nobody is pushing you to do – or not do – something."

"Yes."

"To return to Syracuse and the quilt show. We could have separate rooms."

"Yes," Myrna said quietly. "But somehow I think I'd feel that would mean it wasn't a real trip together. Oh. That sounds wrong!" She looked exasperated with herself.

"To me it sounds like you think that if we go, we should share a room, and possibly a bed. Which from my point of view is fine, but it would be

a disaster if your nervousness or change of mind makes you keep your knees locked together for two days. I think you know what I mean.”

Myrna giggled. “The image is funny. But I think I know what you mean. Though there’s something else that perhaps I shouldn’t talk about.”

“What’s that?”

“It might be ... er ... my time of the month.”

“No big deal. If you really want sex – I’m talking both of us – it can be messy but not harmful. If you don’t, there’s still cuddling and affection.”

“I’d never thought of that. People say things, but they don’t really explain what they really mean.”

“That goes on a lot. And sometimes gets in the way of dessert,” I said.

“Oh yes. Would you like some tea or coffee – I’m afraid I’ve only instant.”

“Can you do regular tea with milk?”

We got our tea, and had our biscuits, still sitting at the table at one end of the living room.

I said “Myrna, I get the feeling that you might like to at least explore sex a little. I’m going to say that I agree it would be a very bad idea for us to start while we’re on a trip. If there are disappointments, we have to put up with each other for quite a time before we are home.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. It would be horrible if things didn’t work out.”

I took a moment to think. Then said “Let me outline one possibility.

Suppose you come to my place next Friday and we make a light supper together and try seeing if we are comfortable with different – shall we say activities?

You can bring an overnight bag so you can stay, if you’re happy to, until Sunday night if we are getting along. And at my place I’ve a spare room, so the sleeping arrangements aren’t imposed on us at all. We can spend some time with the database, we can watch some movies, read, go out, go shopping and generally follow our noses.”

“You wouldn’t expect ....”

“I think I’d anticipate that perhaps we’d see if we’re comfortable in the shower together. Clearly, if we can’t get that far, going any further on the sex front probably isn’t on the cards.”

“I suppose not.”

“And I’ll take care of condoms and lubricant, just in case.”

“Yes. I can’t think I’d be able to buy those.”

Myrna was looking very serious as she said this, so I said “It’s not having teeth pulled without anaesthetic, you know.”

“No. Of course not. It just makes me nervous that I might do something embarrassing or awkward.”



“Oh. Really? I don’t think I’d noticed,” I mugged. “Actually, one fellow I knew in college once asked if there was anything more absurd, awkward or embarrassing than the way humans had to behave to make a baby. So I think you might as well simply do what feels right for you.

To change the subject, is there particular music that you like?” I’d noticed a boom box and a shelf of CDs.

“Er. I like different things. Old Beatles, brass bands, all kinds of stuff. Not country music and not heavy metal.”

“Why don’t you put something on quietly and we’ll top up the tea and talk, maybe on the sofa.”

She put on a Judi Collins album. Good choice. I made sure the wine was well corked and in the fridge. There was about a glass and a half left.

“The wine should last a few days in the fridge. There’s a couple of small glasses left.”

“That will be a bit new for me,” Myrna said.

“Sometimes I put in some soda water and make it a spritzer for a longer drink with less alcohol concentration. It can be quite refreshing.”

I joined Myrna on the sofa.

“I liked the meal. Thank you.”

“It’s ... er ... a bit new to me to cook for a man.”

I leaned toward her and gave her a gentle kiss on the lips. She didn’t pull away, in fact, partly met me. It wasn’t a smooch, but not a peck either.

“I’m not much for heavy smooching,” I said. “There’s affection, and I really value that, but it’s more like the kiss we just had, and sitting close like this. Do you want my arm round you?”

“Oh. I ... I’m not ...”

I raised my arm and she got the idea and scooted in close.

“Tell me about your family,” I suggested.

She told me about her parents. Her father had been an accountant in Bathurst, her mother helped out in a store that sold wool and cloth and craft supplies. Her father had died five years ago at age 80. There was an older brother, twelve years older, who was still in the town and had a wife and three grown children, and who ran a local hardware store.

A sudden thought hit me. “Myrna. Do you have a passport and driver’s license?”

“Yes, both. I got my license 15 years ago, but I really don’t drive. I have it more for ID. And I got a passport so I could take Mom on a bus tour of the UK with Trafalgar Tours in 2004. Are you asking in relation to Syracuse?”

“Yes. Lack of passport would make the issue moot. And since you haven’t driven much and my Subaru is a manual, probably we’d better save sharing the driving until we can give you some practice.”

I felt Myrna stiffen slightly, and it seemed we both noticed.

“Problem?” I asked.

“It ... er ... just seems like you are ... maybe assuming that I’m going to be around to ... er ... drive with you.”

“Perhaps more hoping than assuming.” That got me a kiss, almost a smooch.

“Wow. I seem to be popular all of a sudden,” I joked.

“I guess I never really thought about what it’s like to have someone want to be with me. I’ve really been like some of the books in the archive that just stay put for years and years.”

“Some people take longer to get there. Hopefully you and I will be good together. With the sale of Cotton Computing and Kelly and Joanne moving on, I was wondering where I was going. You know, like you said, “on the shelf”. Did I tell you I took a cruise over Christmas?”

“No. Did you enjoy it?”

“It was worthwhile for me. I don’t think I’d do it again. I think when I booked I had some idea that there’d be a chance to, well, pick up a woman and enjoy a fling, and there were plenty of women on the cruise, some of them in full hunting mode.”

“I guess that comes from movies and TV. *The Love Boat*.”

I related my experience with Daphne, then said, “If you’d told me a year ago I’d not take up the offered fun, I’d have said you were nuts. But somehow I think I’m at a point where I want and possibly need something or rather someone who will be around a while and who I can talk to and be with without a lot of fuss and bother. That doesn’t mean I expect to be a slob or not carry my part of the day to day chores. Just that I don’t want to be doing too much arranging of dates and stuff. Oops. Maybe I’ve said too much.”

There was a pause, then Myrna said “No. I think I understand. And today I thought that on my own, I wouldn’t have made a nice meal, you know, just for me. It’s a lot easier to make something when it’s shared.”

“Yes it is.

Though I pointed out that Kelly and Joanne didn’t share a lot of interests with me, meals and stuff like that were something that was a nice part of my relationship with them.”

“Wasn’t it tricky going to different houses all the time?”

“They shared the house that Kelly’s still in. Sometimes there was a bit of fiddling around with who would sleep where, but almost always one of them would come to my place so the kids wouldn’t be embarrassed. Or maybe it was us. Also – oh, maybe I shouldn’t say this – but one of the sisters was rather noisy. Some women, and I guess some men, are. But in most ways it was rather prosaic. There wasn’t a grand orgy, but there was kindness and

affection. You'll get to meet them, I'm sure, because they are important to me, including the kids, though they are grown mostly."

There was a silent period. Then we tried another kiss, which lasted a bit, but was very gentle.

"I think we'll need to untangle so we can drink our tea," I said.

We weren't really entangled, but I couldn't reach the tea and keep my arm round Myrna. We sipped our tea.

Myrna said, "It's funny that I don't feel odd talking about sex with you."

"That's good. Let's hope you feel the same way about, well, doing it. I know I find I like being with you, though we've not known each other very long."

"No. It's only been a few weeks."

"Perhaps we both know it isn't easy to find someone you are comfortable being with."

"That could be true. I've so little experience, and I'm realizing that the movies and novels leave out a lot of the details, the important details, even if they show the biology rather explicitly."

I said, "To be blunt, a lot of everyday life, including sex, is pretty messy. As I said earlier, there's not much more absurd than how a man and a woman have to come together to make a baby. I only know it doesn't feel absurd in the moment, but there are arms and legs in funny places, and it's good to lie on a towel. If you decide to go ahead with me, I'll recommend keeping a good sense of humour and only taking seriously the obligation to avoid causing hurt or trouble, you know, pregnancy and illness."

"We did mention condoms," Myrna said.

"Yes. Are you OK with using them? Some people aren't."

"Oh, ... er ... yes. I've never given them much thought. I'll have to learn how they work. I've seen descriptions, but ...."

"I'm sure teaching you will be fun, at least for me."

"Oh. Why? .... Oh, silly me." She blushed, but we both laughed.

"Anyway, shall we wash the dishes? I shouldn't leave too late, since I'm on the bus tonight."

"I'll do the dishes. There aren't many."

"Will you call me Wednesday to confirm dinner Friday? Either with or without a sleepover. It really is your choice and your timetable, at least in the short term."

"Yes, I'll be sure to call. I want to think a bit about staying over. ... Not so much the staying over. More how I'll feel about ... er ... being close for ... you know ... some time."

"Don't over-think it. As long as we talk and try to make sure we're comfortable both physically and emotionally, the worst that happens is that you learn a bit more about yourself and about me."

"That's true. And you've been good not to pressure me. I worried you ... might ... er ... "

"Play octopus?"

"Yes, that's how I've heard women describe being with some men."

We were standing now, I found my coat, put on my winter shoes and was by the door. We didn't say much, but Myrna came close and we kissed.

"Goodnight, and thanks," I said.

"Goodnight. Take care."

\* \* \*

Myrna didn't wait until Wednesday, but phoned Tuesday night to say she was planning to come on Friday.

"What do I need to bring?" she asked.

"Well, I've plenty of food and drink. I'm planning to make up the double bed and the guest bed with fresh linen on Friday, and I've plenty of towels and shampoo, though if you use something special, bring that.

I don't know if you need medications, but clearly bring them along if you do. I think a couple of changes of clothes in case you stay until Sunday. PJs or nightdress or whatever you like to wear in bed. Slippers would be good. Given the time of year, I'd choose outfits that will go with the shoes you wear here so you don't have to carry another pair."

"I've a small backpack that I like. I think it will do."

"Should be fine. By the way, I've not asked if there's anything you absolutely don't eat or are allergic to."

"I eat almost anything, but there are some things I don't like much. I'm not fond of bony fish, or things that are messy to eat."

"Oranges!"

"Why oranges?"

"There was a chef in the 60s, I think, called James Beard, who said you should only eat oranges in the bathtub.

Hmm. I don't know if you carry tampons or pads on a regular basis, but sometimes ... er ... certain activities can trigger a bit of bleeding. I do have some pads in the downstairs powder room. Joanne pointed out that it's good to anticipate what your guests might need, but the pads are pretty generic. From what I've gathered, women have their preferences for comfort."

"Oh. OK." Myrna didn't volunteer more information.

"I'll look forward to seeing you on Friday. When do you think you'll get here?"

"Probably around 5:30, is that OK."

"Perfect. See you then."

Well, it seemed that Myrna had made up her mind, but her anxiety was at maximum volume. I went online and searched to see if there was information on experiences of sex for the first time when a bit older. There seemed to be a few horror stories, but most seemed to be concerns that could be termed awkwardness or pain from the first penetration. There were recommendations of lubrication, which clearly had already been on my mind, but some suggestions about the use of fingers or dilators to overcome the fear or novelty of the situation.

On the Wednesday morning, having looked at their catalogue online, I went to a store called Venus Envy and found a simple, smooth dildo made of silicone. The colour was an outrageous purple, but the form was simple and not too large.

The store also offered lubricants and condoms, but their prices were rather high. Instead I went to a chain drug store and picked up a couple of boxes of condoms of a type I'd used before, plus one box of novelty ones with ribs and colours and textures. I got a bottle of the store brand lubricant. The middle aged woman at the cash rang up the order as if it were corn flakes. That was a relief.

When I got home, I put the condoms and lubricant in the bedside stand. I unpacked the dildo / dilator and made sure it was thoroughly washed and dried, then put it on a clean tissue in the bedside stand with the packaging with it in case Myrna wanted to read the product description. It could, of course, possibly never see the light of day.

I took a shower and changed, then for the rest of the day and most of Thursday I worked on Mother's photo albums. I didn't need to shave – I've worn a beard for over 20 years and find it more comfortable.

One of the albums dated from 1950 onwards. It had a lot of pictures of Michael and me. There was just one of the three of us – I wonder who took it – on a beach somewhere. On the back it said "1960 - Thornbury". It was a good family picture. Mother was in shorts – a very rare occurrence. I noticed a round scar on her inner left thigh, about 5 inches above the knee. I'd forgotten that scar. She never said anything about it, just "Oh, I did something silly when I was very young."

The other album was clearly the older one. And in the back of it was a yellowed envelope with three photos and two newspaper cuttings. The cuttings were trimmed so the page heading was not attached to give the source, page number and date, but written on them were "Morning Herald, November 7, 1938" and "Morning Herald, Sept 30, 1943"

November 7, 1938

The master of the SS Nova Scotia which docked yesterday at Pier 21

reported the loss overboard of a Miss Frieda Bohm, formerly of Hesse in Germany. Miss Bohm had apparently been celebrating with some other passengers after dinner Friday night when she decided to get some fresh air on the deck. It is believed she slipped as she was watching something in the water. The master reported several passengers heard a cry and a splash. The vessel attempted to find Miss Bohm to no avail. There will, of course, be an inquest, but our reporter is reliably informed that the verdict will almost certainly be accidental death.

The Furness Line asks that anyone with information about next of kin for Miss Bohm please contact their agent at 71/73 Upper Water Street, Halifax so that her belongings may be forwarded.

---

September 30, 1943

CN Police and the RCMP report the tragic death of Miss Emily Cartwright of Halifax. It appears that Miss Cartwright fell from a CN passenger train near Bathurst NB on the night of September 26. Miss Cartwright was related to the prominent John Smith family of Halifax. She came to Halifax not long before the outbreak of hostilities following the loss of her parents in an aeroplane accident. A private funeral will be held this Saturday followed by interment at Fairview Lawn Cemetery. RCMP declined to give details of Miss Cartwright's death, citing public security concerning train movements in wartime, but did confirm that they do not anticipate further investigation nor charges.

The three photos were labelled "Frieda Bohm, 1935" in a gothic script, "Emily Cartwright with her parents, 1934", and "Braving the weather, Nov 1, 1938, Myself with Emily (left) and Frieda (right)".

Who "myself" was did not appear to be defined. However, the last photo was remarkable in that the two young women were surprisingly similar in appearance. Looking at their individual photos, they seemed different, but a change of hair style and perhaps a little make-up would be sufficient to confuse most people.

I carefully scanned this material and made database entries. I also started scanning the other material in the album, gently lifting the photos out of the corners to ensure I didn't miss any inscriptions. Late on Thursday

afternoon, I even walked a backup disk over to Kelly's, but nobody came out when I was in the garage, and there was no car about, so I think she was out.

\* \* \*

On Friday morning, I started a laundry, then went for a brisk walk. I had a simple breakfast and made the beds as I'd promised, and ran the vacuum around the house, then cleaned all the bathrooms thoroughly.

It was almost noon when the place was as I wanted it. I did a bit of fridge archaeology and checked the small chest freezer in the basement to ensure a range of choices, then went shopping. I tried to find some things that would make for easy and not-too-heavy meals. Truthfully I was on edge. My guess is that Myrna was too.

It had been below freezing for a bit on Thursday, and while today it got up to 22 C, there was a bit of rain and the temperature dropped off later in the day. I'd finally decided on a soup and sandwich supper, and had a home-made lentil soup in the crock pot. Myrna will be thinking that's the only appliance I use. Still, it means timing is flexible.

Around 4:30 I got engrossed in a report on Operation Kiebitz I found on the web, titled *U536 Interrogation of Survivors*, and the doorbell surprised me. I ran down and, rather out of breath, welcomed Myrna in. She was a bit wet from the rain. I helped her out of her coat and she got her slippers from the top of her backpack and put them on. When she stood up from the small seat I have by the door to make shoes and boots easier to get on and off, I put my arms round her and gave her a kiss. Cold lips, and she was shivering.

"You're cold. I should have come to fetch you."

"I'm not really cold. I ... I'm ... sort of nervous."

"Me too. I've been jumpy all day."

"I thought it was the woman who worried about things. And you have lots of experience."

"Maybe not lots, but quite a lot of experience of a very few women." I kissed her again, briefly. "I guess it's important to me that things go well between us in all ways, and not just ... you know."

"It will take me some time to really understand that, I think," Myrna said, and with much less pause beforehand than usual.

"Anyway, come in and we'll see what we can do to stop the shivering."

We came through to the living room, and Myrna handed me a cloth bag I'd not noticed her carrying. "Some cookies I baked, and a Brie and some crackers. I thought we might want a snack sometime and I like Brie a lot."

"I'll put the Brie in the fridge," I said, taking the bag and doing this. "I'll leave the cookie tin and the packet of crackers here on the counter. Is that OK?"

"Sure."

"I've some soup in the crock pot – home made lentil soup – and fixings for sandwiches. I thought we may want to choose our time to eat, and also the amount. We could also use some of the Brie. I didn't make more bread, I'm afraid, but I've some pita bread and some bagels."

"That sounds nice." Myrna was imitating my avoidance of the subject we both knew we had to discuss.

"Do you need to hang any clothing?"

"I should hang up my skirt and my two blouses. Maybe the jeans too."

I led the way upstairs and to the bedroom closet. "There's some hangers here," I said, taking several off the bar. I realized she hadn't been in my bedroom before. Hmm.

Myrna opened her backpack and took out two blouses. I reached out and she handed them to me. I put them on the bed and then put each on a hanger and hung it in the closet. She was putting her skirt on a hanger that had hooks for the purpose. I reached and she gave it to me to put in the closet.

She put some pyjamas on the bed, then fumbled and tried to hide some underwear.

"I should have emptied a drawer for you," I said.

"Oh. Well, I can leave these in the backpack with my socks and stockings. Here's my jeans."

I put these items on a hanger, then turned round. We both looked awkward.

"We're neither of us quite sure what's next," I said.

After a pause, Myrna said "No."

"Is that a 'No, I don't want to see if we like each other physically' or simply 'No, we don't seem to know how to get started'?"

"The latter. I feel so awkward."

"Maybe we should bite the bullet and get in the shower together. Or if you prefer, a bath."

"I think a shower."

"Do you want me to undress you? Or will you be more comfortable taking off your own clothes?"

"Er. I ... think that ... maybe ... my own. This time anyway."

"OK. I suggest putting your glasses on the table on that side of the bed for now. I'll take this side for mine," I answered, and started to undress. I had a couple of chairs in the bedroom and put my jeans over the back of one of these, then took off my shirt. I slipped off my underpants and socks



and put my slippers back on to go into the ensuite to turn on the water and get it adjusted. The ensuite was quite nice, with a tub and a walk-in shower that was not huge, but would easily be big enough for both of us. I made sure there were several towels handy in a couple of colours. When I had left the bedroom, Myrna had her back to me and was down to bra and panties.

“Shall I come in?” she asked.

“Bit hard to get washed out there,” I answered.

She came gingerly round the doorway. I saw her look me up and down. Part of me was already a bit excited, and her eyes went to my crotch briefly. She had her arms across her chest. A quite thick dark brown bush made a slightly overflowing triangle at the top of her rather nice legs. Not sure what to say, I opted for nothing and opened the door to the shower for her and she stepped in and I followed.

“There’s a facecloth for you. I’m going to suggest you have the red towels and I’ll take the green.”

“Thanks.” Myrna still had her arms over her chest.

“If you give me a hug and a kiss I’ll get a chance to see your breasts,” I said, smiling.

“Oh, no. I feel such a fool.” She was actually crying a little, so I put my arms round her very, very gently. I had the spray on very gently also, and it was warm. Kissing her cheek made her look up to me and I kissed her lips and she relaxed. I manoeuvred her more under the spray, which was warm. She put her arms round me, and I could feel her breasts against me. She could probably feel my erection, but I made no effort to avoid contact.

“Better?” I asked, breaking the kiss.

“Yes. I’m sorry for being such an idiot.”

“Just nerves. Can I look now?”

“I guess so. I’m just being silly.”

I stepped back and slipped my hands down her arms so I was holding her hands. Unless she pulled free of my hands, she couldn’t easily cover her chest, and from my perspective definitely shouldn’t.

“Nice. Definitely BTD,” I said.

“BTD?”

“Better than Daphne. The fake boob gal on the cruise ship. Hers were just OK compared to your very nice real ones. Shall I wash them?”

Myrna smiled. “Is that so you get to touch them?”

“Hmm. Definitely.”

We indulged this, and I let her soap my chest and back. I did her back. Then I lifted the shower head which had a hose to it and said “Shall we wash the sports equipment?”

“Oh. Yes. It took me a moment to realize what you meant.”

So we washed each other front and back, did the underarms and then I put the shower head back on its hook and rinsed my face. Myrna decided to do the same, then I pointed to the tap, she nodded and I turned off the water.

When I opened the door, I realized I should have given the thermostat a bump up.

“I forgot to increase the thermostat setting. I’ll get dried off a bit and do that. Here’s a towel for you.”

This rather broke the spell of being close and naked, but the chill relative to the shower was having that effect anyway. I put on my robe and ran down and put a couple of degrees on the setting, listened to hear the furnace engage and came back upstairs. Myrna had dried off and had the towel around her quite modestly.

“I forgot to bring a robe,” she said.

“There’s a guest one in the main bathroom. I’ll get it for you. It was laundered last week and there’ve been no guests.” I was prattling.

I hung the robe next to her things in the closet, then I went back in the ensuite and picked up a large bath towel from the linen closet, came back, folded down the top sheets, then spread the bath towel on the bed. “In case we get messy,” I said.

All this time, Myrna was watching me, standing to one side of the bed. No smile, looking rather worried.

“I think I’d like to brush my teeth – I meant to do it before you came,” I said.

“That’s a good idea. I should too.”

Myrna found her toothbrush in her backpack and went into the ensuite. While she did, I went and split a can of cider and brought up the two tumblers – plastic this time.

“There’s some cider here. And while I brush my teeth why don’t you look at what is in the draw of the bedside table.”

When I came back, she had the boxes of condoms – still closed – on the bed, alongside the dildo and the box with the bottle of lubricant. She was reading the dildo packaging.

“Anything take your fancy?” I asked.

“I ... I want to ask some questions, but I’m really ... er ... tongue-tied.”

“You might find it easier without the towel and me without the robe,” I said.

“What? Why? ...”

I took off the robe and put it on its hook in the ensuite, then came back and reached out for the towel. I suppose I could have pulled it off, though she was half sitting on it. I didn’t have to, she eased up and pulled it off. I took it and hung it properly in on a rail in the ensuite.

“I think you want to ask some questions,” I said.

“Yes. First, I’m not sure what this is for,” she said pointing at the dildo.

“I did some reading about women starting to have sex a bit later than most. The material probably applies at all ages, but being that youth is wasted on the young, they charge ahead and get over the upsets more quickly.”

“Did you learn anything?”

“Not really learn. Mostly confirm what I suspected. Which is that a good percentage of women find their first ... er ... penetration to be uncomfortable or painful. The reasons seem to vary. Lack of lubrication, nerves leading to clamping down – something called vaginismus – which makes any pain worse. Sometimes lack of control, that is, the woman doesn’t control how she is entered, so perhaps the angle is wrong, or something like that. It seems the idea of breaking the hymen isn’t too relevant. Pelvic exams and pap smears etc.”

“I find them very uncomfortable.”

“Pre-refridgerated speculum?” I joked.

Myrna smiled. “That too.”

I continued “Now my experience is that lubrication takes care of itself if the man takes the time and trouble to get you interested and excited. But if that isn’t enough, there’s the bottle. A couple of web advice columns suggested that it could help to use a lubricated dildo or dilator to allow the woman to get a feel for having something there. And you get to control the penetration with it so you don’t hurt yourself, and I could be doing some nice things like caress your breasts or .... ”

“Ooh. You’re going to drip!”

Indeed I was getting excited. Fortunately there was a box of tissues handy. I quickly grabbed one to avoid a drop on the floor. Then I got on the towel and sat cross legged. This made my crotch fully visible, but as I said “It won’t matter if I drip now. You should come on the towel too. I’d be surprised if you’re not a little damp.”

Myrna blushed – and not just her face. I pointed to the other end of the towel and she sat cross legged too. I don’t know if she realized it opened the lips of her pussy. I pulled the boxes between us.

“Does what I said make sense,” I asked.

“Yes. Actually I did some research too. Nearly got caught at work.” We both giggled. “What you just explained clarified the stuff I read.”

“Do you want to take a look at the condoms? With me dripping, maybe we should put one on me.”

“How are they different?”

“Those boxes are ordinary ones. One box has lubricated ones, one has unlubricated ones, and the third box is novelty ones with ridges and bumps

supposed to give the woman extra stimulation. I'm not sure that they work except by placebo effect, but we could have some fun doing some experiments to find out, couldn't we?"

"Wow! I think too much choice."

"Open the lubricated ones and I'll show you how to put one on me."

There were enough details in installing a condom that Myrna stopped being so frozen. After all, there was opening the box, separating a condom, learning how to get the condom out of the foil safely, figuring out which way it unrolled, putting a drop of lubricant in the reservoir, pinching the reservoir, and rolling the condom on me. In the process, I'd had to extract the bottle of lubricant from its box.

"Good job. Now I'm dressed for the occasion."

"Oh! I just realized, I was touching your ...."

"I think the word is penis," I deadpanned, which made Myrna laugh.

"Yes! I'm being silly again."

"Keep on being silly as long as you keep trying to have fun and to help me have fun."

"I guess that makes sense. If I think about what we're doing, I get all embarrassed."

"Probably shouldn't think about it too much. Now the condom is installed, there's not much that can cause permanent harm as long as we're gentle with each other. But gentle doesn't mean we can't be firm."

"I guess I'll have to figure that out."

"Let's put the condoms in the drawer. They're easily accessible. We'll put the dildo and lubricant on the top. The packing can go in the waste basket I think. By the way, the dildo is thoroughly washed with soap and water."

Myrna looked at it, I thought a bit suspiciously. I lay across the towel and offered my arm. "Come and smooch a bit and we'll work out where we go from here. Oh. Maybe a sip of cider."

We took a couple of sips and put the glasses back on the bedside tables. There was one each side, actually, though I generally only used the one nearest the bathroom.

Myrna came in my arms and I kissed her and cupped a breast. While kissing I gently but firmly pinched the nipple, which hardened quickly. I felt her hand on my belly, then round my balls.

"You decided two can use their hands?"

"My curiosity got the better of me. I hope you don't mind."

"I think there's just one rule tonight – Anything goes as long as expressed wishes are respected. So I plan to try all sorts of things, and hope you will too. Let me know right away if anything gives you cause for pain or upset."

And then we can compare notes and decide what we like. Is that OK with you?"

"OK" she said, kissing me and squeezing me gently.

After a bit, I moved my hand down between her legs. It was a bit damp, but not super wet. After a bit more kissing, I nibbled down her neck to her breasts, spent a bit of time playing and sucking, then went further. I turned round so she would be able to see my sports equipment and indicated she should let her legs apart, but she kept them together.

"You don't want me to see?" I asked.

"I ... er ... I'm afraid you might kiss me there."

"Is that a bad idea?"

"I ... er ... I ...."

"You're afraid I might expect you to kiss my bits too? That can be nice, but not with a condom. Doesn't taste good. We'll stick to hands for now for that."

"I guess that was my concern."

I touched her thigh between her legs and this time she opened. Before she could close again, I gently kissed her near her clit and heard her take in a breath.

I spent the next few minutes exploring her sports equipment with my tongue. There was rather a lot of hair to push aside, but it felt nice to touch while I was licking. Quite a bit of liquid oozed out of her slit. There were some sighs and even a small moan, but I don't think she had an orgasm. Probably too much thinking.

"I think that felt nice for you from your reaction."

"Oh yes. It felt really good. I feel very wicked."

"Maybe remember that wicked and wicca and wise all come from the same root. In Dutch, mathematics is wiskunde. So you can be wicked, but only under one condition."

"What condition?"

"That you enjoy yourself."

"Oh, but I am enjoying myself. I didn't think it would be like this."

"How did you think it would be?"

"I thought we'd get undressed and perhaps kiss a bit, then you'd get on top of me and ... well then I didn't really know."

"We've been exploring, but not got to actual coming together. Maybe we should move towards that, since if it works out well for you fairly soon, that elephant over by the door can be sent away."

"Yes, I think I feel the same way. Kind of apprehensive in case things aren't good."

"You seem to have enjoyed things so far. Shall I try a finger?"

I felt her stiffen a bit. "OK, but slowly."

I licked an index finger and it slipped in relatively easily. I moved it around, found what I thought was her G spot and rubbed it. “How does that feel?”

“Interesting.”

“If I’m right, that’s your G spot. Stimulating it firmly often has nice results, but in my experience, it needs the right mood and positioning. Maybe we should try the dildo to make sure you are comfortable with it, then we can try to stick me in.”

“I guess that makes sense. In the movies they never seem to have this much to think about.”

“In the movies – except for porn – they’re not doing it. And in a lot of porn, I suspect the enjoyment is faked. It’s all over the internet, and I could enjoy a good romp and maybe learn something. But so much seems to be about power of one person over another and lots of nastiness rather than fun.”

I moved around so we were lying side by side. I reached for the purple sausage and the lubricant bottle.

“Hold it by the fat end and we’ll put plenty of lubricant on it just in case. When we know how things work for you, we can adjust accordingly, and maybe not need any of the stuff. It doesn’t taste bad, but it masks the taste of you.”

“You like my taste?”

“Yes. A lot. Of course, I like my pussy freshly washed.”

Myrna giggled, but she held up the dildo and I put some lubricant on the end.

“Rotate it a bit and we’ll make sure there’s plenty down the shaft for about two and half inches.”

We did this, then I put the lubricant back on the table.

“OK. Try putting the end by your opening, then see if it will go in comfortably. There’ll probably be some resistance from your muscles to overcome, but as long as nothing hurts, try moving it in a bit, out again, in a bit further and so on.”

We were quiet while she did this. I noticed that she got it in about four or five inches and was stroking gently.

“Seems to work,” I said, slipping my hand over her bush and letting a finger graze her clit.

“Oh, that’s nice.”

“Shall I keep doing it?”

“Yes please.”

So I used my finger to circle her button, taking a bit of moisture from the dildo that was going steadily in and out. After about two minutes, Myrna got very tense and said “Oh that’s too much. Stop. Stop.”

“Hmm. I wonder what the fine is for having too much fun.”

“Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn,” Myrna quoted.

I kissed her, then said “Well I don’t think you should be Gone with the Wind, even if you have had a good time.”

I took the end of the dildo and pulled it out. I checked in case there were any blood, but there wasn’t. Good. I put it on a tissue on the bedside table, then moved to kneel between Myrna’s legs. I lifted them either side of my neck, and positioned myself at her rather wet entrance. I had intended to talk us through step by step, but as I pushed forward, the head slipped in easily before I even had time to think about it. I backed out a bit, then went further. The third time I slipped in almost all the way, and on fourth I simply let myself all the way in and leaned forward to kiss her.

“Feel OK?”

“Oh yes. Great.”

“Should you have done this some time ago?”

“Perhaps I didn’t have someone who knew how to do it properly.”

“Good answer.”

Having not been with anyone for some time, I didn’t last long. I showed Myrna how to hold the condom on pulling out. She didn’t want me to withdraw, so I had to explain how condoms might leak on that occasion. We may have to rethink our precautions.

I passed her her cider and slipped down beside her, pulling up the covers. We put down the cider after finishing our glasses, then lay together quietly for a while.

After a few minutes, I said “PJs and supper?”

“Sure.”

But I kissed her first, a kiss that lasted quite a few seconds.

We cleaned up, then had some soup and a slice of toast with Brie. Didn’t feel like a lot more. It was by then about 8, so we came back to bed and figured out who would sleep on which side – Myrna decided to take the side away from the ensuite. I’d fortunately got a night light there so one didn’t have to bumble around in the dark, nor need a flash-light. Each of us wore glasses. We’d put them on the bedside tables when we got undressed.

We got into bed and lay in each others arms.

“I’m glad it went well for you, and thanks for trying things, it made it easier for me,” I said.

“Thank you, too. I was really anxious. And, if I’m honest, the dildo frightened me when I first saw it.”

“And now?”

“Oh, it was a good idea. I got used to the feeling of something inside.”

“I sort of got the sense that it was more than that.”

“Maybe. There were nice sensations.”

"I'd better be careful. You might like it more than my thing, then we'd have to call you Masturbating Myrna."

"Hmmp. I don't think so."

"As a matter of curiosity, did it feel much different than when I was inside you?"

"I don't know. I felt different rather than it felt different – it was nice together. Very special. Whether the two ... er ... things felt different I can't say yet. You've got to realize, so much was new. Sort of overload."

Somehow most of the pauses and reticence seemed to have evaporated. I almost thought "What have I done?"

For a while we talked about day to day things. I asked if Myrna wanted the TV, but she said no. Then she snuggled into my side, then both of us started to let our hands wander and with a lot of giggling we threw off the covers and our PJs and I put on a condom. I was still lying on my back unrolling it when Myrna was looking at me closely.

"It's a pity the condoms have that rubbery smell, otherwise I think I'd try to taste it."

"We'll get to that I'm sure. There's the taste of the pre-ejaculation fluid and the semen, and I've an idea a lot of women don't like the latter."

I was surprised when Myrna said

"Some time I'd like to try. For now, do you want me to put the towel down and lie on it and you can ... er ... "

"Fuck you?"

"Yes, that."

We got the towel – it was on one of the chairs – but I said "Of course, I could lie on it and you could be on top."

"OK"

So that's what we did, and Myrna showed how quick a learner she was. I lasted a while, and while there wasn't any great fireworks display, we both had a good time and reached a modest level of excitement at the same time.

"This could be addictive," I suggested.

"Definitely. But it isn't an opioid, though I guess some people do become sex addicts," Myrna said.

"Are you now going to worry you'll become one?"

"I've had two ... er ... fucks. I don't think I'm there yet."

"But just think, they were such superb fucks," I teased.

"Joe – or should I use Joseph?"

"Either's fine, but maybe choose one and stick with it."

"OK. Joe. Do you really and truly think they were superb? I mean, for you too?"

"Yes, I do. And I mean that seriously. I'm not just talking about the sex, which was very nice by the way. As we've mentioned, I've had some



experiences. The two tonight are well up on the scale on the purely physical level. But I'm more thinking about the mental sharing and enjoyment, the unconscious generosity you showed. That was rather special."

"I've a way to go to understand all that, but I hope you'll help me to do so."

"I'm sure I'll be more than happy to help in that direction."

We cleaned up again, and re-donned the PJs. I guess some people wouldn't bother. We were more comfortable in our usual night-time attire. We brushed our teeth, and I put water in glasses each side of the bed.

"Maybe we can catch the news," Myrna said, so I found the remote and put on the TV, which was on a bracket high in the corner where we could watch from bed. I put on the timer for an hour, and spooned in behind Myrna on an extra pillow – I'd made sure to have some for this and in case we needed to adjust to fit together. We turned out the lights and both of us missed about 9/10ths of the news.

\* \* \*

We both woke at about the same time soon after 6:30. Myrna went to pee. She shut the door – there seem to be two classes, door shutters and 'Who cares after what we've been doing'. When she came out, I went in. I didn't bother to shut the door.

While Myrna was in the bathroom, I'd taken a sheet off the notepad by the bed and put two marks on it about 3/4 of an inch apart. When I got back into bed, I said, "I made a note of how big your areola was when we started last night. One of the websites said they grow with the first serious sexual experience of a woman."

"No way! You didn't."

"When you weren't looking I noted the diameter of the right one on my thumb and transferred the measurement to this slip of paper. Take off your top and we'll see."

Myrna did this, and now had the confidence to do so without hesitating. I carefully stroked the breast and nipple, then put the paper beside it and marked the diameter.

"Look. It's almost doubled," I said.

"Let me see!"

I showed her the paper, saying "April Fool!"

"You wicked man! I'll get you for that."

"Ooh. I'd better watch out. She might make me satisfy her lust all weekend."

“Not an entirely bad idea. But from what you’ve told me, you might run out of juice, possibly literally.”

“You, Myrna Baird, are getting to be decidedly naughty.” I gave her a small kiss, playing with her breasts. I’d tossed the pyjama tops well out of range.

“I can blame a corrupting influence,” she replied.

This exchange spiralled into another coupling, a rather gentle one that we managed more or less side by side. Despite the fact it was slow and gentle and without much foreplay, Myrna got quite excited. At this point, I don’t think she understood her response, so wasn’t having a full-blown orgasm. The effect was still rather nice.

We took surprisingly little time on this, and after a quick splash in the shower, we were dressed and out the door before 7:45. We decided to have breakfast out at a nearby bistro that did a reasonable breakfast special.

As we were eating, I said “When we get back, shall we take a look at the things in Mother’s room? I’ve a hypothesis I’d like to put forward to get your reaction to it.”

“Sure. Do you think you’re making progress.”

“I think so, but I need to work on some of the letters. I’m pretty sure they are actually coded messages.”

“You think your Mom was a spy?” Myrna’s eyes widened.

“My guess is that she may have discovered that Emily wasn’t Emily but Frieda Bohm and that Frieda was a spy or a crook or something similar. Mother was, after all, private secretary to someone doing a fair bit of business in war-related industries, so I’d guess there’d be some interest from the authorities to make sure she was on the proper side. On the other hand, Emily, as a family member and not directly in the business, might escape close scrutiny until she did something that shone light on her activities. I think possibly someone from the SS Nova Scotia had met both Frieda and Emily, or someone knew Emily from England and showed up. Maybe a navy person at a party realized it wasn’t the Emily he’d known from before, or even that the new Emily didn’t recognize him. You know, not saying hello to an old boyfriend might easily get you in the soup.”

“Yes. Taking on someone’s identity would not be that easy.”

“There’s lots to know about somebody. Look at us, just starting to learn about each other. Oh. I had a thought earlier when you were in the loo at home, and I then forgot to ask.”

“What’s that,” Myrna looked a little concerned.

“Well, if you stay tonight, do we need to think about church in the morning. I’ve no idea of your thoughts or attitudes to religion, which may be a bit ass-backwards given what we’ve been up to in the last few hours.”

Myrna giggled. “Yes. If I were super-pious, I’d be on my way to hell on

a first class ticket. But no, I'm not very religious. I sort of believe in a God, but not in too many of the particular details."

"That's more or less me too. I actually like some of the choral liturgy and some preachers who can give wise counsel. But fire and brimstone preachers seem to be more in love with themselves than messengers of any decent deity."

We were quiet for a couple of minutes as we finished up our breakfast. I asked, "Should we think of going out for supper tonight?"

"It would be nice, but I think you are spending too much on me."

"I've told you how much I got from the Cotton Software sale. I'm not going to fly us to LA for the evening on a private jet, just suggest a modest dinner in a nice restaurant in the area. And I'll be spending for my own enjoyment, not to impress or bribe you."

"Joe. I had a good enough time that I sort of feel I should be paying you."

"Now that is a nice compliment! I could say the same, so let's set aside talk of money for now." As I said this, I realized that it was within possibility that I would want to discuss money if we continued to enjoy our time together. And it wasn't just the bedroom stuff that I enjoyed.

What would I do if I wanted to marry Myrna? If we married and divorced, there was a lot of money involved that I would definitely not want her to have. But if we married and it was a good partnership and then I died, I'd want my wife, and possibly any offspring, to have the full resources of my estate. And I didn't have any family members I'd consider. My distant relatives might be fine people, but I didn't know them.

Myrna was saying something. I answered "Sorry, miles away."

"I was asking if something was on your mind."

"Actually yes. But I think it will wait."

\* \* \*

After breakfast, we were walking back from the restaurant hand in hand. Myrna said "This is new too."

"What?"

"Holding hands. It's something I associate with teenagers, but I never did it after kindergarten."

"If you look, you'll see a lot of seniors walking holding hands. I watch, and once I counted twice as many seniors as all the rest."

"Really!"

"Yes, though that day was one where school was going and it was a mid-week workday, so the seniors were most of the people out and about," I explained.

"I'll have to watch and see for myself."

"I gather you are OK with holding hands, or taking my arm?" I queried.

"Oh yes. It's nice. It felt comfortable right away. Did you not do it with Kelly and Joanne?"

"I don't think we avoided it. I just think our day to day routines didn't give us the occasion when we would. I suppose there must have been times, but I don't recall them. I didn't used to go out with them as such, now that I think about it. In a way that's a pity, but there you are."

"Sorry, I didn't mean ...." Myrna trailed off.

"It's actually useful to get a perspective on how we did relate to each other. I think I talked before about people using the word 'intimacy' to mean sex a lot of the time, but often sex gets in front of learning about the other person, and that's much more what intimacy is about, at least to me."

"I've not had to think about things like that before, as you know."

"Actually, your mention of holding hands reminded me that my Mother and Dad used to hold hands. And they shared a bed. All that despite what was in her letter. From that you'd think it was purely a marriage of convenience to hide her pregnancy with me."

"Do you think your Dad might have been bisexual?"

"Maybe. We'll probably never know. And maybe sex wasn't part of their particular dynamic, but physical affection was."

\* \* \*

At home, Myrna suggested we might learn something from the documents about Mother and Michael, so we got them out of the box. There was an envelope marked *Marriage Certificate, Etc.* I had my own birth certificate. They'd moved to Ottawa before I was born. I wonder if that was to avoid any gossip in Halifax. I'd not been curious about my parents' documents. Perhaps kids aren't unless there's a reason.

There was a birth certificate for Mother in 1910. I had a death certificate now. It should probably be with these documents. And scanned! I hadn't done that yet.

There was a marriage certificate. Myrna said "They married in 1940. So they had over 20 years together."

I said "I feel a bit foolish. I assumed they married just before I was born."

"Maybe being married quieted talk even before the pregnancy. Both of them probably preferred to avoid attracting attention."

\* \* \*

It had been a bit rainy, and while that wasn't a big concern in the morning, we took the car in the evening and went to one of the Lapointe's seafood restaurants.

"We can ask if there are bones," I suggested, half joking, but as it turned out, Myrna ordered scallops.

I said, "One time I found a fish bone in scallops in a very fancy place in San Francisco."

"But scallops don't have bones!"

"Unless they're fake. Sometimes a sort of cookie cutter or cork borer is used to cut plugs from fish. There's quite a bit of controversy, with the industry claiming they label correctly, but I suspect there's too little of the high-end product to go round. The restaurant in question may have known, but apparently some fakes require DNA testing to reveal them."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. Put the bone on the side of my plate where it was conspicuous to the waiter. But the dinner was part of a business meeting. Embarrassing my host might not have been good politics. And I suppose that there's a small chance the bone got in by accident from the filleting of a fish, though that doesn't say much about the restaurant either. We're talking a place that charged \$ 50 US for a main course about two decades ago."

"That's not very nice."

"Though I can afford such places, I rarely eat at them. They just aren't usually special enough to be worth what they charge, and there are lots of decent places in the middle range. I think a lot of the really expensive places are a kind of 'I'm more special than you' for pretentious people in the jet-set."

It turned out that Myrna's scallops – grilled and served with a risotto, were very, very unlikely to be fake given their varying size and shape. I tried one – delicious. I had halibut fish and chips and a salad. Myrna tried a bit of the halibut and declared it excellent also. We split a chocolate cheesecake for dessert.

We'd had a good breakfast and had just a small snack for lunch while reviewing the John Smith material, so we'd gone quite early for dinner. We were home before 8.

"Some coffee or tea?" I asked.

"I think tea," was the response.

"You know you said you didn't have a computer at home, but had an electric piano."

"Yes, it's in the bedroom. I guess you've not seen it."

"Do you play often?"

"I try to put in at least a little time each day. I use a headset so I can do it any time without disturbing the neighbours."

"I hope I get to hear you sometime soon."

"OK. I think I might be able to play for you. I've never performed. Too nervous I think."

I remembered I had a nice CD I'd picked up at the same time I got the Bare Necessities CD. It was by their pianist. Where was it? There! Jacqueline Schwab, *Mad Robin*.

I put it on.

"Tell me if you like this."

The first tune was an especially nice one called *Round about our coal fire*.

"The album is a set of variations on English dance tunes. And the pianist apparently does a lot of the background music for PBS documentaries."

"It's nice."

"I think so too."

We drank our tea. Myrna was in the armchair. I was on the sofa. When I'd finished my tea, I put a cushion on one end of the sofa and lay down on my side, all the way to the back of the sofa. I put out my left arm and pointed with my right. Myrna understood and came and lay in my arms.

The music flowed softly. Myrna suddenly put her arms round my neck and hugged me tight. I felt wet on my cheek and gently pulled away to see that she was crying.

"It's OK," she said. "I'm just so grateful. You've shown me I can be wanted, that I can be myself and not mess up in a social situation."

"We all need to keep practising."

We were quiet until the end of the CD. We got up as we both needed to stretch. I don't recall saying anything as we put away the teacups and moved upstairs.

"Do you want to fool around a bit?" I asked "Or curl up with or without the TV and go to sleep?"

"Can I ... er ... look at you a bit?" Myrna asked. "I'd like to learn how things work."

"Sure. We can even try 69 if you want."

"You mean where we each .... can ... "

"Easier to do than talk about."

Myrna laughed, then she said "When I used the dildo last night, my hair seemed to get in the way. Is that why I hear girls talking about waxing?"

"I'm not in on the female conversations."

"Well, I hear things. Like in the washroom. The other week these two girls were talking. One said her boyfriend insisted she 'blow' him and he was quite rough, but he'd only ... she said 'go down' on her if she was waxed."

"I find it a little more ... er ... accessible if the hair is trimmed or shaved."

"Oooh. I might cut myself!"

"Do you use a razor?"

"For my legs and underarms, yes."

"Not an electric?"

"No. Though I've thought about one."

"It's up to you what you use. I've an electric shaver and trimmer that I use to groom my beard and to keep the fuzz down below to a moderate length. I find if it gets long it catches when I ride my bike."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Scissors are fine too, but I find a comb and the electric trimmer a bit easier."

"You use the comb so it's not too close?"

"Yes. Pretty straightforward."

"Do you want to trim me?" Myrna asked. "It's hard to see ...."

"Is it what you want?"

"Oh, I can't believe I'm saying this, but can you do a landing strip – I've read about that in a *Cosmopolitan*, and it seemed so naughty."

I got out my shaver and we got undressed. I got Myrna to lie down on a towel on the bed and managed to remove about 90% of the forest so there was a fine strip a couple of inches long and one inch wide above a now glistening slit.

There was a full length mirror next to the closet and she looked at the result, pivoting to get different angles.

"Do you want to trim me?" I asked.

"OK, but how much?"

"Depends on where you intend to put your mouth," I said to see if I could make her go shy. My answer cost me more hair than I anticipated.

We went in the shower to get off the hair and then came back and I lay down and Myrna knelt above me. There was plenty of wriggling and noises. Fortunately, I'd put a box of tissues handy so Myrna could clean me up. I still needed to wash my beard. Myrna had produced copious juices. She washed off too.

We cuddled and turned on the hockey with the volume very low.

"Thanks," I said.

"Likewise."

"I hope my coming wasn't too much of a surprise."

"No, I could sense you getting close, and I was on top, so I could let your ... er ... semen drip out of my mouth."

"Didn't like the taste?"

“Not horrible, but not really likeable either. Do you think some women like it?”

“Some people like anchovies, and some don’t. Probably rather particular to each person, though I suspect the number who like it is fewer than those who don’t.”

“But you like my taste?”

“Yes. When you get excited and ooze. That’s why I put in a finger and tried to rub your G spot.”

“Yes, it felt nice. Sort of built up steadily, not as instantly sensitive as in front.”

“You mean on your clit?”

“Yes. Oh, I’ve a question?”

“Go ahead.”

“I’ve read some men are circumcised, and I sort of know what that means. Are you?”

“Yes. Done when I was an infant I guess.”

“I guessed you were because I couldn’t find any loose skin.”

“It apparently pulls back anyway. There’s probably pictures on the web if you’re curious.”

“A bit, but not enough to get out of bed.”

“My goodness, a lazy librarian.” I gave her a kiss, or rather we gave each other a kiss.

We relaxed beside each other. I turned off the bedside lights and made sure the TV timer was set. It wasn’t late, but we soon were asleep.

\* \* \*

We had a very simple breakfast Sunday and planned to have a pasta supper late afternoon – no lunch – so Myrna could get home in time to do some laundry. During the day we looked a bit at the files, and in particular the photo album with me as a child. Also some photos and stuff I had later in life. A learning time. Myrna promised we’d do the same with her photos.

We could have had sex in the morning, but somehow decided to make love in the afternoon. The choice of phrase is important. We were coming to like being together.

As we were making supper, I said, “You’ve not got a computer at home, have you?”

“No, I opted for the piano instead.”

“I’ve an old one upstairs that would do fine for email and the web if you’d like it. It would be useful for us to communicate written messages and send files. And I can help set you up if you’d like. There’s an NCF



internet package that's not too expensive and you have a land-line already, or you could use the modems over the phone, but that's a pretty frustrating experience."

"I don't want to take advantage of ... you know."

"Who's taking advantage of who?"

Myrna laughed. It made her look different. "OK, but I guess I'll give it back if we break up."

"So now we're together are we?" I asked, standing behind her and cupping her breasts. She was wearing a t-shirt and light sweater over slacks. No bra because we weren't going out.

Myrna went silent. I massaged gently and kissed her ear. She said "I'd like to be together. To be your girlfriend."

"Then let it be so," I said.

She twisted round and kissed me hard. We'd just finished in the bedroom, so this was separate from that, so I held her in my arms until she eased away to work on supper.

She said "I feel it's a bit like the inscription inside your Mother's wedding ring."

"I didn't know there was one." I was genuinely surprised.

"Yes, when you showed it to me today I looked. It says 'First friendship, then love'."

After I took Myrna home – we argued a bit about her taking the bus or being driven – I checked Mother's wedding ring. Indeed, on the inside, running round the circumference, was the inscription she mentioned, engraved in clear but tiny characters that I needed a magnifier to read.

\* \* \*

We didn't get together again until the next Friday. Myrna said she had to finish her tax form – she was doing it by hand. I was a bit curious, but kept quiet and did not pry. My own taxes had been more or less worked out last Autumn by my accountants, and MKJ was set up with a year end on September 30 to delay payment as long as possible. I should put some time in to check the state of MKJ's investments, but they were mainly, at least for the moment, rather conservative and simple securities that could be relatively quickly liquidated or else borrowed against if I needed to invest in something particular. So far I'd felt no great urge.

Given a few quiet days, I'd cleaned off the extra laptop and reset the main user as Myrna. It had Windows XP Pro that Cotton Computing had put on it.

I'd also been in touch with NCF and arranged the bottom level DSL, and gone there to pick up the purchased modem and line filters. I set it up to bill to my credit card. I suspected there'd be a minor fuss from Myrna over this, but that could be worked out later.

We'd been on the phone and I'd set up hotel reservations for Friday, April 14 and Saturday April 15 in Syracuse. As we'd have the car, I chose a Days Inn in East Syracuse that was about half the price of a downtown equivalent but was close to the I 481 loop. I knew there was shopping nearby as well, which might be useful if weather turned nasty on us.

Then on Thursday – this is ten days before Easter – Kelly phoned and invited me to Easter Sunday dinner. I was about to decline, then asked “What time were you thinking? I'm going to Syracuse with a friend to see a quilting show near there, but could be back in time to get to your place at 6 pretty easily.”

I didn't want to come out and ask if I could bring Myrna, but Kelly said, “You can only come if you bring her along,” which made things easy. I said I'd check that Myrna wanted to come, and call back to confirm, which I did. I offered to bring two bottles of wine.

Within 10 minutes Joanne called.

“Joe. ... Er... We sort of wanted to know if your friend knows ... er...”

“She saw the picture taken at the resort with both of you and all the kids. She knows the essentials of how things were, but I didn't share any juicy details.”

“Ah. That's good. Especially avoiding 'juicy'.”

We both laughed, and after some minor chat signed off.

For this Friday, we decided to try a sleepover at Myrna's. I took the bus – parking in Sandy Hill isn't easy. While I set up the laptop and the Internet, Myrna played the piano. I'd a pair of small speakers – powered ones – which I'd brought along just in case, otherwise I would not have heard what she was playing. Several light pieces. She wasn't a concert pianist, but I could recognize some of the tunes, at least to the extent of knowing I'd heard them before. Live music in the house was something I could get used to.

We did a take-out pizza while she learned how to use the machine to access the internet and send and receive emails. I really wanted her to be able to do that, as it was often much easier to have a written message with timing and address than a voice message on my answering machine.

Sleeping was cosy. Myrna had a wide single bed. I could have moved to the sofa, which was long and comfortable, but I think we wanted the closeness.

We came back to my house on Saturday around noon. As we walked up to the front door, I handed Myrna a key on a key-chain with a WarAmps tag and said “Why don't you open up, and I'll then tell you your access code?”

She looked surprised, then realizing what I intended, asked “You mean this key is for me to have?”

“Yes. It will make it easier for you to come and go. I’ve set you up with a code that is the two digit day of our birthday followed by the two digit month.”

“I can remember that.”

She let us in. Once we were out of shoes and coats, she said “I’ll get a key made for you too.”

“Only if you want. Does the landlord have rules about the key?”

“Probably, but people ignore them. I actually changed my lock because a neighbour told me the previous tenant had given out several keys to family members and she’s sure they were still out there. I gave the landlord a copy of the key to the new lock so he can’t complain. There’s still the outside door. We’ll need to get a key copied for you.”

It was surprising how Myrna had become more assured in the past couple of weeks. I liked the old Myrna. I liked the new Myrna better. There were still moments of shyness, of course.

Before we’d left her place to take the bus today, she’d asked

“Joe. What should I wear to Kelly’s for Easter dinner.”

“Well, it won’t be fancy. I’d guess you’re more comfortable in a blouse and skirt than a dress.”

“You’re getting to know me.”

“Did I see a skirt made sort-of like a quilt in your closet?”

“Yes. I did that as an experiment. I’m not sure it worked. I had to tone down the colours so I didn’t look like I was walking out of the wall or off the bed.”

“Why don’t we see how it looks on you. Go put it on.”

“I don’t have stockings on.”

“Oh. Horrors! I might see your legs. Of course, the alternative of just stockings and a bare pussy and bare boobs, that might be interesting.”

“Stop it! You awful man.” But she went and put on the skirt. It actually looked quite nice. She was wearing a beige blouse.

“Try a white blouse. And do you have a sleeveless pullover or cardigan, maybe in a brown or dark green?”

“Forest green?”

It turned out this worked, so we took them over to my place so they’d be there next Sunday. I’d set aside a part of my closet for Myrna. I definitely had a girlfriend.

\* \* \*

Myrna was sleeping still when I got up on Sunday morning at a bit after 7. I didn't feel sleepy, so I moved the car out of the garage to do a bit of tidying. Looked like it would be a nice day, but it was a bit cold. Still, I had a jacket, cap and work gloves.

Hmm. There was my bike. I should pump the tires. I pulled it out into the middle of the garage and found the pump in the cabinet at the back of the garage along with a couple of rags and wiped the bike, pumped the tires, then found some oil for the chain. I took the bike outside and did a quick circuit of the condo complex to test the gears and brakes and was pulling back into the garage when Myrna popped her head round the door into the garage from the inside hallway.

"Oh. There you are. I wondered where you were."

"Getting my bike set up. Do you have one?"

"Used to. Got stolen from the basement 4 years ago, even though I had a lock on it. Never felt it worthwhile to get another."

"Go put on some clothes and we'll run over to Rockin' Johnny's for breakfast, then see if we can find you one. Then we can take a spin this afternoon and see what things are like at the Experimental Farm."

"Joe! You keep getting me stuff."

"No. I keep getting myself stuff so I can have fun with you."

"All right! But I should have a shower, I was too tired last night."

"We could shower together when we get back from finding a bike," I suggested.

"I suppose."

"What do you suppose," I pretended innocence.

"I suppose I'm going to end up trying out more than one type of sporting equipment."

\* \* \*

We looked at a couple of places for a bike for Myrna, but ended up getting a fairly inexpensive 21 speed women's pattern at Canadian Tire. It was quite well equipped with a carrier, but I bought a pair of lights, just in case, and some reflective tape to satisfy a fairly obscure regulation that insisted the forks be reflective. And I got a mirror too.

When we got home we left setting it up for the afternoon and took a shower. Afterwards, back in bed we realized we'd finished all of one box of condoms and were part way through the unlubricated ones.

"What do you think of these?" I asked.

"I don't know if I feel much difference. How about for you?"

"Lubrication inside gives a better feeling for me, I think."

“Do you think it would feel different without the condom?” Myrna asked.

“I’m sure both of us would prefer that from the point of view of not having to pull out and not having to put it on. And I’m not worried about an STD. As far as I can tell, we’re monogamous. So the issue is possible pregnancy.”

“Yeah.”

Myrna’s answer left a lot hanging.

“Want to talk about that?” I asked.

“I do and I don’t. I’m not sure how I feel about a child. I know that I have some feelings of wanting one or more, but I’m not sure I’m equipped to handle it.”

“An obstetrician acquaintance – female – said she tried to get her patients to have kids early before they realized how much work it was.”

Myrna laughed. “Probably a good idea. Which puts us in the soup if I get in the family way. Or rather puts me in it.”

“I’d be there too,” I said quietly.

“Yes. I know you would, Joe.”

She got out of bed and went to the bathroom. When she came back, she said, “I’m starting my period, and I bought some tampons last week, but left them at my place. Silly me. Up to now I’ve used pads, but I think tampons will be more convenient. I’ll have to go downstairs and get a pad from the pack you have in the powder room.”

“Maybe after trying without a condom? It should be safe. If we are extremely unlucky, we’ll manage whatever comes together.”

“You lovely man. I’ll get a towel.”

We postponed the discussion of condoms and kids until later. During the week, I bought some more of the condoms we seemed to prefer – we could play with the novelty ones later – so we’d be OK for the trip if Myrna’s period finished by the time we were travelling. Even if her period weren’t finished, I would be happy to be with her. In fact, I suspected she would be the disappointed party.

\* \* \*

Over a snack that we called lunch we got on the topic of some of the letters from and to Mother and/or John Smith. Actually the two from Mr Swenson that were in Mother’s deed box.

“I remember as a kid, that one time Mother and I played a game where we wrote each other letters with hidden messages, but I was quite young and I can’t remember how things worked.”

Myrna said "It could be a quite complicated code. The British MI9 had a code that POWs used, but I believe knowledge of the method was lost for a while."

"Maybe we'll take another look and see if we spot anything."

After we'd tidied up, we went upstairs. Myrna said "Can you make a photocopy so we can write on it?"

"Actually, I have scans, I'll print a couple of copies for us. Here's the first one."

---

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

January 7, 1943

File: #236554082

Dear Miss Rivers,

Please forgive the informality of a handwritten letter, but there is some urgency in communicating this to you.

It is extremely important for the good management of proposed contracts that any documents submitted be precise. We have found this principle to be critical in achieving the required objectives. Possession of clearance to SECRET level will be verified by Unit 30. No prior inmates of internment camps should be engaged.

I remain, Miss Rivers, much obliged for your continuing and faithful assistance, and am,

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

I brought the copies from the office/guest room where the printer was into Mother's room and put them on the table.

"What if the file number isn't really that at all, but a key to the message?" Myrna said.

"You mean 'use word 2' if there's a 2 at the start?"

"Something like that."

"But how would you know the difference between 1 then 3 and 13?" I complained.

"Yeah. Bad idea.... But if it is the words to be skipped between the words of the message...." Myrna admitted.

I scratched out words according to the number "236554082" and saw

~~Please forgive the informality of a handwritten letter,  
but there is some urgency in communicating this to you.~~

~~It is extremely important for the good management of~~

"That gives ... THE ..... HANDWRITTEN ...IN... IS.... Not seeming to work," I sighed.

"Try just the second paragraph," Myrna suggested.

~~It is extremely important for the good management of  
proposed contracts that any documents submitted be precise.  
We have found this principle to be critical in achieving  
the required objectives. Possession of clearance to SECRET  
level will be verified by Unit 30. No prior inmates of  
internment camps should be engaged.~~

"EXTREMELY .... GOOD .... DOCUMENTS FOUND IN POSSESSION OF 30 INMATES .... Wow! That seems to be on target. Camp 30 was where the U-boat men were being held."

"Let's look at the other one." Myrna was excited.

---

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

February 22, 1943

File: #112622-80

Dear Miss Rivers,

Once again I must resort to a handwritten letter.

I believe the E 10 14 C contract will be signed tomorrow.  
Your close cooperation is to be commended. Documents  
related to this contract must be handled with extreme  
caution.

I will communicate once the Minister has signed.

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

“It seems to be BELIEVE .... Oh, how should we handle the letters and numbers?” I asked.

“Try them as single words.”

“OK. It reads BELIEVE ... E ... C ... CLOSE ... TO ... DOCUMENTS. .... We seem to have found that Mother was involved somehow in the Kiebitz story. But what about the dash in the file number?”

“Try moving to the next paragraph,” Myrna suggested.

“There are only 8 words. No good.”

“Try ignoring the dash. It may be just to sow confusion.”

“EXTREME ... CAUTION ... Does that mean the dash is marking the end of a sentence?”

“And maybe the Beretta bullet shows that caution was needed.

Oh. Bye the way, did you note that today is the anniversary of Vimy Ridge?” Myrna added.

We made up entries to explain the letters and also about the decoding. They were quite long text blocks by comparison with the phrases that were commonly the entries in most fields in the file. Fortunately I’d set up a way to include links to such blocks and to images and other separate files that were relevant to my database. I even found a way to illustrate the method by including a marked up text in Open Office. The index machine was Linux and so Word wasn’t available. I had a copy of Corel WordPerfect for Linux, but it had a lot of issues. Even though Corel was based in Ottawa, I couldn’t get too enthusiastic about the product, which was rather better than Microsoft Word when it worked, but ....

\* \* \*

It was around 4 o’clock that we got into the garage to look at the new bike. I decided to just get the saddle set to Myrna’s height and I’d do the rest of the setup during the week. We got the saddle set quickly, and Myrna took a brief spin round the complex to test it out and declared it fine. She had a helmet at her place. We’d better remember to bring it over.



\* \* \*

The trip to Syracuse was a very relaxed one. We probably did a lot less than we could have, but managed to become familiar with the city. We enjoyed pleasant dinners, one in a steak house, one Japanese. On the Saturday, we drove to the small town that had the quilt exposition and spent nearly four hours there. It isn't something I would have sought out, but I found it pleasant, and it was enjoyable to watch Myrna interacting with people and listen to her explain the quilts to me.

On the way down to Syracuse, we'd crossed at Ogdensburg. It's a quieter crossing, and we could take the back roads parallel to I-81 and see something of the older, now rather impoverished, northern New York.

Once we were on Highway 37, I said "Should we continue the discussion about condoms and kids?"

Without her usual hesitation, Myrna said "Yes, we need to make sure we're on the same page."

"It's good that you didn't take the long pause to answer. I think you know that I do want to keep our friendship going – and the other stuff that we seem to like."

Now there was a brief pause.

"Would you like a child, Joe?"

I paused also.

"That's a big question. I don't feel a particular need to have a child of my own. I'm not sure I'm quite prepared for all the work. But on the other hand, I'd never avoid my responsibilities. And I've clearly been involved in a situation where there were children around, and I participated in a partial way in the parenting. I'm not sure I'm much good with diapers though. Joanne and Kelly's kids were well past that.

What about you?"

"Like I said the other day, a child hasn't been a possibility. When I was first out of university, I kind of thought I'd meet someone and have a child or two, but then I didn't find anyone, nor they me. In fact, I probably thought more about a child than sex, which is cart before horse I suppose. Now I don't know. And like you, the idea of diapers isn't appealing. Nor is all night crying."

I said "I don't have any moral objection to abortion, but I would never want a woman I shared a conception with to think she had to have one on my account."

"I don't think I'd feel right about an abortion either. At least for me. I think women should have a choice, though I also think they should try to avoid the need of abortion. It seems such a waste."

I summarized, “We don’t seem enthusiastic about parenthood, would that be a fair statement.”

“Yes. I’d agree with that.”

“So what about contraception? It wouldn’t have been an issue if we both wanted a child – we’d just not bother with precautions. But since we may need contraception, I’m willing to discuss any method, unless you want me to tie a knot in my you-know-what. Of course, it might be difficult to give you what you like with a knot in it.”

I heard a giggle – I was watching the road – then Myrna said “Yeah, we’d better talk about that. Probably talk a lot to avoid messing up.”

“Can I ask if you have a physician?” I said.

“Yes, and I’m overdue for a check-up. Probably should make an appointment.”

“Do they do a PAP smear as a matter of course?”

“I’ll ask. I guess it’s important. Should I ask about the Pill?”

“For some women, and especially in your age group, I think there’s a concern about blood clots with the pill or other hormonal methods. With IUDs I guess there’s the risk of infection and bleeding. And with barrier methods like condoms and diaphragm, the fiddle-factor.”

“Joe. You seem to have thought about these things.”

“Sometimes Kelly and Joanne would talk about them. Joanne’s oldest, Margaret – who is now very pregnant by the way – was of an age where they needed to have conversations.”

“If I was sure, or you were sure, we could get surgery.”

“Myrna. Do you think that worth the risk vs. the chance of pregnancy?”

“Maybe not. Things can go wrong.”

“Perhaps, since we managed to enjoy a no-condom ... er ... intercourse ...”

Myrna was laughing. “Joe. It was me who couldn’t find the words a few weeks ago. I’ll not be offended if you say a no-condom fuck. It was nice.”

“Yes. It was. Maybe we use condoms except around the time of your period. Or maybe after I’ve gone off once and washed off, if we feel like a second go. Conception should be much less likely, especially at our ages. And, in the unlikely event of pregnancy, we could accept fate and be good parents.”

“That seems like a plan.”

We didn’t say anything for about two minutes as we drove through a small town. I said “We should make sure you have a check-up with a good pelvic exam to ensure no problems, and you can run the ideas we’ve talked about by your doctor. There may be other things we haven’t thought about that would work better.”

“Yes. We could be missing something helpful. But .... Can I ask a what-if question?”

“About what if you get pregnant?”

“Yes.”

“Well, for sure I’d provide properly for you and the child. And if we were still a couple, I’d suggest we get married. Maybe it’s a bit early to talk about marriage, but perhaps we should at least tell each other how we view what marriage means to us. If we have very different ideas, we’ll waste a lot of time otherwise.”

“Somehow I know you’ll look after a child, and me too. I don’t know a lot about being married or even being boyfriend / girlfriend. My parents didn’t show much affection, but they did act as a team. It seems that you show me a lot of kindness and warmth in small ways. You make me comfortable. I don’t think I’d ever have been able to get to having sex with a man who didn’t make me feel that I would and should enjoy it, and that I had a right to say what I liked and what I didn’t.”

“Even if I did almost convince you sex would enlarge your nipples?”

“That was a good prank. And pretty harmless. I’d forgotten it was April First.”

“Well, I think what you’ve seen is pretty well what you’ll get from me if we stay together. I’m sure there’ll be grumpy days. There always are.

So you know where I’m a bit cautious, I’m gong to tell you that my relationships with Emma and Jessica both let me down. Not so much the women but the situations. Emma and I were both young and didn’t consider whether we could or should stay linked to each other. Jessica I would have married, but she became addicted and through that mentally ill.”

“I’m sure that was very difficult to deal with,” Myrna said.

“Yes. I felt pretty helpless.

Now one of the awkward things about you and me is that I’ve got a moderate bundle of money. Some people might suggest that could attract a gold-digger. I know that isn’t you. But suppose we were to marry, then you got sick like Jessica and we separated or got divorced, not because I really wanted to, but because such situations make life impossible otherwise. Even with ‘for better or for worse’, I have a hard time thinking you’d deserve half my wealth, though I’d be a sleaze if we had a child and I died and the money went to a distant cousin. And even if the situation were like with Jessica, you’d probably be due some monies to help you get well, though in Jessica’s case, I think any money would go to criminal drug dealers. As it was, we hadn’t married, and I didn’t have much money then.”

“Joe, I’m glad you’re thinking of these realities. They’re not easy issues.”

“No. These are matters that aren’t really about love and affection, but still need to be looked after.”

“Frankly, I’d not thought about possibilities like that,” Myrna said.

“If we continue to grow our friendship and it ripens into something more, we’re going to need to figure out good arrangements that work, as I said, for better or worse. I’m sure that it’s entirely possible with good dialogue and attention to detail.”

“I’ve never had reason to think about things like this before. I’m glad you take us so seriously. And I think even if you just wanted me for a bit of fun, I’d still go along with it as long as I felt I wouldn’t come to harm.”

“I think I want more than a bit of fun,” I said, and noticed Myrna smile.

“Joe. When we were talking about children just now, it occurred to me that if we had a child, we’d be older parents like your folks were. Is that part of how you are thinking?”

“Hmm. Good question. .... I’m sure I wasn’t consciously thinking about that, but maybe it is part of my ... er ... context, or the context of my thinking.”

“Did it make growing up seem different from other kids’ experience?” Myrna asked.

“Probably. But it was going to be pretty strange anyway. Dad retired early – I think he’d done pretty well with investments, and then he died and Mother didn’t go back to work as such, but she did seem to do a lot of correspondence and organization in an office she had at home. She made some income from that, but it meant she was at home for me too, especially until I was 14 or 15 and could be more independent.”

“What about male role models? Friends if not family?”

“I guess you don’t notice so much when you’re living it, but the ‘older parent’ situation meant that Mother’s friends – she had connections from the War – were older. I’m guessing Swenson was one, though I don’t remember anyone by that name, though there was an Uncle Richard when I was little. I think he died soon after Dad. But people in my parents’ age group had older kids, so at social events I was often the youngest. Those more than a decade older I never really got to know. Those who were teens when I was under 10 I know now as acquaintances, or perhaps a bit more than that.

On the other hand, I think Mother and Dad didn’t really have a clue about children, and treated me like a little adult. That may seem weird, but they let me read the newspaper and ask questions or give comments about the news. I was expected from an early age to be able to use money. After Dad died, I’d shop for groceries with Mother and she liked to pack things carefully, so had me do the payment and check the change. Sometimes the cashier would seem surprised. I remember one time I said ‘You’ve charged me \$1.30 too little.’ The cashier said ‘No. It’s right here on the register’. I said ‘I’d already added it up.’ and the cashier insisted on the amount on the register. Mother said ‘All right. Thank you.’

Later she confirmed I was right, but she said that if you've tried to be honest and the other person insists on giving you money, it's easier just to agree with them."

"But it sounds like there weren't father figures for you after your Dad died?"

"Not around the house. Mother had occasional men friends, I think. After I was about 12, she sometimes would go out to lunch and if I was at home she would leave the phone number where she was. A couple of years later and she went out evenings, but she didn't bring men home. I don't even know if her outings were with men or not.

We did spend some holidays at a cottage where there were families she knew, and I'd tag along on a boat or fishing, and there were campfire or veranda get-togethers. I think that was how Mother arranged that I saw how men fitted into families."

"Do you think she missed having a man? She did mention having men friends in her letter to you."

"I didn't tell you that I found a box of condoms when I cleared up her unit in the retirement home."

"Really!"

"They were about 10 years out of date, but it does indicate that she was at least interested until quite late in life."

"Joe. It seems like she had what you could call family life and her sex life apart. That was the case with John Smith as far as I can understand."

"Yes. It could be that she separated those parts of her life. But it's not so different for me with Kelly and Joanne. And from the outside it's always hard to understand what is really going on. I'm hopeful that you and they will find enough common ground that you'll be able to get a bit of a sense that they were and are important to me, even though we recognized that we weren't the ones for each other. But it's equally possible that their own new arrangements will make that a pipe-dream, so don't worry too much if Sunday is just a dinner with some acquaintances. That is, nice if things develop into a friendship, but it isn't required."

"That almost sounds like you think I could be the one." Myrna said apprehensively.

"We seem to get along nicely on several levels. But we'd better enjoy the here and now and not put too much pressure on ourselves.

Do you think there is 'the one' or are there a number of people who could work?"

"You're seriously asking someone who's just got her first boyfriend?"

\* \* \*

Easter Sunday – April 16, 2006

We had a room with two double beds, but fell asleep in each other's arms in one of them. I woke about 6:30 and went to pee. When I got into bed, Myrna was awake and she went to the bathroom. She came back and slid in beside me.

"There was just a touch of blood on the pad, and the heavy feeling has stopped." Myrna had decided to start using tampons during the day, but at night continue with pads. As she snuggled up to me, I realized she had abandoned her PJs and had brought a towel back from the bathroom.

"Horny?" I asked.

"Not exactly. I think I want closeness."

"Does that mean without barrier?"

"Hmmm. Is that OK?"

I answered by kissing her and starting to slide out of my own pyjamas, but I said, "It might be more risky at the end of your period, and I've not gone off for a few days either. We could just cuddle and play around a bit."

"Thanks for being considerate. But put on a condom. I want to be together."

We slept afterwards and woke around 9 and showered and packed up. We found a McDonalds and had McMuffin's and coffee, then began the journey home.

We stopped in Watertown and did a bit of mostly window shopping in the shops and mall just west of I-81. Since we were away more than 48 hours, we had a duty free allowance. Myrna already had some quilting material and a new pair of scissors. I found an interesting corkscrew in a gadget store. Entirely modest expenditures.

Primarily we were learning each other's pace and style of shopping. Was it Red-Green who said "Women shop. Guys buy stuff"?

\* \* \*

We got home in time to unpack without having to rush. We had a cup of tea and chatted a bit about what we'd done on the trip. Talked also about when Myrna might try driving the Subaru. Then we took a shower together and washed hair, and had a minor smooch but didn't end up in or on the bed. It was getting toward 5:15, so we dressed. Myrna was being quite particular about her hair, even though she still kept the pony-tail. And she put on a little lipstick and a simple pendant on a chain I'd not seen before. There was something else different too. What was it?

"Do I look OK?" she asked.

"Very nice. And I mean it."

“And the glasses?”

That was it! She had on some wire-frame ones that were almost the same shape as her regular specs, but without the heaviness of appearance.

“They allow your face to be seen better. New?”

“Yes. I went out about ten days ago and saw them and decided to get a pair made to see how they’d look.”

“Good thinking,” I said, meaning it.

When we got to Kelly’s there was general noise and welcome. We’d brought some wine and some Brie and crackers, as well as some cookies Myrna had baked before the weekend. I was told to take these things into the kitchen to Joanne and bring back a drink for Myrna and myself. Myrna looked a bit stricken, like a deer in the headlights, as Kelly had her cornered. By the time I came back, though, she and Kelly were laughing.

Kelly said “We were comparing notes on your skills. You know. Getting drywall mud out of awkward places.” Both ladies giggled. Almost guffawed.

“Sounds like I have no secrets,” I said.

“None,” said Kelly.

“At all,” echoed Myrna.

“Does that mean Myrna has been telling you about what has been happening at my place in the last few weeks?”

Myrna blushed, then said, “Only the barest outline.”

“Well, let’s hope it disarms the Inquisition. Remember having to face the kids at the resort in 2000, Kelly?”

“They’d better not do that to Myrna, or Margaret will have to pay double rates for baby-sitting when that lump in her tummy decides to plop.”

We all laughed, and then moved to chat with the rest of the family.

\* \* \*

The next Saturday morning found us in the Timothy’s coffee shop on Laurier Avenue to meet Barbara, a friend of Myrna from the library. Easter Monday I’d driven her to the University – exams were on, so she decided to work. A lot of places seemed not to take the holiday now.

Myrna and I had enjoyed a nice pub meal the night before to celebrate our birthdays in the Highlander on Rideau. I’d given Myrna the corkscrew I’d bought. She gave me a nifty fresnel magnifier – to make it easier to read inscriptions on rings, she claimed. She also gave me a set of keys to her place. We were officially a boyfriend / girlfriend couple. I stayed over.

Today was pelting rain. We were rather damp and umbrellas and hats were dripping on the floor.

Barbara was possibly a year or two older than Myrna but looked a lot older. Part of that was the mostly grey hair. Instead of streaks of grey in dark hair, she had streaks of dark brown or black hair on grey mop that had little shape or style. She was also overweight.

Her greeting to me was “You’re the man who’s to blame for me not seeing Myrna for a month.”

This rather set the tone for our hour together, and though Myrna and I had spent the last three weekends together, it would have been possible for Barbara and Myrna to get together. I had my own hypothesis that they had drifted together because both had few friends and were socially awkward.

Myrna told Barbara about the things we had been doing. However, as each event was related, Barbara’s response was a snide or sour remark.

“If you like that sort of thing.”

“Only a pub meal for your birthday.”

“Syracuse always struck me as such a sleepy place.”

It’s hard to warm to someone who despises you simply because you have become close to one of their friends. However, I did my best to avoid making the situation more uncomfortable for Myrna. That meant biting my tongue and trying to be polite and friendly when I really thought some frank talk would be more appropriate.

After about 50 minutes, Barbara said “I guess it always happens this way. Women socialize with women until they get a boyfriend. Then ... you know.”

I didn’t think Myrna should respond to this, and said “I think we’re here because Myrna considers you a friend, and I think she wants that friendship to continue. People want to find partners, and it does cause change in other friendships – I’ve had it happen to me over the last year or so and it has been an adjustment I’ve had to make, not always comfortably. But I haven’t lost the friendships, though the amount of time and type of get-together is different from what it was before.

There’s also the matter that Myrna and I are getting to know each other and that means meeting the people in each other’s lives. That’s a chance to meet new people and get new viewpoints on life. I’m not a guy to try to isolate a woman to keep her all to myself.”

“I suppose that’s a way to say it that let’s you feel better.” Barbara wasn’t letting go of this bone.

“Barbara, I’m sorry you are unhappy that Myrna has found another friend. I hope we can both be supportive of her, even if we don’t share many interests.”

Myrna mumbled a suggestion that she meet Barbara during the week for lunch at the library and there was a rather unsatisfactory conclusion. We walked back to Myrna’s apartment mostly in silence. When we came in, we



both slumped down, Myrna in the armchair, with me on the sofa.

"She's very unhappy," Myrna said, "I don't know what to do."

"It really isn't up to you to make Barbara happy. You've been friends, and both your lives will evolve. It could have been her who found a boyfriend."

"But you weren't nice to her either."

That really wasn't fair. I knew Myrna was upset by the way Barbara had been, but I felt I'd been courteous and straightforward.

"Do you think I was unkind or unreasonable?" Possibly I had an edge on my voice.

"Well, I haven't been around to meet her for a few weeks."

"Do you regret your time with me?"

"Maybe you monopolized my time. I could have made time for Barbara if I'd not been at your place."

The grumpy time had arrived.

"Do we need a little time out to regroup?" I asked. I noticed a tear running down her cheek.

"You mean you go home?"

"I don't really believe in running away, but maybe a walk for half an hour or so to let us think a bit. Oh, it's still coming down out there."

But I meant what I said to Barbara. Like with Joanne and Kelly, things change. That's life. You can make the best of it so the friendship lives on, even if in a different form. And sometimes you get to make new friends. Or you can crawl under a rock."

"You're a man! You don't have to wait around to be asked out."

"Myrna. Listen to what you're saying. Nobody can conjure up a partner, but it doesn't mean you have to become a hermit or a nun."

"Oh. I just didn't realize what it would mean to finally have a ... boyfriend."

"Our first fight."

"Yeah. It's not fun," she said quietly.

"We haven't thrown anything at each other or said anything really nasty. If it wasn't raining so hard, I'd go for a walk round Strathcona Park for a bit."

How about we read or do quiet stuff for an hour, then see if things are a bit brighter, and not just the weather."

\* \* \*

I had a trashy novel with me. Myrna worked on one of her miniature quilts. She had a sewing machine – I'd not noticed it before, so perhaps she'd put it away when I visited previously.

After about an hour, she went to the kitchen – there was simply a half wall between it and the living room – and made a couple of sandwiches and a pot of tea.

“Peace offering?” she said, handing me a tray with a mug and a plate with the sandwich – cheese and tomato.

“I didn’t think we were at war. Just frustrated that not everyone can get what they want all at the same time. And we negotiated our first tiff without requiring the UN Blue Helmets.”

“Guess you’re right. It still makes me sad.”

“Well, when you see Barbara, try to be positive. She’s feeling sorry for herself, and her happiness isn’t your job. You’d like to help her find good things in life, and she should do the same for you. That’s a big part of friendship.”

“That’s what some of the self-help books tell you. You know, the Dr. Phil stuff.”

“I’ve seen mention of his program and books, but I’ve not actually looked into them.”

“He’s not bad. Tells people who have kids on drugs to love them but not cover-up their wrong-doing. That sort of thing,” Myrna explained.

“Barbara’s a bit on the self-pity drug. She’d probably have a lot better chance of having a few more friends if she presented a smile. And I’d bet a few bucks that she’d lose a few pounds and look more attractive if she did. Sometimes people only see the faults when they look in the mirror, and it helps if you’re looking outward.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Myrna didn’t seem convinced.

“Some years ago, I took part in a student Amnesty International committee trying to get a political prisoner out of jail in some god-forsaken country. The young woman running it was really overweight and dressed badly and ... well, sort of like Barbara only worse. She’d sometimes complain that women would drop out when the first penis offered itself.”

“What happened?”

“There was this guy joined the group. He’d taken a few years off after school before university and travelled. He wasn’t movie-star good looking, but I heard a couple of the girls in class or in the Amnesty group talking about him. Then apparently he started spending time with Zoe, the fat girl who was head of the group. And over a few months she started to dress in ways that were better suited to her shape and size, and then a lot of the excess weight came off, and her attitude became more friendly. I think it helped bring in more people to the group. I don’t know if the relationship lasted, but even if it didn’t, Zoe should have learned something about herself.”

“Yes. I guess so.”

“Not noticed it a bit yourself? I think you’ve been thinking about what you wear more lately.”

“Hmm. I guess I do. I don’t spend a lot of time doing so, but I do find I check in the mirror to see my clothes look OK.”

“Kelly one time said men can smell when a woman’s getting sex, and it makes them think she’s more attractive.”

“Do you think so?”

“If it’s true, it’s not a conscious thing as far as I’ve been able to figure out.”

“On Wednesday, I was kind of surprised when one of the male Reference librarians came by. He seemed all uncomfortable, then asked if I’d like to go to a movie Friday night. I had to tell him I had a dinner engagement.”

“Did you tell him you had a boyfriend?”

“Er ... no. Not yet.”

“Ah. Planning to two-time on me. I’ll have to get all huffy and jealous.”

“But ... but you don’t have to. I just didn’t want to make him feel bad.”

“And it felt kind of good to be asked? Yes?”

There was a pause, then “Yeah. It did.”

I was sitting on the sofa, and held out my arm and she came and sat beside me and I gave her a kiss.

\* \* \*

On the last Friday in April, Myrna arrived about 5:45. There was an accident somewhere and the buses were late. I’d got everything cut up for a stir fry and we shared a cider as we made it, then sat down at the kitchen table to eat.

“How did your physical go yesterday?”

“Dr Domenico ordered some blood work, but she says it’s just to get baseline data and she’ll only get in touch if there’s something abnormal. She’s in the University Health Centre practise, so I went down to the lab before going back to work.”

“Sounds like you got a clean bill of health unless they find something.”

“Yes. She’s a woman about my own age. She was pretty thorough. It was a bit awkward when she did the pelvic exam. I was embarrassed about the ... er... trim we did.”

“I’d guess she sees lots of variety these days.”

“Yes, she didn’t say anything about that. She did ask when I first had sex, and was a bit surprised when I said less than four weeks ago. She wanted to know if I had any pain, discomfort or bleeding, and was pleased I hadn’t. I told her how you’d taken time and introduced things slowly. I was a bit

vague about that, but she asked if I meant using toys or oral or manual stimulation, and she laughed and said 'Good for him' when I said 'All of the above'. She told me she found a variety of things like that a lot of fun herself which made it easy to talk to her woman to woman."

"What did she have to say about contraception?"

"She asked whether we used any, and I told her we were using condoms, but had tried without when my period was starting. She said that was OK as long as we were willing to accept a small risk of pregnancy. And she said that the real issue was likely how disciplined we were with the condoms, since they had a rather poor statistical record, but that the belief was that the failures were due to lack of care in using them rather than failures of the method itself.

She said if it was important that I not become pregnant, she would recommend an IUD or possibly a tubal ligation. There is a non-hormonal IUD, but they seem to have a pretty high risk of cramping and bleeding. She also said if we were willing to take a higher risk of pregnancy, we could go without the condom if we knew when I was a day or two before my period, as long as my period wasn't short, like less than 24 days. But I'm normally 30 to 32 days, and fairly regular, so we could possibly do a calendar of when we should use condoms."

I said "The main outcome seems to be – barring something in the blood work – that you seem to be healthy."

"Yes, she said my lungs seem clear. She checked my breasts. Said I should probably think about mammograms in the next couple of years, and have them annually from age 45 to 55, then every 2 years. And she told me to have regular dental care, because it's thought tooth decay is related to other illness like heart disease."

I said "Well, I'm happy for now to continue with the condoms and occasional unobstructed connections."

"Me too.

Oh, to change the subject, I found a photo of John Smith in a different collection in the Library."

"I'll have to take a look."

"I made a photocopy, which suffers a bit. It's in my purse, let me get it. I think you may be surprised."

She got the out an envelope in which the photocopy was kept flat on some cardboard. The image that looked back at me was disconcertingly like the one I saw each morning in the bathroom mirror.

"Wow," was all I could say.

\* \* \*

Saturday while I cooked breakfast – poached eggs on toast – Myrna read the Subaru manual and a short comic-book tutorial I’d found on the Internet. After breakfast, I drove us to Tunney’s Pasture and found a moderate sized parking lot near the Banting building, well away from active streets.

We changed seats and Myrna said “Hope we don’t do the cliché routine and end up shouting at each other.”

“Let’s wait and see. If it seems to not be working with me as instructor, you can find someone from a driving school. I’m not going to mess up things between us if I can avoid it. And I don’t think you are either.”

“OK. But what is your suggestion of how to proceed?”

“I think we should start with the engine off, and you should go through the motions to get a bit of a feel for the pedals and the gear-shift. That’s not a bad idea with any car that’s new to you. Same with mirrors and seat.”

“That makes sense. Let me try.”

I decided to keep quiet. Myrna pushed in the clutch, and was able to put the gear-shift to first and release the clutch. She tried to adjust the seat a bit and I helped her do this. Then the mirrors. Then she tried again to use the gears with engine off.

“Was that too fast?”

“On the release, yes. You want quick in, slower out. And at the same time, when clutch goes in, right foot comes off the accelerator. After a few tries you’ll not have to think about it, but at first it seems awkward.”

“Yes. It does. I’ll try the other gears.”

She got stuck trying to go to third.

I said “Sometimes when the engine isn’t running, the gears aren’t aligned. Try releasing the hand brake and putting it on again.”

After Myrna did this, she could get third gear, then fourth, then fifth.

“Try reverse. You need to go from Neutral and there’s a ring on the shaft to lift up.”

Myrna tried and it was a bit stiff.

“Try moving to first, then try reverse again. That’s a trick that isn’t always in the manuals.”

That worked for her.

Myrna went through the exercise of first to fifth and back again, using the pedals. We’d have to try it with the engine going.

“I think I’m ready to try with the engine now,” she said.

“OK. Do you know the sequence? Or shall I talk you through it. I’d rather keep quiet if you think you have it, as listening to me might be a distraction.”

“Let me try. Anything special about this car?”

“No. I think the main thing to remember is that if you have any concerns, push in clutch and step on the brake. And you should have right foot on

brake to start with, even before releasing the hand brake. Takes a bit of coordination to do the release and transfer to the accelerator, but a couple of tries and you'll be OK. By the way, I don't think I've ever downshifted into first except when stopped. And we won't be able to get beyond third gear here in the parking lot, but we can do start, second, third, second, stop a few times going round and round. And we can try stopping from third and restarting in first. And later reverse."

Indeed, she had a bit of a jerky start on the first try, then we got into second fairly smoothly, a bit of engine speed mismatch into third, but OK coming back. She did about three or four ups and downs going up one row and down another in the lot. Then we tried a couple of quick stops where I would say 'Stop' without warning so she could try an emergency stop. She stalled the car once, but that was pretty good.

We tried reverse, but just for a few feet. Decided we should quit while we were ahead for today and would save parking and reversing into a parking space for another time.

"Do you want to drive us home?"

"Not today. Remember, I've not driven for quite a while in any car. I need to get comfortable with the car and traffic."

"Good thinking."

"And you were right to keep quiet. I think when I learned with my brother, he was talking all the time. It was, as you said, a distraction."

\* \* \*

On Monday morning, I woke up with a sore throat and sniffles. Myrna phoned to say she was at home similarly, so we must have picked up something together somewhere. It wasn't terribly bad, and in the event she was back at work on Wednesday. On Monday and Tuesday I planned to mostly lay low.

Late Monday morning, after a hot lemon drink, I looked a bit at some of the stuff of Mother's. I came across a letter that seemed to explain one of the photos I'd found earlier.

---

3479146 Lt. Cmdr. Walton, J  
c/o RN Post Office  
Portsmouth, England

21 February 1941

Miss Katherine Rivers,  
John Smith Ltd.  
Halifax, NS, Canada

Dear Miss Rivers,

Enclosed is a copy of the photograph I mentioned during our conversation. Perhaps you could pass it along.

I am most grateful for the warm hospitality you showed my crew and I.

Sorry I cannot say more, but the censors have their job to do.

Yours sincerely,

James Walton

---

I took a shower, which cleared my sinuses a bit, then made a ham sandwich. After I'd eaten this, I went back to Mother's room to look at her books I'd kept. After I'd brought them home, I'd simply put them on her small bookcase that I'd also saved. However, I'd not done more than unload the books into the bookcase, where they occupied the bottom shelf and a few inches of the middle one.

Given that there'd been money in a couple of Mother's paperbacks, I should look through these ones I'd brought home. In the room at the moment I had the bookcase, the two folding tables and a simple chair that I'd found by the street one garbage day. The chair had needed a couple of screws and some glue to make it solid. However, I didn't have a comfortable chair. Probably should have kept Mother's LazyBoy, though it would be too big for this room with the tables. For now I got a couple of cushions from the living room and set them on the floor by the bookshelf. I could sit on one of them and lean back against the wall to peruse the books.

I started checking through the books, making sure there weren't any notes or money between the pages. A hard-cover copy of Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* caught my attention. Hmm. 1941 edition from Collins in Toronto. Must be a first edition. Probably worth a few dollars. Inside the front cover it was signed by Dad – Michael Cotton.

An envelope fell out of the middle. I gently took out three letters it contained.

---

Christian Cottage  
Downend, Bristol,  
England

21 January 1919

Lt. Michael Cotton  
c/o Halifax Citadel  
Sackville Street  
Halifax, NS, Canada

Dear Lt. Cotton,

Your enquiry of September 1918 to the Bristol Emigration Society regarding our relationship with Miss Prudence Ebberly has been forwarded to me as the former assistant to Mary Clifford, who was our most active member. It is extremely regrettable that our efforts were, under the intrusive examination of the Lord Bishop of Bristol, deemed amateur. We disbanded in 1906.

I can, however, confirm that there was some correspondence regarding your case, as Miss Ebberly shared our conviction that disadvantaged children should be brought up in a Christian environment, and I found her letter offering to take a child under ten as ward and as a helpmate and companion for her in her golden years.

I believe, from memory, that we asked Mr. Samuel Gardner to arrange for you to be delivered to Miss Ebberly when you arrived in St. John, New Brunswick, in 1900, though I have not found any document to that effect.

I am sorry that I cannot provide more information, and offer my condolences on the presumed death of your former guardian in the terrible explosion.

Yours sincerely,



Margaret Forster

---

General Delivery  
Halifax

12 July 1918

Lt. Michael Cotton  
c/o Halifax Citadel  
Sackville Street  
Halifax, NS, Canada

Dear Lt. Cotton,

Thank you for your condolences regarding Merle, who I am afraid we must now presume to be gone, and my own sympathies for the similarly presumed demise of Miss Ebberly.

I do recall your arrival at Richmond School in, I believe, 1901, when I was a junior teacher. I am afraid, however, my recollections will only provide imperfect information on your history. As far as I remember, you were made a ward of Miss Ebberly after being conveyed from a workhouse in Bristol, England, under the auspices of the Bristol Emigration Society. My understanding is that this organization was run by people with eminent good intentions, but whose attention to documentation and to continued diligence in following their charges left much to be desired. Indeed, your note to me is likely a reflection on their inattention.

I apologize that my own situation, while largely secure and comfortable, is subject to change as we rebuild after the catastrophe, and I am using the General Delivery at the moment. However, I hope

that we will get a chance to meet in person soon.

Yours sincerely,

K. Huggins, Principal, Richmond School

---

Mortuary Committee  
City Hall  
Halifax

2 June 1918

Lt. Michael Cotton  
c/o Halifax Citadel  
Sackville Street  
Halifax, NS, Canada

Dear Lt. Cotton,

In response to your enquiry about your former guardian, Miss Prudence Ebberly of Veith Street, I am unfortunately unable to report that we found any identifiable remains. Nor have we found any report of a living person who might be this lady.

Given that we did thoroughly search the area where she was presumed to be at the time of the explosion and subsequent fires, I will state that it is my opinion that Miss Ebberly perished, that her body was either consumed or is part of the collection of unknown victims that were buried soon after the disaster.

I regret that this letter cannot provide that closure so sought in this time of sadness.

Yours sincerely,

I checked there was nothing else in the MacLennan book, then put it at the empty end of the middle shelf. That would give me a system. I even took a bit of masking tape and stuck it to the shelf and wrote on it “RHS reviewed”. I did this in case Myrna were to start looking at them. There were a couple of other books I’d rifled for things stuck between the pages and put on the floor. I added them to the MacLennan.

I scanned the letters and then put them on the table where I’d be able to show Myrna next time she was here. They added to my knowledge of my parents. It occurred to me that Mother never quite said how she came to be employed by John Smith. I’d have to see if I could find anything.

\* \* \*

Tuesday morning I was feeling a bit less fuzzy and went for a good walk of over an hour. My thoughts were unsettled. I didn’t have material worries, of course. My emotional and intellectual disquiet came from a mix of the challenge of uncovering the history of my parents and their wartime activities, the search for a new occupation – not necessarily paid – and finally, but far from last in priority, Myrna.

As I walked, it seemed the threads of thought tangled and twirled as if in the squally winds immediately prefacing a storm. I wanted to spin them together to a common yarn that would pull my life into a positive and rewarding direction.

My perambulatory peregrinations did not lead me on this day to a conclusion, even as my feet carried me home. I would continue to ponder the trio of themes a while yet. Meanwhile, I could continue to look through the books and papers of yesteryear.

After a washroom visit, I got an instant coffee, sent an email to Beth to convey my regrets to the writers’ group that I felt I shouldn’t burden them with a possible cold, then returned to consider the bookshelf in Mother’s room. I started going through more books, choosing from the ones I hadn’t yet reviewed. About half a dozen contained nothing, not even writing in the inside covers.

I picked up a 1905 printing of Browning’s poems, published by Oxford in a nice binding, and as I rifled the pages an envelope fell out. Inside were three letters.

---

Officer Commanding  
Canadian Military District 6  
The Citadel  
Halifax

2 April 1919

John Smith  
John Smith Industries

Dear John,

This is to introduce the bearer of this letter,  
Michael Cotton, who acted as one of my interrogation  
and documentation officers in managing internees in  
the recent War.

Michael has a great skill in recording and organizing  
many disparate pieces of information. I think he would  
be an asset to your organization, and on that basis I  
commend him to your attention.

If you wish more details -- though some cannot be  
revealed as they fall under the Official Secrets  
Act -- you know where to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Zachary Sutton, O/C

---

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

August 30, 1939

Michael Cotton  
John Smith Industries  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Personal and Confidential  
=====

Dear Michael,

I apologize for using your work address, but do not have your home one.

I hope you will remember me from our time working to determine the status of internees in Halifax during the Great War. It happens that I will be in Halifax next week, and would be pleased if you could meet me at the Lord Nelson at 7:30 Tuesday, Sept 5. There is a matter of great delicacy about which I would be most grateful for your advice. From my recollection of your handling of some cases during the War, I think you may be of great help.

If you are unable to meet on Tuesday, please leave me a message at the Nelson suggesting when we might meet and how I may get hold of you. I will arrive there Monday.

My greetings to Miss Rivers, who I believe you know. We met recently in Ottawa when Mr. Smith came to discuss some work for the Government of Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

March 30, 1940

Dear Michael and Katherine,

It is a great pleasure to be able to write to you both in a purely personal capacity and extend my heartiest congratulations and best wishes upon your marriage.

In these dark times, it is to be hoped that your statement of confidence will give others assurance and purpose.

I look forward to being able to communicate with you both over the coming years.

My best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Richard A. H. Swenson

---

I got up – sitting on the cushion on the floor was conducive to cramps – and, as with previous finds, made entries into the database and scanned the items. Once more I set them out on one of the two tables I was now reserving for 'things to show Myrna'. However, we were chatting most evenings.

In the afternoon I attended to some everyday tasks of bills and letters and a bit of checking the house and vacuuming. I also did a bit of reading of a trashy novel. Truthfully, the trio of parents history, occupation and Myrna were churning. I really did want some distraction and distance from that preoccupation. Being too close to things could, I knew from both programming and business, lead to poor decisions. However, I did take a few minutes to tap out an extended outline of a very short story using the idea of threads of thought spinning into a yarn. I might use that for next week's writers' group.

\* \* \*

For some reason, despite the cool temperature necessitating a jacket, I sat on my front step after I'd eaten some noodles I made for supper. I make

my own from ingredients rather than use the pre-packaged variety. I had a mug of tea and had just taken my first sip when Kelly and Joanne came along.

“Whatcha’ doin’?” Kelly asked.

“Hi guys. Having a cup of tea after supper. Want a mug.”

“Sure,” Joanne said.

We went inside and I refilled the kettle and turned it on. I was using Mother’s rather nice one, and Joanne noticed. “Nice kettle.”

“It was Mother’s, and better than my old one, which I’ve relegated to the basement as ‘just in case’. What’re you guys doing?”

Kelly said “Taking a walk to try to work out the solution to life, love, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Joanne added “Also known as trying to decide whether to get married and, if so, when and how.”

“I guess I might be in the same boat,” I said before realizing it might be premature.

“You too!” Kelly gasped.

“Presumably that quite nice lady named Myrna,” Joanne was more in control of herself.

“Tell me about you and I’ll tell you about me,” I offered. “Maybe saying things out loud will bring some clarity.”

“Clarity is good,” Kelly agreed, then said “You go first, Joanne.”

“Pass me that mug then.

OK. Well it’s no secret Ralph and I are partners. You’ve both been in the know from the start, and I really appreciate your support and encouragement. But now I think we feel we’re a team, and maybe that needs a bit of a declaration. With Margaret getting married and now about to give me a grandchild, I didn’t want to steal her limelight. But later this year, Ralph and I would like to do something. He’s been divorced a while – more or less a juvenile mistake – and I eloped and then was widowed rather young. We’re tempted to do something fancy, but it doesn’t seem to be ‘us’.”

I said “You seem to have made your basic decision, and I assume Ralph is on side, so your mix-up is about the way you get married rather than doing so.”

“Yeah, I think so. We’d probably not insist on a wedding, but at least some sort of celebration of partnership,” Joanne added.

“A wedding could still be such a celebration, but maybe you don’t want some of the traditional excess,” I suggested.

“That rather puts a nice perspective on things. Kelly, your turn.”

“Well both Tom and I are divorced. He’s 5 years younger than me, and he still has a 10 year old and a 12 year old. They live with their mother, but maybe would spend more time with us. I think I’m in the ‘other woman’

category, but Tom had been divorced two years before we even met. And I'm divorced too. I haven't had any contact with 'slime' in over ten years, though the kids do sometimes go and visit his mother, and they have his address. He doesn't write to them, though, and I think that hurts a lot more than either Charles or Heather will admit. I've even thought of sending them a card supposedly from him."

"Dear Frankie?" I said.

"Why Frankie?" Kelly asked.

"It's a Scottish film that came out about a year or so ago," Joanne said. "Ralph and I rented the video recently because someone at work said it was really good and it was if you didn't mind replaying bits to catch the incredibly strong Scottish accent."

"Yeah, I saw it too," I said. "I've been to Glasgow and the accent is really thick. The film was beautifully done."

"Anyway, there are some reasons for Tom and I to be cautious, but we like being together, and could combine the work we do. So we've been talking about how we'd do a merger, and whether getting married is what we want to do. I think it is. We're not quite living together yet, just always at each other's place, so laundry is a nightmare. I keep running out of undies at one place or the other."

"Does Tom mind?" Joanne asked provocatively.

"Hardy Har Har. If you're not careful I'll have to play the tape of you and Joe from when we shared a room."

"You didn't!" Joanne exclaimed.

"Just be nice, and I'll make sure it disappears."

"Well, ladies, your attempts to tease each other sort of let me off the hook."

"No they don't," both sisters said at once.

"Spill, Joe," Joanne said.

"Well, you've met Myrna. She's pleasant. I think good looking, though one guy I met at contra dance said 'plain Jane' and 'almost ugly', with which I disagree strongly."

Joanne said "She's got fairly strong facial features but a great figure, which I envy. She just needs to watch what she wears and how she does her hair. Also should smile. Not grin, of course, but when she's just thinking, her face looks unhappy when I suspect she's not."

"You've summed up Myrna's appearance well. And I think being with me has had a modest effect in a positive direction."

Anyway, appearance is just one thing. I think what has me thinking about Myrna more seriously is how we seem to get along and share different activities, though I worry that may just be wishful thinking."

"Why don't you give us some examples?" Joanne suggested.



“Well, she’s been really helpful and interested in my investigation of Mother’s files and the time she worked with John Smith. We think we’ve found out that Mother and Dad were involved with stopping German POWs from escaping and probably somehow helped catch or stop some sort of German agent. A woman – she may have murdered a relative of the Smiths and taken her identity. Myrna even helped me decode some messages hidden in some letters.”

“Gee. A spy mystery to boot.”

“Yeah, but that’s sort of a hobby, if you like. Myrna has been dancing with me and she’s good. We’re trying to bike, and will once the weather cooperates. We seem to like similar food – at least we don’t have friction over things. So there seems to be a fit.”

“Is it my imagination, or is she pretty new to fun in the bedroom,” Kelly asked.

“Yeah. Shyness and a strict upbringing. She’s fine, and has a good sense of humour, in and out of bed, I might add.”

“That’s important,” Joanne said.

“We both enjoy .... well, words and ideas,” I added. “Even when we’re doing other things, we talk about what we like, things we’ve seen.”

“Does she want kids?” Kelly asked.

“We’ve had a couple of talks about that, and the conclusion is no, but neither of us would want to take any action if she got pregnant to get rid of it.”

“That’s an important topic to agree on,” Joanne said.

“Seems like you’ve found a gal worth popping the question,” Kelly said.

“Well, maybe. I still have emotional scars from Jessica, and now I’ve a bit of money. I’d hate to get into a situation where the woman I loved was funnelling money to drug dealers. And an outsider would probably say to beware of gold-diggers.”

“So, get a pre-nup. In your situation, I think it makes a lot of sense,” Joanne said. “If things work out, I know you’ll be happy to share your fortune and future with Myrna. And my brief encounter with her tells me she’s OK.”

“I’d second that,” Kelly said.

\* \* \*

We were having a wet Spring, with several millimetres on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Then it was below freezing Saturday night. We still hadn’t got out for a good bike ride.

Still, we were able to go to the Ottawa Little Theatre and had tickets for the 5th. I would stay over at Myrna's. We met Myrna's colleague and supervisor Jocelyn and her husband Ray Lindeman at the intermission, and on the spur of the moment decided to go to Second Cup for coffee after the play. It turned out I'd had some interaction with Ray on some projects where my company had done work for the government unit he worked for. I should remember which one, but it really didn't matter too much now.

"It's interesting that we have two librarians and two IT guys attending that play," I said. The plot involved a librarian who threatens to blow up the library if the card catalogue is removed.

"The premise could be considered timely given most libraries, including U of O, have been getting rid of card catalogues," Jocelyn said.

"For what it's worth, I can give you a CD with my inventory of the John Smith archival papers," I said. "You could copy off the files to whatever the Library is using, but put the CD with the papers."

There was some good natured banter about this and the general subject of catalogs and indexes, as well as the ever-popular discussion of the weather. Canadian, eh? As it was gone 10, we didn't linger long.

Walking back to the apartment, Myrna said "I don't get to the theatre much, but I like it when I do."

"Anything stopping you?" I asked.

The characteristic pause, then "I think it's just that it's so much nicer to share it with someone. And until now I haven't had that possibility, or haven't felt that I've had it.

The idea of discussing the play and so on is attractive. Though really we didn't do that, so maybe it's just that a play presents a different life, and that's a starting point for conversation."

"I've got to say I'm not nearly as likely to go to the theatre on my own. Solitude makes you lazy about that sort of activity. Or maybe it reminds you that you don't have someone to go home and cuddle with," I contributed.

"That too."

\* \* \*

We came back to my place on Saturday and spent some time looking at the letters I'd found.

Myrna said "You're getting a more complete picture of your Dad's background."

"Yes. As a kid of 8, he's just Dad. You don't think of how he got where he was."

“You told me about some of the stuff you’d found when we talked on the phone. I had a couple of hours that were pretty quiet, and I’m afraid I skived off and did some searching about the Bristol Emigration Society. They were just one of a number of outfits that essentially exported poor kids, not all of them orphans.”

“Yes. I had a bit of a look too. You know, it struck me that we’re starting to get a lot of people of indigenous or black background campaigning for recognition of some of the pretty nasty things that happened to children of their communities. But in the late 19th century, mainstream society treated poverty with surprisingly even-handed nastiness.”

“Yes. My reading suggests most of the kids brought to Canada weren’t orphans and in many cases the parents would not have given their permission.”

“Maybe we should consolidate our notes and the things we remember while it’s still fresh in our minds,” I suggested.

This took us most of the day. I was rather surprised to look at the clock and see that it was just after 5 p.m. We’d had a quick lunch at noon, so had been at this for well over four hours.

“Food, sex, or something else?” I asked.

“Oh. Now you’ve got me flummoxed. I want all of the above and all at the same time. But let’s start with food. Do you have anything in mind?”

“I’ve the makings of a stir fry, though we had that last week. Or we could use the same ingredients in a pasta dish, even add some tinned tomatoes. If there’s stuff left over it can be frozen. If you’re hungry, we’ll use one chicken breast apiece. If not, share one,” I offered.

“A friend says that she and her husband in the kitchen together would be instant divorce. But I’m willing to try to see if we can cooperate.”

“Are we going out later, or staying in. I’ve a couple of DVD movies if you want, and some saved VHS tapes. You told me about Kiebitz and HMCS Rimouski. I’ve Nicholas Monsarrat’s *Cruel Sea* which is about corvettes like HMCS Rimouski. A bit sobering, but not Hollywood gung-ho military. He lived in Ottawa for about 14 years, I think until 1966.”

“OK. That’d be fine. .... But didn’t you forget sex?” Myrna asked mischievously.

“I’m sure we’ll fit it in. Or we could try the kitchen table while the pasta cooks. There might just be enough time for one orgasm.”

Needless to say, we both were all talk on that front, at least while cooking supper. We opened some wine and maybe drank 2/3 of the bottle over the evening. When we had the pasta ready, we ate it in front of the TV. I had some old-fashioned TV tables. They don’t seem to make them any more. Monsarrat’s compelling story led to quite a rambling conversation about different people in different places during the War and we finally rolled into

bed around 11. We'd forgotten sex.  
Of course, we did have Sunday morning.

\* \* \*

On Monday, I got my Census questionnaire. I'd drawn the long form. Well, I'll fill it in online next week. May 16 was the official count day. I wondered if Myrna got a long or a short form. Have to ask.

It struck me that if we were married, we'd save a form. The probability of getting a long form was 1 in 5 or .2. What was the probability that at least one of two households would get the long form? Ah, what was that? Oh yes, a binomial probability. Well the chance neither would get the long form was  $.8 * .8$  or .64. So the chance at least one of Myrna and I would get a long form was 0.36. Getting on for double.

I wonder if Myrna would find that interesting. I'd need to ask. Pity she wasn't here. I was getting so I wanted to be able to ask her opinion, to see her smile or look pensive or ... just be there.

Indeed. I truly had come to like having her around. As I'd already admitted to Joanne and Kelly, I was seriously thinking of asking her to marry me. Yet I'd never exactly told her I loved her, nor had she said she loved me. Not in those words. Was that an excess of caution, or did it indicate we didn't really love each other. I know that I said "I love you" to Emma and Jessica. And I'd meant it at the time. Was getting burned with them why I was so reticent to use the words now. I'd not said the words to Kelly and Joanne, though I had expressed affection to them both. And I knew I loved them too, but it wasn't a passion. It was deep and abiding friendship with a cross-current of loving of a familial sort.

I had my second cup of coffee. With each sip, the realization that I loved Myrna and she loved me became more sure. It was time to say the words, if I could get them out.

Tonight was writers' group. I wrote a short piece called *Unsaid* about a couple who love each other deeply and show it with kindness and affection, but never say the word. I realize it described Mother and Dad, and might apply to Myrna and I.

\* \* \*

Rain! Over an inch on Friday, a smattering Saturday, then another 6 mm on Sunday. No wonder I'm mixing my metric and imperial measures. So we still haven't been out on the bikes.

On Friday, I drove in to pick Myrna up. Even between the Library and where I could stop for her she got wet. Well, we had fun removing wet things. Fortunately, we'd planned for the weekend and I'd picked up some clothes and stuff from Myrna's apartment on Wednesday night, when we'd had dinner and "dessert".

There hadn't been as much progress lately with the John Smith and related files. We needed a new breakthrough, if there really was anything else still available to find in the documents. We seemed to be hitting a lot of dead ends. Sometimes finding one question would raise ten others. Truthfully the archives materially had not produced too much of value yet. I'd need to try to link Mother's material to the archives inventory.

We spent a very lazy Friday night. Well, we were in bed, but not asleep.

Saturday, we took some time to go shopping. I wanted a more comfortable chair for Mother's room. Not a big chair, but something fairly comfortable. Myrna was looking for some fabric and/or a comfortable dress or skirt and top for casual wear. Something that could work for dancing. She also wanted to look for some flat-heeled shoes that she could dance in. We were going to the contra again tonight. The dance slippers were fine, except they offered very limited protection from the clumsy-of-feet with heavy shoes or boots. Despite the strictures and signs, there was always one idiot.

We spent a good part of the day in and out of shops, but we seemed to be happy to share each other's quest. I found a modest and compact wing-back chair. Myrna found some flat ballet round-toe shoes with a strap that fitted her well.

The dress hunt was less successful. Far too many offerings looked like they were for teenaged prostitutes. We did eventually find a nice tie-die moderately long skirt and, independently, a short-sleeved blouse that went well with it.

Myrna said "I'd like to look for a small purse too. You remember that last time we hid my purse under the car seat. I'd like to be able to have something I can wear for just essentials like a bit of money, some tissues, my ID and my keys. I saw a couple of women with a small purse on a longish strap over their head and one shoulder."

"Yes, I think I introduced you to Brenda. She had one like that I think."

We found a suitable small purse at the Bentley chain luggage shop. It was really a travel pouch, with a couple of pockets that closed or zipped. It could carry a phone too. That was something I wanted to talk to Myrna about. A cell phone wasn't something I really liked using, but they were really convenient when travelling or out and about so you could confirm plans.

We came home at about 2 in the afternoon and spent the afternoon with books. A quiet time together. Had rarely done that before with a woman,

unless you count sitting on the beach with Kelly and Joanne. Perhaps that was the same, just a different environment. Still, a period of what might be called free time was very calming.

We decided to have a shawarma supper on the way to dancing. Indulged and had baklava for dessert. Have to dance all the dances to work off the extra weight.

Actually we stayed for all the dances. Myrna was more confident and seemed to have a good time.

I was going to ask her to dance the last dance of the first half of the program when I saw Marvin walk over to Myrna and they went to the top of the far set. I saw Susan who we'd talked to last time, waved, and she joined me. It was a good, lively reel medley, without being played frenetically. I like it that way, so one can dance with an economy of effort yet be moving briskly.

As the break started, both Myrna and I headed for the washrooms, having to wait in line a while. It pays to wash hands after all the interaction on the floor. The ladies line, as unfortunately was usual, had the longer delay. I was filling a glass of lemonade when Marvin came up.

"Saw you ask Myrna to dance," I said, remembering his comment about her.

"Yeah. She dances well. Over Easter – I guess you weren't here – I brought a really good looking woman, but she was an absolute disaster. I had to pretty well lift her around the floor, and though she wasn't overweight, she was still a quite robust lady, especially on top if you know what I mean. I was really tired and sore next day. Myrna is light on her feet. And maybe I was too quick – she has strong features and needs to smile a bit, but she's definitely OK."

"I think so too," I agreed.

After the break, the first dance was entitled Triskadecaphobia. Very appropriate to the date. However, it has a rather strange move where the two couples form a line and promenade down the hall, then the middle people turn away from each other WITHOUT letting go of their hands. It seems impossible, but works, leading to a weird foursome that backs up to position, in the process forming a cloverleaf of arms. The other moves were more or less standard, but the walk-through was a bit longer for this dance. When the music started, we were fortunate to be in a set where people had an idea of what to do. In fact we only had one messed-up round.

I did all the dances. Myrna decided to sit one out and get a drink of water. Pretty good evening of exercise.

We didn't go to the after-party, but instead came home and took a quick shower together and tumbled into bed and into each other's arms.

"Thank you for a really nice day," I said.

“Thank you too.”

We gave each other a kiss and we snuggled closer.

“Love you,” I said.

“Love you too” came the immediate reply.

\* \* \*

Saturday had had only a smattering of rain, but we were back in it on Sunday. We had nothing planned, and spent an hour or so enjoying each other before we finally got to the shower after 10. After dressing, Myrna said she'd prepare an egg and bacon brunch while I got some laundry going. It spoke volumes to our growing relationship that there were panties and a bra in the basket.

Sometime around 1 p.m. Myrna asked me “How did your mother come to work with John Smith?”

“Oh, I'd meant to show you something I found. Mother seems to have left letters in different books, as we've seen. I found this one a couple of days ago.”

We'd been folding sheets and making the bed, and joking about 'un-making' it too, though this was more a happy recollection of this morning's enjoyments. Finishing the folding we went into Mother's room and I pointed to the handwritten letters I'd found in an old edition of *Pride and Prejudice*.

---

Gannet House  
Halifax

May 28, 1935

Erminia Jackson  
Armdale Crescent  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Erminia,

It was so nice to catch up over tea last week, and it turns out that our conversation about your niece Katherine was timely.

John's private secretary, a man of impeccable qualities but no imagination or charm, is retiring very shortly. He was excellent at managing John's schedule, but rather slow at correspondence, which is becoming more important with some international activities of the company.

It seems a waste that Katherine has had to train as a stenographer and work in an uninspiring job when she got a first class degree in Economics from Dalhousie. I have suggested that John at least interview her and am enclosing his card so she can telephone to make an appointment.

Your friend,

Roberta Smith

---

51 Laurier E  
Ottawa, Ontario

October 22, 1935

Erminia Jackson  
Armdale Crescent  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mrs. Jackson,

I most enjoyed your lively and informative letter, and am glad that we managed to reconnect. My stay with you during the War was, despite the world situation, a time of happiness for me.

It is great news that your niece Katherine has found such a good position with John Smith. My current work sometimes puts me in touch with his business. I will endeavour to introduce myself if I get an opportunity.

I enclose a couple of photos of my family on holiday



near Kingston this year.

Yours sincerely,

Richard A H Swenson

---

The photos were missing. Pity. It would be interesting to know what Mr. Swenson looked like. He seemed to be ever-lurking in the background of the lives of my parents.

“How does Erminia fit into Katherine’s life?” Myrna asked.

“She was the sister of my grandfather. He was a founding member of the faculty of the University of Alberta when it was founded in 1908. Mother was born in 1910 there, in Strathcona, which was the city where the University was established. Strathcona and Edmonton amalgamated in 1912.

Unfortunately, my grandparents both died in 1919. Mother didn’t say how, just that they got sick. I suspect the Spanish flu. So Mother would have been 9. Her two sisters were 7 and 11 years older, and they weren’t really able to take care of her. Erminia was married to a Mr. Jackson, a lawyer in Halifax. He died sometime earlier – we could try to find out when and how, but it probably is not critical – and she was a widow in her sixties and reasonably well off, but had never had children.

Mother said Erminia raised her. There was some money from her parents’ estate I think, which paid for her university education. Mother didn’t say when Erminia died, but did say she left a bit of money to Dad but not to her. Go figure. It may have been her way of giving Dad a vote of confidence, because Mother didn’t seem annoyed about this when she told me.”

Myrna said “I wonder how they got Katherine to Halifax from Edmonton. It’s a long way.”

“Possibly they arranged with a family or a woman travelling to look after her. I’m sure it was pretty common then, especially with all the upset of the War and the flu.”

\* \* \*

We’d nearly finished going through the books. On Monday afternoon I decided to finish my look at them. The very last volume was a copy of Philip Gibbs *Now It Can Be Told*, dated 1919, an edited collection of the censored

dispatches of the quite famous Times war correspondent. In fact, he more or less invented the job of war correspondent sometime around 1914 or 1915. Up until then, people just went out to watch battles. As I turned some of the pages, I fortunately came across an envelope that had got stuck between two pages. Probably some of the glue from the envelope or stamp.

---

Armdale Crescent  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

February 17, 1940

Armdale Crescent  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dearest Katherine,

This is to congratulate you and Michael on your marriage. Beyond the toasts we shared on Wednesday after the ceremony at City Hall, I felt I should write to you woman to woman to wish you both well and to say some things that I feel need to be expressed carefully and with love.

Michael is a very dear and precious man, but we both know that he may be somewhat less than suited as a husband. Your role in the work and life of John Smith are, as far as I can perceive, important. Some aspects of your relationship with John are, no doubt, delicate. In my life with Jackson (as you know we never used his first name) I was made aware of all sorts of ways of making a living and dealing with the vagaries of the real world. While I don't approve of your choices, I do admire the way in which you are handling them, and I want you to know that. I do hope that neither you nor Michael will come to grief later because you have made your own settlement with life. On the other hand, I do know the import of companionship and friendship, even more so in these dangerous and desperate times.

With my heartfelt best wishes for your future,

Your aunt,

Erminia

\* \* \*

On May 17, I had a meeting quite early with James Goodstreet. The weekend's pattern of affection with Myrna had solidified my comprehension of my own feelings and I had made up my mind. Even the somewhat silly issue of the probability of getting a long form census in two versus one households was a moment of joint fascination to both of us. We'd spent some time reviewing the materials and database in Mother's room, but were in some sense taking a bit of a respite from detail work while we tried to think of other avenues of attack. Indeed, one such approach was the consideration of how Mother had come to work for John Smith and be involved with him. That now seemed to be revealed, at least in outline, with additionally the somewhat ghostly presence of Swenson.

I was ushered into Goodstreet's office by his receptionist.

"Good morning, Mr. Cotton. Good to see you."

"Likewise. I gather Mother's will has been probated and the taxes all settled."

"Yes. It went through with less fuss than most. And I've sent the proceeds to the Royal Bank account for now, in kind as you requested, and the bequest to the Nature Conservancy was done in the same way, and fortunately in the 2005 taxation year so we could apply the charitable donation to your mother's estate."

"Are there any loose ends to tidy up? I believe we arranged your fees to be taken out of the estate already."

"Yes. All done. This is just to hand over to you and do the final signatures."

We did this, then I said.

"I've some more work for you, so you can start the clock for me now."

"Oh, certainly. What do have in mind?"

"Well, I'm thinking of asking a rather nice lady to marry me. But as you know, I am reasonably well-off financially. I doubt that my intended is after my money, but in my past I lived briefly with a nice woman who suffered an injury, as a consequence of which she became addicted to painkillers and eventually homeless."

I left out the suicide.

"I may have heard something to that effect from your mother."

"In such an event, I would not want my resources to be at risk of diversion. On the other hand, I believe that a marriage is a partnership."

Mr. Goodstreet interrupted, "You want a prenuptial agreement?"

"Yes. And an update to my will. For the pre-nup, I'd appreciate your advice on details. I think that I would specify an annuity of \$30000 per year in the event of a divorce. I believe the cost to set that up would be somewhat under a million, given Myrna is now 41. I suspect the amount is enough to make the agreement worth accepting, since it would be paid without a contest."

"Yes. I think that it passes that test. And none of your assets are currently derived from any contribution of the lady in question?"

"No, we met in February for the first time, though I think I talked to her on the phone – she is the archivist who helped me with the John Smith papers at the University of Ottawa – in December."

"Then why don't I write down her particulars and I'll draft something."

"Can I send the information to your assistant by email? I'll need to check the spelling of Myrna's names and other information you may need."

"Yes. That does make sense."

"Assuming we go ahead, I'll want to amend my will so she is beneficiary. Oh, and I suspect she does not have a lawyer, and I would like someone who represents her interests to review the agreement with her. Do you have any particular advice on how she should proceed? I'm not, of course, asking for a referral, just general information."

"There's a referral service run by an outfit called CanLaw. I'll get my assistant to send you the Internet link."

"I'll give my card to your receptionist on the way out with my email and a note that I need that and the information you will want for the draft pre-nup."

"How soon will you need this draft?" Goodstreet asked.

"Will next week be possible if I get you the information by tomorrow?"

"We should be able to do that. You're keeping things straightforward, and you aren't trying to do anything unreasonable."

\* \* \*

That night I called Myrna to get some bits and pieces of biographical information. I lied and told her it was for the house alarm company, but she was in any case much more interested in telling me about some new information she had for me about Operation Kiebitz.

"I came across a mention of a book on Wolfgang Heyda. It's called 'Silent Runner - Wolfgang Heyda, U-boat Commander' by a man named Rodney J. Martin, who seems to have self-published it a couple of years ago. It's on a website called [www.u-434.com](http://www.u-434.com). I haven't found any inter-library loan possibilities."

"No problem," I said. "Unless it's super-expensive, I can afford to buy a copy."

It turned out to be a rather strange web-site. I wasn't greatly thrilled that there was no address or phone number. The payment was by PayPal, which was relatively new. I decided I could afford to take the risk, and ordered the book.

\* \* \*

On Sunday afternoon, I let Myrna out of the car and pulled into the garage while she opened the door to the house. We were quite chilled and wet, having tried to view the tulips near Dow's Lake. It was cold and wet, and the Tulip Festival had been a disaster.

We'd parked up by the Experimental Farm and walked. Even the car heater on full hadn't warmed us up by the time we got home. Well, home to my house.

When we got to the kitchen, I said, "How about a hot toddy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why don't I make them and we'll sit in a hot tub and get warm again."

"OK. That sounds like an idea."

"Off you go. Meet you in the tub. I'll bring the drinks."

I fortunately had a couple of lemons and some honey and once the kettle boiled I made up the toddies in mugs. I put a plastic bowl of peanuts on the tray too and carried it upstairs. Myrna was already sitting in the tub, which was partly full with a small stream of water coming from the tap. I put the tray on the bathroom stool – a very useful item – and went to the bedroom to undress. When I returned ready to get in the tub, Myrna was sipping the toddy.

"You just want to get me drunk so you can have your way with me," she grinned.

"Oh, I don't know. If I went downstairs like this and waved from the front door, I'd probably have to fight off four or five women."

"You wish!"

"Actually, not. I kind of like that pussy right there."

"You mean this one?" She pointed.

"Yes, that rather nice one. Very juicy."

"It might need the landing strip cleaned up on the edges."

"We might be able to arrange that," I said, getting into the tub behind her.

I took a sip of the toddy myself. Hmm. I had made them quite strong. Well, we weren't going anywhere. Tomorrow was the Victoria Day holiday.

"Did the email with my name and stuff get through OK?" she asked.

"Yes, fine. Thank you."

"What was it for, again. You said for some document or other for household security. Is that the alarm company?"

"I suppose it could have been, and you've reminded me of something to do, but it was actually for my lawyer."

"Your lawyer? Why?"

"If you give me a few seconds, or maybe a few minutes I may just honour you with an answer. But I think I'd better have another sip of this toddy. And check out the delightful distractions here in front of me."

With my free hand I played with her breasts and she squirmed a little. A very little.

"So?" she asked.

"I'm thinking that I like ... these distractions. And it would be nice to have them around for a while. Actually for a long while."

"OK. But that seems possible. I'm not jumping out of the tub because there's a snake in it."

"Not even what the Australians call a one-eyed trouser snake?"

"That might be a reason to stay in the tub. I was thinking the other kind."

"Yes, I thought so," I said.

"But now you've got me all antsy because you mentioned your lawyer."

"Yes I did, didn't I?"

"Joe! Tell me what's going on."

"Well, if I want you around long-term, it seems we need to think about making an honest woman of you. And that has legal implications. So I asked James Goodstreet to draft an agreement. You may remember I talked about how Jessica had got addicted after the medics prescribed something or other for her pain. If you and I are a team, a married couple, everything I have will be shared with you. In fact, I'd hope that everything we have and do together would be shared, not losing ourselves, but gaining the strength of partnership. And if I die, all I have would go to you. But marriages do fail, and not always because somebody is selfish or stupid or criminal. And Jessica was an example of how that can happen purely by accident and mistake, with neither party to blame. So I've suggested that in the event of a divorce or separation, you'd get \$30000 a year for life, without conditions. I'm sorry this is such an unromantic proposal."

"It is kind of weird, but you did say that as a team we share everything, you lovely man. I accept!"

"I realized a couple of weeks ago that I really do love you, and that we hadn't said it. I think just that once after contra."

"Yes. I love you too, and I was sort of scared to say it. You make me happy, or maybe it's that you give me the permission to be."

"That's good, but I'll still insist you get your own lawyer and review the draft agreement with him or her. But maybe we'd better kiss and cuddle, since I think we're agreed in principle."

It was a bit clumsy to smooch while sitting facing the same way, but we did manage. Then we finished our toddies and the peanuts.

"Shall we put in some more hot water? Or do you want to get out?" I asked.

"No. It's nice here."

"There's some practical matters to decide, I guess," I said.

"Like?"

"What kind of wedding? Rings? Big reception or elope? Honeymoon? How soon to get married? Where to live? What to do with your apartment, since I assume it's too small for both of us and all my stuff, including car? Do you stay working? Do we stay in Ottawa even?"

"Gee. I was so wrapped up in the idea that we're getting married that I didn't think about that sort of stuff."

"Where do we start? Kind of wedding?" I suggested.

"I don't have a lot of friends, nor a large family."

"More or less same for me. And I think nobody has a lot of truly close friends," I said.

"Where would we get married?" Myrna asked.

"You mean here? Or do you want to get married in Bathurst?"

"Oh here. My mother is getting frail. Things with my brother are cordial, but we're not close. Anyone else in Bathurst is not much more than an acquaintance."

"Well, then we should think of a venue. There's City Hall – we have to get a license anyway. Or I have met a minister from the Unitarian Church. He led my mother's funeral service. I know the Unitarians offer to marry people of all faiths or none, as long as the couple wishes to form a loving union. I think that's how they have it written up. I actually checked their website."

"The 'loving union' bit sort of echoes the inscription in your mother's ring. I like it. Can we marry there?"

"I don't see why not, since they say we can. Since you mention the ring, would you like to have that one? It would give a sense of continuity?"

"I'd love that!" Myrna said. "But you'll have to amend our agreement so I give it back if we break up. I can't think you'd be happy if I took it."

"On that basis, would you like Mother's engagement ring too?"

"Ooh. Yes please!"

I got a really nice smooch this time.

We decided we were getting to be prunes, so got out of the tub and dried off.

We dressed in casual clothes and we went into Mother's room and found the rings in a small fire safe lock-box I'd got for my own documents and a few valuable items.

"We'll probably have to get them resized," I said, handing the engagement ring to Myrna.

"It fits perfectly!" she said. We both looked at each other meaningfully.

"Do you think we can assume the wedding ring will fit too?" I asked.

"Do we dare try?"

"Maybe gently. We don't want it to get stuck."

Myrna tried carefully, and the ring went on snugly but not too tight. She was able to take it off without struggling and gave it back to me.

"I'll put it away, but you might as well keep the engagement ring on your hand unless you have some reason not to," I said, as I was putting the wedding ring back in the lock-box.

"I don't want to take it off. It's lovely."

The ring was of a quite simple design, with an emerald bracketed by two small diamonds. Hmm. We'd better get it appraised for insurance purposes. No doubt it should have been done as part of the probate process, though that would have meant further cost to the estate.

"Joe. Should I get you a wedding ring?"

"If you want me to have one, yes. I've no strong feelings about rings. I hope that's not a disappointment. If you and I affirm our partnership as husband and wife, that would be good enough for me with no rings at all. But some people like the symbols. If it's meaningful to you I'll be happy to wear a ring for you."

"I'll give that some thought," Myrna said. "It isn't critical to getting married, so we could wait until later. But I appreciate your ... er ... willingness."

"OK. Unless we have some sort of Hollywood extravaganza where the ring exchange needs a full film crew, it can be a choice we share.

But what about a reception?"

"I guess I'd like to invite a few friends. What about you, Joe?"

"You've met some of the people I'd invite. Probably about a dozen."

"For me maybe half a dozen or so. And possibly my brother, his wife and my mother might fly in."



“Or possibly we can offer to pay for a party there if we take a trip to follow up on whatever happened in 1943. We can suggest that they either come here – we can easily afford the travel and hotel – or party there, or both if you like.”

Myrna said “I think my mother would probably like it if she could invite a bunch of people who may remember me to a reception with tea and cake. I’d be OK with that.

How soon do you want to get married?”

“In business, I always found it worth taking time to decide something. Once it was decided, waiting around just wasted time. I’d marry you tonight!”

“That would mean I spent all day tomorrow at Human Resources updating my records,” Myrna rejoined.

“Yeah, I think we’ll have a lot of forms to fill in. But most will only have to be done once.”

“That’s fortunate.”

“There’ll be more to do if you decide to be Mrs. Cotton. Unless you really want to, I suggest keeping Baird.”

“I was about to ask what you felt about that,” Myrna said. “I’ve been using Baird for quite a while, and I’d have to be careful signing cheques.”

“And develop and record a new signature for the bank,” I added.

“Oh horrors. I hope not.”

“Better keep Baird,” I said.

“I’m going to write down a few of these decisions and things to do,” Myrna suggested.

“Good idea. There’s a pad there.” We were still in Mother’s room.

We went downstairs to the kitchen. It was about 5 p.m.

“I assume with holiday tomorrow you’ll stay the night and we’ll continue to work things out?” I asked.

“Yes. I’d like that.”

We were quite lazy about supper, and opted for beans on toast. Not really the meal to celebrate an engagement, but we did toast ourselves with a small glass of scotch.

As we did the bit of preparation for our meal, I said “What kind of honeymoon would you like?”

“Like we were discussing. Supposing we married here, could we take a trip to the east coast? That way we could visit my family – especially if they don’t come for our wedding – then poke around Maisonnnette and see where the German U-boat was, then maybe go to Sackville and Halifax, where you can see a bit of where John Smith and your mother lived.”

“I could go along with that,” I said. “Will you have enough holiday?”

“Oh yes. I’ve got 6 weeks because I didn’t take much last year.”

"We could also go somewhere in the Fall. Britain or somewhere on the Continent of Europe."

"Ooh, that would be great. I'll definitely make a note about that."

"Do you have a note that you need to see a lawyer – your own lawyer – to check the draft agreement when I get it. Goodstreet said he'd have it ready sometime this week."

"I'll have to find a lawyer."

"Goodstreet says there's an outfit called CanLaw that will help you find one. But perhaps someone you know can recommend a lawyer they like."

"I think Jocelyn at work had to get something done with family wills. I'll ask her."

"Of course, you wouldn't have to keep working if you didn't want to."

"I think for a while I'd like to keep working. I'm not sure I'm ready to be a lady of leisure."

"Have you made notes about those decisions? I guess we'll need to decide when to go east. Which depends on when we get married," I said.

"I think you were serious about doing things as soon as you decided. Yes?"

"Yes. I kind of feel that now we're both agreed we want to get married – to be married to each other as real partners – all the things we have to do are more or less a set of nuisances. So I'm thinking that we figure out how we can do that in the next two to four weeks so we have the summer together to travel and do things."

"Yes. The details seem like they're getting in the way. But I suppose I would like some mementos. In the photo album before you were born, your Mother and Dad have only one photo of their wedding, which looks like it was a civil one."

"True. Seems odd. Maybe there are others."

Do you want to go East right after we marry, or shall we allow a bit of time between marrying, going east, and going on another trip?"

"Well, I'd think I'd like to get married soon, but I like the idea of taking our time," Myrna said. "We're not kids, and it will be nice to take each step at a time."

"Like where to live?" I suggested.

"Do you mean staying in Ottawa or moving away?" Myrna responded.

"I haven't any particular other place I want to live. How about you?"

"I'm quite happy in Ottawa. Do you think we'll want to go elsewhere later?"

"Possibly. For instance, if most of my friends moved away, I probably wouldn't feel strongly about staying."

"That makes sense," Myrna agreed. "So for now, stay in Ottawa. Do you think in this house?"

“Does it make senses to see how we like it together, but make notes on what we like and don’t like? I can see the single garage could be tight, and if we get you a car, it would have to be in the driveway, and so on.”

“But if I didn’t, there’s the basement, which you haven’t developed. So there’d be some space if we needed it.”

“Yes. Space for your piano and quilts and sewing machine. Does that mean we’ll give up your apartment.”

“The lease date is August 1 anyway. You proposed just in time!”

We both laughed.

“You’d better add a note to give notice in good time. In fact this week to ensure the clear 60 days. We’ll see whether this place suits us over the next few months. We should, in any case, look around. There could be something really nice that we both love. And it’s never a bad idea to be aware of the market.”

We went over the notes and made a few edits. I asked Myrna if she wanted to call her mother, but she said she’d wait until we had an idea of the date we could marry and whether it would be at the Unitarian church. That made sense.

We tidied the kitchen, then had some fruit and tea, and decided to settle in to watch the Keira Knightley *Pride and Prejudice* which I’d bought on DVD. We replayed some of the dances a couple of times.

In bed, we lay a while in each other’s arms discussing places we might go in the Autumn for what we started calling Honeymoon 2.0. It was a very peaceful evening.

\* \* \*

Monday was Victoria Day. We could have planned something, but the weather had been so bad for the last week or so that we’d decided to wait and see. I’d invited Harry McCormick for a barbecue and Myrna had invited Barbara – we weren’t matchmaking, just trying to be friendly – but we’d said come at 4:30. I had a pretty basic barbecue on the patio. Really just a portable one on a stand, so I couldn’t cook a lot of food at once.

Barbara, however, was going to London Ontario to see family, so we’d just be three. There wasn’t a lot to prepare for dinner. We had some small steaks which we put in a marinade, and prepared but did not dress a salad. We cleaned some potatoes, ready for the microwave. Too much work to do otherwise.

“Want to go for a drive?” I suggested after we’d cleared away from breakfast and preparing for dinner.

“What were you thinking of?” Myrna asked.

“Thought we might give you some practise and we drive out Perth way. See if we can find a bite of lunch somewhere.”

“OK.”

So we made sure we had some water and Myrna drove us out along Highway 7. Since our first try at Tunney’s Pasture, we’d done another session there, then an hour around residential streets, then a trip to the supermarket, and finally a small session on the street and parallel parking. For the last exercise, I pointed out that it was often helpful to use the hand brake so the driver didn’t have to try to move the right foot from accelerator to brake quickly.

We didn’t try parking with cars. I found some laundry detergent bottles and filled them with sand and put broom handles or similar sticks in them, two for one mock car in front, two behind. Myrna had a couple of simulated fender-benders, then got quite capable. I warned her to avoid trying to do parallel parking on a hill until she had more experience. Few people could accomplish that well.

We also used the sticks to practice reversing into a parking spot. Myrna worried she was slow. I told her slow was better than scratch and dent. We both laughed.

Our drive on Highway 7 was without any incident. We split a sandwich at the Subway shop in Perth. Parked and walked about the town a bit. Myrna asked me to drive back, as traffic was picking up. At this stage she found driving tired her quickly, which I could understand.

Harry showed up around 4:30 and he and Myrna got along fine. He’s easy going. I’m not sure why he’s divorced, and that doesn’t seem to be one of the topics we talk about. We decided in advance to say nothing about getting married, as we didn’t have our ducks in a row yet. Myrna wondered if he’d notice the ring. If he did, he said nothing.

I said “We were going to invite one of Myrna’s colleagues to join us.”

“Not match-making!” Myrna interjected.

“Understood. Though I wouldn’t care if you were,” Harry grinned.

“Barbara had a family obligation in London,” Myrna explained.

“Would that be Barbara Evans?” Harry asked.

We were surprised, and said yes.

“She and I sing in the same choir. Well, sort of glee club. It’s a way to be social without a lot of the pressure of bars.”

Harry didn’t stay late – he had to work in the morning. So we were in bed quite early after setting out Myrna’s clothes and making her a lunch to take to work in the morning.

\* \* \*

Myrna left shortly after 7 a.m. to catch the bus. She didn't like to be late.

I sent an email to Goodstreet's assistant asking that a clause about the rings be added. I included a description, including the engraved message on the wedding ring, as I guessed the lawyers would want them identified clearly. I guess the assistant also started early, as around 8:30 she replied with the draft pre-nuptial agreement attached. It was simple and clear.

At 9:30 I called the Unitarian Church and someone in the office was able to give me the number for the lay minister who had conducted my mother's funeral. I asked if he was able to conduct weddings, and got a yes. Also that the Church was sometimes available, along with reception rooms, but that the timetable was pretty full every weekend until October.

I phoned the minister at his work number – he was an insurance agent – and asked if he'd be willing to officiate. He said that his schedule permitting, he would be delighted to do so. I mentioned we would be using my mother's ring, which he felt was a nice gesture. He told me about a booklet that I could pick up at the church or download from their web-site with some suggestions for wordings for the ceremony. He asked if we could follow that, and I said that would be no problem and that I would get back to him with our outline.

On a whim, I asked if weekday weddings were possible, which was actually a silly question. The answer was yes. The minister – Ray Jones – said it was probably easier to get a venue mid-week. I told him I'd had a thought that the Nepean Sailing Club had a hall that was available for hire weekdays, but reserved for the members during the summer weekends. I said I was going to try for about two to three weeks time, since Myrna and I had decided we wanted to be married and felt sooner worked better than later. Perhaps he thought Myrna was pregnant. If that worked so we got the event organized, so be it.

Around 9:45 I phoned the reading room, hoping to talk to Myrna, and indeed she was there.

"I guess you took the pad with the to-do list," I said.

"Oh yes. I should have copied the items for you."

"No worries. I already have the draft pre-nuptial agreement, and I'll print it and bring it over to your apartment tonight as well as email it to you in case the lawyer you choose prefers that."

"I'd better talk to Jocelyn right away. Oh. Do you mind if I ask Barbara to be Maid of Honour?"

"Of course not. That will either cheer her up or give her a hissy fit, but I'm inclined to think the former."

"Me too."

"I also talked to Ray Jones, the Unitarian minister. How do you feel

about getting married in about two or three weeks in an evening ceremony at the Nepean Sailing Club. They have a quite nice hall overlooking the river, and they can cater food and drink, though nothing fancy. I've got to call them to see if it's available, but I'm guessing there'll be a suitable evening."

"Wow. You don't waste time! Yes. Let's do it."

"I'll see which day is available. Shall we aim for the 7th of June by preference? It's a Wednesday."

"Sure."

"OK. See you tonight. I'll bring some packing boxes so you can start to figure out what should be moved."

We signed off. I hoped there weren't too many clients in the reading room. Sometimes I was the only one.

I had found another notepad – we used to buy the spiral steno pads for Cotton Computing and I'd grabbed a few before leaving, and wrote down a list for my own use. I'd merge it with Myrna's tonight.

- venue
- minister – Ray Jones – confirm date
- date and time
- wedding dress
- menu?
- maid of honour
- license
- guest list and invites. NO GIFTS?
- Myrna's mother: Ms. Baird – name?
- best man
- timing – 6:30?
- wedding cake
- appraise ring(s)
- documents – wills, etc.
- pre-nup
- pay different fees (minister, hall, etc.)

- notice on Myrna's apartment
- disconnect Myrna phone
- cell phone for Myrna

I got an answering machine at the Sailing Club, but at noon I got a call back. Yes, the Harbourview Hall was available. The rate was not outrageous. I gave my name and said I was a member, and arranged that someone in charge of food would call me back. I booked the hall for June 7 from 5 to 11 p.m. I wasn't sure if there would be any setup or decoration needed, or take-down, but thought it better to err on the side of caution. Wedding cake? I wonder if the kitchen could arrange that or we bring one from elsewhere. No wonder there were people in the business of arranging these things. And we were doing a simple wedding!

I called Ray Jones back – he stayed in his office for lunch fortunately – and told him I'd reserved the hall for the 7th. I said that I had in mind 6:30 or 7, followed by a meal to which he'd be welcome. He said that 6:30 would get the view, and that he'd not want to stay long after the ceremony. In other words, not to assign him a seat at a table. I asked him how he would like his fee, which got that out of the way.

So we had a venue and a minister.

Best man? I called Larry at work. He's head of some economic analysis unit at Transport Canada.

"Hi Joe. Can't talk very long. Got a meeting in 10 minutes."

"Can you be my Best Man in the evening of June 7. Wednesday in about two weeks?"

"Congratulations. Do I know the lady?"

"Not yet, but I'm hoping you will and that you'll like her."

"I'm sure I will. Joe, my calendar here shows I'm in town as there's something happening in the morning, so the evening should be fine. I'm going to say yes and immediately phone Jennifer to keep the evening free."

"Thanks Larry."

I'd hardly had time to put the phone down and put a tick on my list when the phone rang. It was Jennifer.

"You sly dog, Joe. We'll be delighted to come and witness your marriage. Tell me about this lady of yours."

I gave a summary of how Myrna and I had met and got together. Jennifer was clearly intrigued.

"We're going to be around for a bit, and it's barbecue season, so I think we can arrange so you get to know her," I said.

\* \* \*

Myrna phoned around 2. She'd got the number of a woman lawyer that Jocelyn had used and arranged an appointment for Thursday morning at 11:30 so she could use her lunch break with a bit of stretching. The lawyer's office was on Metcalfe, somewhere near Gladstone, so she'd be able to walk.

I suggested that when she left work, she pick up some bus tickets at the Presto in the Uni-Centre.

"Good idea. I used my last ones this morning. Are you staying at my place tonight."

"Parking's the issue," I said. "If we do a few evenings where we pack some stuff and move it over, you'll be moved in by the time we get married."

There was a long pause, and I said "Are you still there?"

"Yes. It just hit me that in three weeks I'll be a married woman living with my husband. It won't make sense to be in my apartment."

"That is the general idea of being married, I'm told," I said facetiously.

"Yes, I know. I guess it wasn't quite real to me. Oh. Barbara was OK with being Maid of Honour. In fact, all full of questions and ideas."

"Like dresses?"

"Yes. I had to calm her down. I hate those horrible pastel bridesmaids concoctions. And I must have some parsimonious Scottish blood, because I hate the idea of buying or making an expensive dress that gets worn precisely once."

"I'd added a note to my list to ask you about that, but let's talk over supper. Maybe sort and pack a bit then go to Mukut, that Indian restaurant near the Cummings Bridge. By the way, there was no mention of a suit for me when I asked Larry to be my best man."

That got a chuckle, and we signed off.

I had some time before I needed to drive over to Sandy Hill. It would be rush hour. Oh well. I should take some boxes. Leaving Cotton Computing, I'd packed up a number of books and documents, along with the computers and stuff I've already mentioned. In the process I acquired some packing boxes and tape. Some were still in original condition. Flat boxes were easy to stuff in the car.

I went and got these and the tape from the basement and put them in the back of the Subaru. It's a station wagon and has a roof rack. Hmm. The moving van I'd hired had a dolly and straps. Given we might not get parking in front of Myrna's – she had a unit carved out of a house – a dolly would help. There was a driveway to the house, but it often was blocked by some vehicle or other. This was a source of constant aggravation for the residents who needed to move stuff in or out. Myrna probably didn't notice as much, since she'd been there a while.



By driving to the Canadian Tire in Overbrook and buying a hand cart style dolly and some tie down straps, I was parked near Myrna's only a few minutes before she got in. I had the boxes and straps and dolly inside and was about to put on a kettle when I heard her key in the lock.

"Oh. You're here already. It still gives me a jump that there's someone here. Wow. You brought a ... er ... "

"I call it a dolly. Some call it a hand cart or hand truck. Useful for moving stuff, especially with straps to keep everything on it."

"Yes. Anyway, I guess I was startled."

"It hasn't been that long, maybe I'd better ration the kisses," I said, as I gave her a big hug and a little kiss.

"No, it's great. Just new to me."

"Do you want to eat right away, or do some organizing, then eat, then load the car?"

"I think the latter," Myrna said. "But am I at your place or staying here tonight?"

"Your choice, though in some ways it may be easier to base yourself at one place. Otherwise you are going to end up having different clothes and bits of food and other things, and always in the wrong location."

Myrna thought for a few seconds, then said "And soon, because I'll be your wife, I'll be at your place anyway."

"Our place," I corrected. "It's why I mentioned bus tickets earlier."

"Yes. Takes a bit of getting used to."

"Used to bad or used to good."

"Oh good. By the way, I got enough tickets for 15 days both ways – 30 journeys. Cleaned me out of cash. I need to go to the bank."

I took out my wallet. "I've \$220. I'll give you \$100 so you don't have to run around."

"I'll pay you back in a couple of days."

"You know, that will be something we have to sort out. On the big accounts – oh, the agreement printout is on the kitchen table for you and should be in your email – on the big accounts we will have our names, though to avoid costs if one of us, especially me, dies we need to make them Joint with respect to ownership. But for household and day-to-day money there really won't be my money and your money. It'll be our money."

"Hmmm .... more getting used to, but it is sort of an adventure," Myrna said.

"G K Chesterton is misquoted as saying adventure is an attitude to discomfort."

"That's witty. But you said misquoted."

"Yes, I looked it up, the quote is – if I remember it right – 'An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an

adventure wrongly considered.”’

“The misquote is more ... pithy,” Myrna was using her library education. I liked her doing so.

“To return to matters at hand, shall we decide if there’s anything you want to get rid of? In the worst case, I can arrange a van and helpers and we can move things that we aren’t going to use into storage. It would be unfortunate to have you unhappy if we disposed of something that you wanted later. We can also toss out or store some of my stuff to make room while we work out what we both want.”

“Thanks. That makes things easier for me. In fact, the willingness to give me room to decide is what is really comforting.”

“Supposing we decide you are going to sleep at my ... er ... the house from now on, what do you need to pack right away?”

“That question makes sense. We’d better start with clothes and stuff.”

We went into the bedroom.

“We should move your piano fairly soon,” I suggested.

“Where will we put it?”

“The upstairs landing is quite roomy. If the power outlet is awkward, I’ll arrange something. But from there the sound would carry through the house. It’ll be nice to hear you.”

Myrna’s expression suggested that she didn’t believe me, but she nodded, then said, “It’s not as urgent as clothes and personal items.”

Myrna had a couple of suitcases, inside which were a large and small backpack and some good cloth shopping-like bags. Like me, she collected plastic shopping bags. I eventually had to dispose of them, and I assume she did too, but they’d be useful for shoes and other things that might dirty other items.

Myrna had a tall-boy that was slightly crooked. The fastenings had pulled free of the pressed-board in a couple of places. She was taking clothes out of it and putting them in the suitcase, but also throwing some things on the floor.

“Maybe time to toss those,” she said.

“Do you want to keep the tall-boy. I can probably fix it so it’s straighter, but these IKEA-like ones aren’t great on quality of materials.”

“It was left here in the apartment when I moved in over a decade ago. I think we leave it or dispose of it.”

“We can look at your rental agreement. Strictly some of them can charge you for disposal, and the fee might be high. They may even have charged the previous tenant then simply left stuff for you to deal with. If we need to, we’ll get rid of it. Kijiji might be useful, but we should try to advertise anything unwanted fairly soon so it can be gone ASAP, though we’ve got a month or so to play with.”

"I'm beginning to see why your business did well, Joe."

"Good or bad?"

"Oh essentially good. It just sort of takes my breath away that you're able to decide and then act."

"Well, don't let me toss anything you want. The cost of a bit of storage is trivial compared to later grumpiness. If you're going to be Moaning Myrna, I want the moans from a different origin."

"Sex maniac!"

"Me or you?"

There was a pause, then "Maybe both. Joe, it sort of surprises me how much I enjoy it. But I think what your Mother wrote about punctuation and words was right on the money. It's part of my life now, but kind of there without a lot of fuss, and I like that."

"Better focus on packing, or we'll be at it when we're supposed to be in front of the Minister. Oh. And make sure you write the letter of notice on this place. No sense paying an extra month's rent."

\* \* \*

After an hour or so, we'd got two suitcases and both backpacks filled with clothing and some odds and ends. Two boxes were partly filled with some of the better kitchen items. We added a note to our lists to bring a cooler to empty the fridge, though I suggested we ensure we keep tea and instant coffee capability until the apartment was vacated.

That thought led us to separate a minimal set of some items so overnighting was possible in the apartment. Toothbrushes, towels, linen. We might as well have reasonable use of the apartment until the lease was out.

I added cancelling NCF to the list. Pity we'd just got it set up. Oh well. I supported the community aspect of the Freenet, and had no qualms about giving them a donation to ensure they kept going. I'd see about finding a home for the modem. There were people who could use them who didn't have the cash. Mind you, we could keep the Internet connection until we gave up the apartment. It would be useful to have here if we did drop in.

We locked up and walked to Mukut. Myrna said she'd not had Indian food for some time, and asked me to order. I requested that the spicing be not too hot, and ordered a fairly light meal. We could get more if we were still hungry.

While waiting for our order, I asked what Myrna planned to wear for the wedding.

"Well, Barbara's coming to the apartment tomorrow after work and we're going to look at a couple of patterns I have. I've seen a picture of a wedding

outfit that had a medium length skirt and a separate jacket. I have a pattern that has an optional halter bodice, or else sleeveless top part. It's about calf length. It would look nice, but could be worn at another time. I'm thinking in simple white for the dress, with the jacket also in white but silver trim done from ribbon."

"Do you have time to make it?" I asked.

Myrna paused. "Well, it's actually already mostly made. I'd intended it as a dress for Scottish dancing about five years ago, and some rather bossy lady said a halter top was totally improper for Scottish dancing, and jackets were worn only by men. I'm afraid that put me off completely. I liked the dancing, but I couldn't face the people, well, one person. The jacket needs some trim, though."

"Is that difficult or time consuming?"

"It shouldn't be. I already have the ribbon, and was planning to do the trim before we started going out together."

"So is Barbara coming to help out?"

"I'm hoping she will want to wear something not too different. Some styles don't flatter her."

"Can you find something for her in time?"

"I hope so. I have a white wrap skirt of a similar length to the dress I've been making that I also used for dancing. It has velcro on the waist so it is multi size. We'll have to try it. If that works, then a white blouse and jacket would be nice. She has a nice navy blazer that I know of."

"Would it be a good idea to suggest the two of you get your hair done a few days before? My treat."

"That would be nice. But I can pay," Myrna said.

"It'll take a while for us to work out the everyday money, I think.

Maybe we should make the guest list. I'll send out invites tomorrow by email – post will take too long. Those without email we'll phone. Oh, did you call your mother? I don't even know her name."

"Susan. And I meant to call this afternoon when I got home."

"Better remember to give me names and addresses for the guest list.

Another matter is about gifts. I think we're more or less equipped – maybe over-equipped – on the household front. I'd like to suggest a no-gifts message. I'm sure we'll still get some flowers or wine."

"I'd wondered about that. Yes, I agree. Now the list ...."

It didn't take long to list the people we were going to invite. Kelly and Joanne and crew made up the biggest part of my list – 10 or maybe 11 with partners. There were Larry and Jennifer and Harry and possible guest. Beth from the writers' group. Was there anyone else I really felt I should invite?

Myrna had a couple of colleagues, including Jocelyn and her husband, and of course Barbara. There were two women she knew from quilting and

their husbands. And one friend from Mount Allison and her husband. They would all be new to me. We had talked of getting together, but Myrna and I seemed to have moved our friendship too quickly to get around to the social events.

We were back at the apartment before 8. Myrna showed me the dress.

“Try it on,” I suggested.

She went to go to the bathroom to change, then realized that I’d seen all there was to see and simply did the switch in the bedroom in front of me.

“This is the ribbon for the trim,” she said, holding it against the jacket lapel.

“Nice. What about the skirt for Barbara?” I asked.

“Here. It’s got a lot of extra material. I made it in case I could get her to join me, then things fell apart.”

“People can be cruel, and some of them can be stupidly cruel,” I said. “Pretty hard to dance those social dances alone.”

Myrna put the dress and skirt back in the closet. I said, “Better phone your Mom. It’s already gone 9 o’clock there.”

“Yipes! So it is.”

She went to the phone and dialed – well punched in the number. I’m still stuck with the concept of a rotary telephone in my head. Must, however, remember to ask Myrna for family telephone numbers.

“Hi Mom. ... Yes I know it’s a bit late, but I know you like to watch the National News at 10. ... Yes, it’s been cold and wet here too. .... Mom, I’ve some important news. .... No not about my job. That’s still the same, though through my job I met a nice man. We’re getting married on June 7. .... No Mom, I’m not pregnant.” Myrna looked at me, smiled and added “Well, I don’t think I’m pregnant. .... Mother, Even if I were pregnant, I’m 41 and I’m getting married to a very nice man. And I’m going to phone Roger in a minute because Joe and I will be happy to pay for you and them to come to the wedding and stay in a hotel. Or, since we plan to come to Bathurst later in the summer, we’ll host a reception for anyone who may remember me in town. Or we can do both. .... Yes, we’ll pay for you to fly up here. I know it’s quite a bit of money, but we have made sure it won’t be a problem for us, as Joe just came into a bit of money. .... Why don’t I see what Roger thinks, since he and Laura will need to make sure you can get here OK. All right. Love you. Goodbye. Yes ... Goodbye.”

She hung up.

“Naughty!” I said.

“Well. I’ve had 40 years of being told how to behave. I couldn’t resist a little tease. And though she’s surprised, she seemed pleased. I’d better phone Roger. I’m not sure Mom is really up to travelling, or even wants to.”

Myrna phoned her brother. This conversation went quite smoothly. Roger clearly called his wife over and there were congratulations for Myrna. Roger thought the best plan was the local reception and not try to get their mother to Ottawa. Flying meant a couple of changes of aircraft. Train took rather a long time, and they didn't feel comfortable leaving mother alone in a hotel room, but didn't feel like sharing a double room. Roger said he'd phone back within the hour.

The wait for Roger's call was fortunately not that long, as we were more or less ready to load the car, and it was easier as a twosome. Still, I took down the cases and backpacks. We loaded the boxes on the dolly and strapped them on, but didn't take them out yet. We'd leave the piano for another trip.

While we waited, we discussed some other things. Myrna said she felt her sofa was old and we should get rid of it. Also the arm chair. They would be awkward to move, though we might have to arrange to get them out.

The kitchen table and chairs were reasonable. They could be left to the last moment and the table legs removed. Then the Forester would be able to shift them quickly.

There were a couple of bookcases. Myrna was selecting some books she felt she no longer wanted as the phone rang. Roger said that the idea of a Bathurst reception would be fine. Myrna said we'd pay. Roger said they'd pay. Roger asked to talk to me if I were there, so I was handed the phone.

"Hello Roger, this is Joe Cotton."

"Joe, First, congratulations to you and Myrna. Second. I'm sure we can cover a simple reception here. Mother isn't wealthy, but Laura and I will contribute, if you'll consider that a wedding present."

"Certainly. Just don't go overboard. We'll feel awkward if it's too fancy. I've discovered Myrna and I share fairly simple tastes."

Roger said "We're thinking something at the local Legion or a similar hall on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, then a nice meal somewhere for just family. Would that be OK?"

"Yes, absolutely fine with me. Let me ask Myrna."

I did so, then resumed, "Yes. She's OK with that."

Oh. Do you have email? I can give you mine or Myrna's. It'll make things a little easier if we need addresses and phone numbers and to let you know our schedule."

"We have it for the hardware store." Roger gave me the email and I wrote it down. I gave him mine and Myrna's, which was easy – myrna.baird@ncf.ca.

I passed the phone back to Myrna and she said her goodbyes.

"That worked fine," I said.

"Yes, I think so too. And Roger and Laura were genuinely pleased for me, and said Mom was quite thrilled that I was getting married finally."

“We’d better get going. Don’t forget the draft agreement. Oh, there’s the booklet with the ceremony outline. Why don’t you put that in your purse, take a look when you can and we’ll prepare what we like so we can let the minister know.”

\* \* \*

On Wednesday I kept myself busy in the morning figuring out a ceremony. Myrna suggested I do the first edit. It actually wasn’t difficult. The pamphlet was well-organized. However, I took the time to read it carefully.

I decided to try to get it into machine readable form. That took me a while, mostly with a few awkward parts that seemed to be in image form in the pdf file. In any event, I managed to create a plain text file that I saved and then emailed to Myrna’s address. I also edited it to what I thought would work for us, which was much shorter.

Later on, I went for a walk. I was thinking about everything and nothing, and ended up walking for well over an hour. When I got in, I was thirsty and made a pot of tea. I found a frozen meat pie in the freezer, and cooked it in the toaster oven. Nuked a potato in the microwave and sliced a tomato. That hit the spot.

Checked my email and did some file clean-up, then it was time to go.

I arrived at Myrna’s apartment around 8 p.m. Barbara was still there as they were just finishing the trim on the white jacket.

“How are things?” I asked.

“Great!” Barbara said. “Myrna had a good idea and the outfit looks nice on her. And we tried the skirt she had with my navy jacket and a blouse and I was surprised how nice it looked.”

“What about shoes?” I asked.

“Oh. A man who notices shoes. Wow.” Barbara was not being sarcastic.

“Both in business and personal life I’ve found it pays to at least be somewhat aware of coordination of outfits,” I explained.

Myrna said “We can be inside the whole time or on the deck, and it is almost summer, so maybe some nice sandals with low heels. I don’t like tottering around on heels.”

“Suits me,” said Barbara.

“Do you want to go shopping in the Rideau Centre on Friday after work?” Myrna suggested.

“Sure. Now I’ll guess you need to move some more stuff, so I’ll head off.”

Barbara had a small suitcase into which she put her blazer and the skirt she was going to wear. Goodbyes were said and she was off. We didn’t waste time either, and had the piano, stand and stool into the car very smartly,

along with some boxes of books, some knick-knacks, and winter clothes and boots. So far we hadn't moved the sewing machine and related material. Myrna planned to dress for the wedding at the apartment, and wanted the machine handy in case of any last-minute adjustments.

\* \* \*

We'd realized that since the apartment lease ended at the end of July, we didn't have to move everything out right away. We did move the CDs, but left the boom box since it had a radio. Also the small TV. It would allow one or both of us to use the apartment if we needed to, even, for example, if I wanted a rest from working on the John Smith papers. Thus by Thursday night we had moved everything Myrna needed to be living at the house, and we had sufficient furnishings and equipment to allow for a comfortable overnight stay at the apartment.

Myrna's meeting on Thursday with Farah Nesrallah, the young Lebanese-Canadian lawyer, went smoothly. Ms. Nesrallah actually found a couple of minor typos in the draft, and added a clause that Myrna would keep all assets she brought to the marriage. I'm surprised Goodstreet had omitted that. She also asked that we create an inventory of assets to append to the agreement, including Myrna's pension from the University. That was an asset too.

The final addition requested – one I could understand and agree to – was that the annuity would be doubled if I abandoned Myrna or were clearly responsible for the marriage break-up.

We talked on the phone about these things on Thursday night, but I wanted to go to a meeting about programming in the Python language that night, so I wouldn't see her until Friday.

In fact, on Friday, Myrna didn't get home until nearly 9 due to the shoe shopping. The plan was I'd look after my own needs. During the day I got a haircut and beard trim. I usually do my own beard, but decided to get the barber to oblige given the wedding was in less than a fortnight. I could have waited longer, but if he'd taken off too much, there'd be a little time for hair to grow back.

"Success?" I asked.

"I think so. Take a look." Myrna showed me some silver sandals. Modest heels and reasonable straps so they wouldn't be likely to fall off.

"Nice. What about Barbara?"

"We were lucky. They had almost the same sandal in her size. But we went on looking for a while. Women can't buy the first pair they see, at least not until they've seen a couple of dozen others.

What did you get up to?"



"Didn't you notice?"

"What?"

"I had a haircut and beard trim."

She blushed and looked shameful. "Now you mention it .... It's embarrassing I didn't notice, isn't it?"

I gave her a kiss. No sense rubbing it in.

"Want anything?" I asked.

"The toilet. Then a cup of tea."

I obliged. When she came out of the powder room, we sat at the kitchen table and I showed her a photocopy I'd made at the Library.

John Smith Ltd.  
Halifax, NS, Canada

3479146 Lt. Cmdr. Walton, J  
c/o RN Post Office  
Portsmouth, England

31 October 1943

Dear Commander Walton,

I apologize for not responding two years ago (though my secretary says that she did correspond then) to thank you for the photo of my cousin Emily taken on the SS Nova Scotia before commencement of hostilities.

You may or may not have heard that, sadly, Emily died in a fall from a train near Bathurst about a month ago. My secretary, Miss Rivers, who you also know, suffered a serious injury to her leg at around the same time while helping to thwart an escape attempt by POWs. Her absence for a few weeks has set back my correspondence, but she has returned now in good spirits.

Again my thanks, and may you be kept safe in your voyages.

Yours,

KR for John Smith

I said "I'd indexed it before, but not recorded much about the content. It was only when I did a search of the index for items July to November 1943 that it popped up. I had photocopies made of all those items on spec. There were only a handful. I'll have to look carefully at the others, but they may be unconnected to Emily/Frieda."

"Do you think Walton was the 'myself' in the photo of a man and two women, Emily and Frieda?" Myrna asked.

"Seems likely to me."

"Perhaps we can find out more about him, though that might be difficult."

\* \* \*

We woke quite early on Saturday morning at a bit after 7. Looked like it would be a nice day. Already 14 C.

"We might finally get to ride bikes today," I said.

"Let's do it now, then come back and I'll cook us a big brunch."

"Trying to fatten me up, are you?"

"Only if you don't get your exercise."

We did have a glass of juice before we set off for the Experimental Farm. It would be warmish later on, but not quite shorts temperature for this time of the morning. I'd a couple of pairs of old-fashioned bicycle clips. Myrna hadn't seen the style before, but was glad of them to keep her slacks out of danger from the chain or other sources of dirt.

I guess we rode for about 90 minutes total in two hours. It was around 9:30 when we got home.

"Hungry or horny?" I teased.

"Both, but I think mostly hungry. Let me do an English breakfast for us, but I'll dragoon you to do the coffee. When we've eaten, we can get washed up and see about other appetites."

\* \* \*

We'd hoped for another bike outing on the Sunday, but the weather didn't cooperate, even though there was only a smattering of rain. In the afternoon, we had an invite from Larry and Jennifer. They argued that the bride just had to meet the Best Man before the wedding day. We made them witness the pre-nup and initial the asset list. All the copies!

"I'm planning on hanging on to these rings," Myrna said. "But mainly because I like the man who gave them to me."

That earned her a kiss and cheers from our hosts.

Weather got in the way of outdoor eating the next Saturday when we were invited to dinner by Marilyn and Francis Koch. Marilyn and Myrna had been room-mates at Mount Allison.

The dinner was friendly and relaxed, and conversation was largely exchanging biographical information, which, since the Kochs and I had no prior acquaintance, used up a good part of the evening. The rest was discussion of plans for the future – mostly ours, though we did extract an admission that they were looking for a new house, as neighbours had put in a pool and the squealing of children was making the back yard an unattractive place to sit.

While the evening was unremarkable in detail, I felt a contentment in being there with Myrna. I suppose a man who'd escaped matrimony for half a century should be more apprehensive. I wasn't. I'd found someone I could live with day by day.

Sunday the weather was better, and we got in an early ride on our bikes, in fact before breakfast, which we turned into brunch. Around noon we decided to see if we could tidy Mother's room. We both called it that, but now intended to try to organize the materials and put them in two or three large plastic totes. There'd been a special on these at Giant Tiger, and I'd found some that were quite large but would still fit under the guest bed in the office. My plan was to convert as much as I could of Mother's and John Smith's material to digital format anyway. Then Myrna would have the room for her quilting or whatever she wished. If she wanted, there was the tall-boy, or we could buy new. I'd use the 'office' as my room. So we'd each have a room to use as we wished, though we'd put Myrna's bed from the apartment in her room which would allow us space for two guests if needed.

Myrna started looking in the tall-boy and found Mother's purses.

"Are any of those useful to you?" I asked.

"Possibly, though I don't think they're quite what I tend to use. Maybe the fancy one for dress-up occasions.

Oh. What about this wallet?"

This was the damaged wallet. It was still in one of the purses.

"Do you think the wallet has anything to do with that purse?" I asked.

"The purse looks to be a special-occasion one rather than every-day, and it looks relatively recent.

Oh. There's still a couple of quarters in the change purse of the wallet, but they are sort-of bent."

We both looked carefully at the wallet. It was quite mangled. Myrna took the coins out, and I picked up the magnifying glass.

"1936 is written on this one. Bit hard to read, but the other side is a rather scratched George V."

"What about the other one?" Myrna asked.

“George VI.” I turned it over and looked. The coin was quite scratched by something, and a bit bent. “Looks like 1940.”

“Any ideas?” Myrna asked.

“Could the wallet have been hit by the bullet from the Beretta? Mother often used to put her wallet in a pocket. She liked to have a jacket with good pockets for that reason. Used to say she had less worries of having her purse snatched or robbed. And in her job with John Smith, I can imagine she’d quite commonly wear a lady’s suit. You know, jacket and skirt outfit. And while working, a purse would be a nuisance. She always had a pen and small notepad in a pocket, I think a carry-over from her days at work.”

“That would make sense. The dates of the coins fit, and the damage to the wallet,” Myrna agreed.

“Do you think that someone – I’m guessing Frieda cum Emily – took a shot at her, and the bullet hit the wallet then went into her leg?”

“It’s a hypothesis we can use for now, anyway,” Myrna said.

“Oh, by the way, that book about Heyda arrived on Friday. I’d meant to tell you, then somehow forgot. It’s actually sitting on the bedside table.”

“Which shows how unobservant I am.”

“I’ll try to read it when I get a chance, but first things first.”

\* \* \*

“Hope you didn’t mind our wedding night at home,” I said as we took our seats on the train for Toronto on June 8.

“No. Getting married was exciting enough. It was actually good to get married on a Wednesday. I worked until 3:30. Well, I was at work in body, even if my mind was elsewhere. But I couldn’t spend all day in a tizzy getting ready. After work, though we quit a little early, Barbara and I went to my apartment and dressed and Harry picked us up. It was nice and simple. Not too crazy stressful.”

“But we could have gone to a hotel for the night after,” I persisted.

“I’m more comfortable at home. Oh. Now I’ve said ‘at home’. I must be getting used to it.”

“As you should. I’m really pleased by that. It’s not my home or your home but our home. And having got all the agreements and documents that make us official, we should think of maybe setting up a joint account for household expenses like the utilities and groceries and petty cash.”

“What about the mortgage?” Myrna asked.

“Did you see a mortgage listed when we did the asset list your lady lawyer wanted? Which, I should add, was an excellent idea.”

“No. Does that mean there isn’t one?”

“That’s right. The condo purchase document is in my safety deposit box. The purchase and sale papers are in the fire safe. Actually the list of assets had the house noted as clear title.

To return to the wedding, I liked what we did too. It was relaxed. I asked Gerald and Heather to take photos and to use a timer for the group shots so we all got in. I hope you don’t mind that we didn’t get a photographer.”

“No. I find a lot of the fancy wedding photos so fakey. And Heather had a good eye. She showed me some of the shots on that digital camera she was using.”

“Yes. She wanted that last Christmas, and we pooled together for her. I wasn’t there, of course. And in truth I would have bought it for her, but there’s a more or less formal rule on the amount anyone is allowed to spend on each present, but you’re allowed to pool contributions.”

“That probably avoids a lot of grief in the long run,” Myrna suggested.

“Indeed, it’s better for family dynamics and it encourages teamwork in getting good presents. It’s so easy to end up with so-called giftware. Stuff that sits around until it goes to the dump.”

We talked a bit about what we were going to do in Toronto. We each had some friends we wanted to see, and had a dinner Friday with some of my friends and brunch Sunday with a U of T friend of Myrna and her husband, as well as a late Saturday lunch with a couple of her other Library School acquaintances at the AGO who were having a girls-day-out without husbands and children. Plenty to keep us busy.

“Did you remember your phone?” I asked. I’d bought her a flip phone as a sort of wedding present, as it would make it easier for us to avoid getting lost, or rather to find each other when separated. We’d put our phones on to charge, and I wasn’t sure she’d grabbed hers.

“Oh yes. Right here. It’ll take some getting used to.”

“We’ll probably not use them that much, but they are really helpful when you’re travelling, especially if something comes up and you’re trying to find each other in a large place like the Eaton Center.”

“It makes you realize how challenging it must have been during the War to arrange to meet relying mostly on the post.”

“What else did you want to do while we’re in Toronto?” I asked.

“Oh, I’ve some ideas, but we’ll have to wait until we’re in the hotel,” Myrna grinned.

\* \* \*

The Saturday after we got back from Toronto I suggested we get the Laser sailboat in the water. Friday had been stormy. Over 14 mm of rain!

It was, however, supposed to be nice for the weekend. On Friday afternoon, I even drove in to pick Myrna up. We stopped on the way home for Chinese dinner on Somerset at a little place called Royal Treasure. Treasure definitely in the superb food at great prices. The place was a straightforward and down-to-earth eatery. Not royal.

While I had a spare life jacket, it was a big, puffy one and not great for mobility on a sailing dinghy, so we stopped at Canadian Tire and found a nice PFD for Myrna that would fit her comfortably, as well as some water shoes to protect her feet in the boat and in getting it launched. Then we realized she probably should have a swimsuit under her shorts and T-shirt tomorrow.

"I have an old one somewhere, but it's been a while. They never fit me terribly well."

So we tried a few places and found a two piece at Walmart. I also persuaded her to buy a sports bra and some beach shorts.

The air was going to be warm, but I warned Myrna the water would be cold, so we took some towels and a change of clothes. I'd been out to check the boat earlier in the week and ensured we could get rigged quickly. We didn't rush to get up on Saturday, so it was 11 before we were there. I had a dolly that made launching easy and we were ready to go in about 20 minutes. Myrna held the painter while I returned the dolly to my boat spot.

"If you get in carefully and duck under the boom and sit on the other side but lean forward, I'll be able to get in and sail us away. As soon as we can, we'll have you cross over to my side, but sitting close to the center."

Myrna looked nervous, but did as I said. The wind was gentle. It would be a good day as long as things stayed steady and there weren't motor-boat idiots around.

The jetty let me sail almost straight out into the lake. Myrna moved over without incident.

"Here's the main sheet – the rope that controls the sail. We have just one, so it's the main one too. You hold it and I'll ask you to pull it in or let it out. Do so when I ask, but quicker out than in – the reverse of the clutch on the car."

"OK. I hope I don't mess up." Myrna said.

"The penalty is getting all wet. We'll practice that sometime. Probably when the water's a bit warmer."

I pushed the dagger board fully down. "OK, gently haul in and we may have to shift back to balance the sail."

We did this and the boat more or less leapt forward. "A little more," I said, and the hum of the hull planing started.

"Wow, this is fun," Myrna said.

"We need to learn how to tack," I said.

I won't go into details, but we managed this quite well, at first very awkwardly, then gradually as a team. We practised bringing the boat into irons, close hauling, letting the sail out to spill wind. Myrna proved quite adept and seemed to understand the principles. Some people never do.

We came about and she sat a little more forward in the boat. "Ouch!" she said. "I got pinched on that thing that holds the rope."

"The cleat." There was one each side for the main sheet if the pilot wanted to leave it set. "If you'd sat a few inches further forward, our marriage would have suffered. You'd have a 'cleat'oridectomy."

"Oh. Bad! Bad!"

We'd been out a bit over an hour, so I headed us in. The wind was such that we could let the sail out and have hardly any thrust, yet I could ease up to the dock and hop out. We were parked in 15 minutes and went into the clubhouse to dry off and have a sandwich.

"That was really fun," Myrna said.

"We can try again tomorrow and you can have both mainsheet and tiller. The Laser is pretty easy to sail. Racing it takes a bit more skill and strength."

"Have you raced?"

"Once or twice, but my business meant I couldn't really commit to being out here on Wednesday nights for the club races. Still, I do like to sail, and I'm glad you enjoyed it. Hopefully it'll be something we can enjoy sharing."

"Didn't you do it with Kelly and Joanne or their kids?"

"For some reason, no. Kelly often worked late in summer, and Joanne hates the water. The kids had their own schedules in summer, though I did take Gerald out a couple of times and Heather once. Neither had a feel for the wind and water."

It turned out that we went sailing two to three times a week over the next month or so. Myrna got quite good, and even surprised me by asking to do dump drill until she could get the boat up herself from being in the water. I was told to float holding onto the painter while she did so. Good for her.

She also learned how to avoid getting immersed – if you were quick, you could step over the gunwale and onto the daggerboard and not get wet.

\* \* \*

In the time since it had arrived, I'd managed to read the biography of Wolfgang Heyda. The book was readable, but seemed to get distracted from its theme far too often with side stories about other events or personalities. There was very little that I hadn't learned already, except that false-bottomed cans that arrived with parcels were used to smuggle Canadian

money. It seemed the POWs themselves forged documents, at least according to Rodney Martin's book, though he skated over where they would find originals to copy. There were, however, some pictures and discussion of Heyda's life beyond Kiebitz.

\* \* \*

We learned just before our June 7 wedding that the Legion Hall in Bathurst was booked solid until August. After we came home from sailing on June 17, there was an email from Roger saying they thought we should try for a reception on Saturday August 5.

I asked, with some trepidation, "Are you OK with waiting that long? We could afford to rent a hotel reception room if you wanted to go sooner."

Myrna said "I'm actually relieved. You know how shy I am."

"Not nearly so timid as you were, I think."

"Perhaps. But I want to be very much in charge of myself as your wife and as myself before I face Mom. I did all right on the phone, but she can get at me if I'm not confident. I'm hoping a few weeks of married life will mean I don't have to feel like a dutiful daughter any more. I want to be a respectful and loving daughter, not one who is submissive. Not any more."

I decided that I shouldn't say anything. There was clearly some history. Perhaps with all parents. Indeed there had been times when Mother could reduce me to jelly.

To change the subject, I said "The organization of Mother's documents seems to be coming together nicely. I think they'll all fit in two totes."

"Yes, we've got things in chronological order in the binders and indexed those in the database," Myrna replied.

"How would you like to arrange your room?" I said, effectively changing its name from Mother's room to Myrna's room. The office would henceforth be Joe's room.

"I think I'd like to keep one of the tables set up, but fold the other and put it downstairs. One table is big enough for my quilting work. When I'm not using it, the sewing machine can go under the table on the floor."

"What about the wing-back chair, the tall-boy and the bookcase?"

"You have a bookcase in your room," Myrna said. Indeed it was a quite large one, and useful for those things that I wanted to be able to find quickly. I also had a filing cabinet. "I don't think I need the wing-back chair. I prefer to read in the living room or in bed. But now the tall-boy is empty, it could hold my quilting, and cloth, and wool, and perhaps some clothes that are out-of-season."



“Do you want me to refinish it? Or at least give it a coat of furniture polish? I’ve some quite good furniture cream that is supposed to hide scratches and bring up the lustre, but it should have a couple of days to air after it’s applied.”

“That would be perfect.”

“What about the regular chair?” I asked.

“Oh, I’ll need that or another one. Maybe one from my kitchen set. They are strong but easier to move about.”

“We’d better think about moving more things over. Maybe tomorrow would be good – parking shouldn’t be so bad.”

“Yes. Do you think we’re really going to use the apartment at all any more?”

“We can’t really turn it over until July 31 anyway. How about we leave the table and one of the two chairs from the kitchen until then, and I’ll take over an air mattress I have in case of an emergency overnight. It’s a double I got one time on sale when I thought some friends were coming for a weekend. I’d better check it’s still OK. Oh. I think you have a vacuum cleaner there. Right?”

“Yes, but it’s just a small canister one. It doesn’t have a blower if that’s what you were wanting.”

“Yes, it was. Well, let’s take my small shop vac and bring yours back here. The shop vac will be plenty strong enough to do clean up quickly at the end.”

“Do you think my bed will go against that wall?” Myrna asked.

“Should do. It’s one of those IKEA ones which comes apart, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I didn’t have any trouble putting it together. And it’s a metal frame with wooden slats to support the mattress.”

“I think the bed frame I have in the office is about the same size but I made it myself in wood with perforated angle iron for the side rails that support a sheet of 3/8 inch plywood and the legs. I bought a foam mattress at IKEA to put on it, since it’s not used regularly except to lie on while reading.”

“That’s why I want my bed here. Of course, you never know what might happen,” Myrna said suggestively.

“You mean, falling asleep on the second paragraph of the page,” I teased.

Our discussions meant we took the drawers out of the tall-boy – I noticed two could use some re-gluing in the corners – and manhandled the frame to the basement. I spent about an hour or so doing the gluing and cleaning up the surfaces. I’d apply the furniture cream a couple of times over the next few days and return the tall-boy to Myrna’s room, but place it in a different location.

On Sunday we were up quite early, made a quick breakfast, then did a trip to the apartment. The bed came apart easily and the mattress could be strapped to the top with it rolled and strapped through the car rear windows for extra security. The frame pieces fitted awkwardly inside. The kitchen table and chairs would need another trip, but we managed to fit in the canister vac and a number of odds and ends.

By the time we'd got everything put away, it was about 11:15 and getting hot. Supposed to be 31 C today.

"Want to go for a sail?" I asked.

"I'd better shower and clean up first."

"Why bother? We'll probably be getting wet anyway."

So we got on swimsuits and shorts, slathered on sun-block, and grabbed a few crackers and a lump of cheese with a glass of juice before heading out. We were out at least a couple of hours, first with Myrna getting a feel for handling the boat on her own, then a long reach across to the Aylmer marina and back. During this we were able to chat.

"Do you want some more sun-block?" I asked.

"Yes. Can you put some on the back of my neck?"

"Sure. There's a rag there to wipe your hands after. Sun block is really slippery against fibreglass when it's wet with water."

"Are you going to come in to the reading room much any more for the John Smith papers?" Myrna asked.

"Well, I should see if I can find anything in them during the 1943 period. There could be more of those coded letters. I'll particularly check anything from Swenson, or in fact other government departments. There could be several cover agencies."

"Do you think Swenson was – there's a name for the person who communicates with agents – for Katherine and your Dad?"

"Their handler or controller you mean?"

"Yes, either of those names."

"He was certainly one of their contacts. I'll have to see what else might be there. Of course, they may have destroyed a lot of stuff, and some communications may have been by telephone or perhaps by couriers."

"Yes, it would be wonderful to have been a fly on the wall."

"Possibly not. Mother was a fiendish swatter of flies. Odd, I don't recall packing her swatter when I closed up her unit in the retirement home. Probably left it hanging on a hook. Oh yes, it would have been in the broom closet, and was likely under the dustpan. In October she would have not been likely to need it."

"Guess not. That's an interesting detail about her. It's so difficult to put little things like that in a biography, because they aren't the sort of

information people think of recording unless they have a reason to recall something.”

“Another reason to keep poking at the archived material. I’ll probably come down a couple of times this week. We can do lunch together.”

“Hope you don’t want early supper,” Myrna said, changing the subject.

“Why?”

“I want to cook us dinner. I know it’s old fashioned, the wife cooking Sunday dinner, but I feel like doing it.”

“I’ll not get in the way of that sentiment. Unless, of course, you’re a terrible cook. Then it’ll be marry for sex and live with an upset stomach.”

“I haven’t had much experience, but Mom did insist I knew how to cook. A little practice won’t be amiss, though. When we were shopping, I got some boneless pork cutlets. I’m thinking of doing medallions with a mushroom sauce, rice and some broccoli and courgettes.”

“Are you trying to make me hungry when it’s ‘Water, water everywhere, and ne’er a bite to eat’.”

“Be careful Mr. Coleridge’s albatross doesn’t give you a good flap with a wet webbed foot.”

“Aye Aye Captain,” I said, as Myrna actually had the sheet and tiller at this time. “We’re starting to approach the breakwater, so I’d better take over to bring us in.”

\* \* \*

Gerald and Heather came over on Saturday June 24 to bring our wedding photos. We’d anticipated a CD, and indeed we got that, but organized with an HTML presentation in addition to the directory of photos, which had been renamed from the generic camera filename. In addition, they’d arranged to print a selection of the photos plus some others from some photos Myrna and I took before and after the wedding that Heather asked us to send her if we’d like them included in the collection.

Some of the prints were a good size and they’d put them in an nice album. Fortunately it didn’t have ‘Our Wedding’ on the front. They’d found one with a transparent cover on the end boards and a clamping mechanism for the pages. Probably not a true photo album, but something meant for presentation documents. One of the photos was printed to the size of the cover and slipped under the transparent plastic. It was overprinted with

Myrna Baird  
and  
Joseph Cotton

June 2006

“All these colour prints must have cost you guys a bit,” I said.

Heather replied “Everyone put some money in the pot. It’s our present to you both.”

“It’s really lovely. And tasteful. Thank you,” Myrna said.

“Indeed, it really is special,” I added.

Gerald and Heather stayed for pizza, but took off around 7. I think there were plans for the evening with different dates. The rest of the families had been off on different weekend trips.

After they’d left and we came inside – we’d been on the patio out back of the house – Myrna said “Pity Katherine and Michael didn’t get someone to take photos. In fact, I wonder who took the one you do have.”

“Actually, I’d been meaning to take a look at that photo again. I scanned it carefully, and I think that if we magnify the image, there may be some more detail.”

“Oh goody! More detective work.” Myrna’s delight was genuine. The words themselves could be taken as sarcastic, but I knew they weren’t.

We went upstairs with a glass of wine each and I brought the scan up on the quite large monitor on my tower machine.

“Look. There’s a window behind them at about chest level, and you can see a vague reflection of two people,” I said.

“Oh, yes. One’s a woman – probably older in a black coat and what looks like a fur collar and a hat with a brim. And the other is a man who’s holding something at waist level.”

“A box camera – to take the picture.”

“Can you blow it up any more?” Myrna asked.

I centred on the reflected man’s head and clicked the zoom several times. The result was a set of squares that lost any sense of an image. Then I backed out a bit. At one point the image was fuzzy, but it was an image.

“He looks like you!” Myrna said.

“I guess John Smith was at the wedding. And the lady is probably Aunt Erminia Jackson.”

\* \* \*

On Sunday morning I woke before Myrna and went to the basement. I needed to put another coat of furniture cream on the tall-boy. It was sitting on some newspaper, as were the four drawers, two smaller and two larger. I did top and sides and front rails, then the fronts and front edges of the

drawers. I'd left the drawers lying upright on the newspaper, but realized to get the furniture cream on the bottom edge of the drawer front, I should sit them on their back side. As I was setting one of the smaller drawers up, I realized there was an envelope taped with cloth Elastoplast tape to the bottom. I carefully removed it. There was a lot of dried up glue and loose threads. There was an inner envelope of waxy paper with some negatives in it. Big ones, mostly. I think they call it 120 format. There were a couple of 35mm ones too. Odd – those weren't in a strip but separate.

I went upstairs to the office and turned on a lamp and got out the fresnel magnifier Myrna had given me. Very carefully handling a negative by its edge, I held it to the light and looked through the magnifier. In reverse were images of people. I'd need to scan these, but with a decent resolution, and I didn't have a negative scanner. Still, the fact that these were hidden in Mother's tall-boy had me salivating.

"Not horny enough to stay for some fun?" Myrna had come up behind me. I'd not heard her. It struck me also that a few months ago she would never have uttered a sentence like that. Go figure.

"Look what I found taped to the bottom of one of the tall-boy drawers."

"Oh my! Are they interesting?"

"I'm sure they are, but it's difficult to make out in reverse and using a magnifier. I need to get high-resolution scans."

\* \* \*

We put the negatives away carefully, but I went online and looked up businesses that did negative scanning. We enjoyed the rest of the day with sailing and then reading and enjoying ourselves. We could have invited someone over, but were still preoccupied with getting to know each other.

On Monday, as soon as businesses were likely to be opened I phoned a couple of places. The first didn't seem to understand what I wanted to do. They said they used a flatbed scanner and 'it usually works ok to give nice snapshots'.

The second place, GPC Photo, were more knowledgeable. I said what I'd found and that I thought the materials were quite sensitive, so that I'd be happy to pay extra to have them scanned while I waited. The person I was talking to, who appeared to be the owner or manager, said that since it appeared to be 120 film with large negatives, and that I guessed it was from the 1940s, he'd be happy to do this if we set up a time. It turned out that 11 that day would suit him, so I packed up the negatives carefully and went to the bus.

I took a USB key with me, but they were fairly new. It turned out that GPC put the scans – at 600 dpi – on a CD for me, and said they'd keep a copy on their hard drive for 2 weeks. I paid and rushed home.

Once I'd copied the files to my hard drive and checked they would open, I ejected the CD and put it in the 'to be indexed' box. Then I copied the files to one of the external backup drives, just in case. I also put the negatives in a box and labelled it and put it in my 'to file' box. Then I got some lunch, took a deep breath, and came back to look at the images.

They were raw scans in reverse in BMP format – no compression. I loaded the Irfanview program and then read each image at a time and inverted it, then saved it as a JPEG with good quality and full resolution of the original. Then I saved those JPEGs to the backup drive right away. No sense having to do extra work.

Now it was time to look more carefully.

The first image seemed to be at a garden party. There was John Smith, talking to a woman a bit older than Mother, who was standing a little to the rear and one side, with a younger woman beside her who I didn't recognize. Mother looked to be the age she was when she married. Zooming in on her left hand, I could make out a ring, so after 1940, but probably not by much. There were a few other groupings of people around. I didn't see Dad. Maybe he was behind the camera.

One group had two men apparently in Navy uniform. One had wavy stripes. Ah yes, the 'wavy navy' was the term used to indicate 'for the duration' volunteers. Except somehow there were two types. Was it Reserve versus Volunteer Reserve. Both had wavy stripes and the regulars had straight stripes. Have to look it up. The men were angled away from me, and I couldn't make out their faces properly, but the young woman matched Frieda, but was, in this photo, likely called Emily.

The next image to come up was from a 35mm negative. There were even sprockets showing in the scan. The scene was a park bench from some distance. Two women were sitting on the bench. Zooming in, I saw that one was the woman who had been beside John Smith in the first photo. The other was the woman who had been talking to mother. I toggled back to the first image. Yes, both Mother and this woman were dressed a bit differently from the other women in the picture. While the others had on summer dresses – no doubt they would say frocks – Mother and her companion were in suits, in Mother's case with pockets for her notebook. Oh, the other woman had a pocket too. I'd seen some letters from Roberta Smith, John's wife, that were signed 'GH for Mrs. Roberta Smith'.

Who was GH? I opened up my database. I had already written a script to build a list of names so I could find references to them. The script produced a table with each name given once for each time it appeared, along with a

pointer to where it appeared.

I pulled that table to plain text and brought it into R, then stripped off the links and ran a nifty command called 'unique' to get each name just once. Well, almost once. In some cases it was 'J Smith' and in others 'J. Smith' with a period, while 'John Smith' was going to be different for sure. I didn't feel like another half hour of work to ignore the period. But I did spend a few minutes searching online for a regex to extract initials. Regexes – regular expressions – are mightily powerful tools that seem designed to fry the brains of just about anyone who has to use them in anger. In any event, I found one, and R could use them.

After half an hour – well to be truthful an hour – of futzing, I had a list of initials and up popped Germaine Hopewell. Ah, yes, I'd seen mention of her in some document or other. I'd have to go back to see, but I was pretty sure she was the private secretary to Roberta. In the process of doing this, I realized that I'd need to figure out a nice way to give a single identifier to people with names and surname, name initial surname, and initials surname who were likely the same person.

I toggled back to the 35mm negative. I'd zoomed to the faces, and as I zoomed out, I realized the two women had their hands joined. I zoomed to the hands. Indeed, they were holding hands. Maybe that explained a lot. If Roberta preferred women, then she and John might have come to what used to be called an understanding. The same applied to Dad and Mother. Complicated!

At this point, I decided to make notes on my review so far with just these two images, prefaced by 'Hypothesis' laying out what I could see and what I thought might be implied.

\* \* \*

That evening Myrna and I walked over to Kelly's and swapped disks. Myrna was quite excited by my news, but I wanted to secure the images off-site along with my notes, so she didn't see the photos before we went out. Kelly and Tom were in, and we joined them for a coffee. Myrna had, just in case, brought along some cookies she'd baked over the weekend. I'd have to watch my weight.

We got home around 9:15, and Myrna wanted to look at the images from the negatives. I booted my machine and showed her the two I'd been studying.

"Why do you think the photo of the two women is a 35mm and not the same type as the other picture. Did you say 120?"

“Yes, 120 was used for several box cameras, in particular the popular Kodak Brownie No. 2, which was a pretty plain rectangular box. The negatives are bigger than 2 by 3 inches. There were some other sizes that were close with different numbers. 116 and 117, but I’m not sure of the significance of the numbers.”

“They’ve disappeared, but until recently 35 mm was pretty popular,” Myrna noted.

“Yes, but in the 30s and 40s, 35 mm was normally associated with movies, but Leica, among others, adapted it for still cameras that were quite compact for the day. Not, of course, compared to today’s digital cameras, which are tiny by comparison.”

“So the 35 mm might be the sort of camera used by a spy?” Myrna asked.

“Possibly, though there were even smaller cameras at the time, such as the Minox, which used special film just 9.2 mm wide. And I know that the US government bought some for covert uses in the 40s. But I suspect that 35 mm film would be more available and trying to buy it would arouse less suspicion than trying to get Minox film, even if that were in stores.”

“Who do you think took the picture?”

“Going out on a limb, my guess is Frieda/Emily. She might use this picture to blackmail Germaine and have her send messages or run errands or whatever if, as I suspect, Germaine and Roberta were lesbian lovers. Or maybe she blackmailed Roberta, but I think Germaine is the more likely target. I want to do a bit more digging.”

“Well, it is a working hypothesis. I’m a bit disappointed for you that the archives haven’t proved as helpful as the materials Katherine left,” Myrna said.

“In terms of output per 100 pages of material, true. But they’ve provided a lot of help sorting things out. Like today, finding references to Germaine, though I must make sure to cross-check that I’m correct on that. In the process, I’ll probably find a few more bits and pieces of information to help fill in the gaps.”

“It’s hard to accept that these were real people. I’m a bit sad I never got to meet Katherine. I think I’d have liked her.”

“I’m sure she’d have liked you too.”

\* \* \*

We could have looked at the other images from the negatives. Myrna popped them up on the screen, but we didn’t examine them in detail. There were five more.



I didn't get to them until later on Tuesday morning, as I wanted to get the tall-boy set up for Myrna. Before we went to bed Monday night, we moved up the main frame of the tall-boy. It wasn't that heavy, but big enough to be awkward, particularly to get up two flights of stairs. I could bring up the drawers myself, though I did one at a time to avoid hitting the wall and damaging walls and/or tall-boy drawers.

I found some cardboard and cut strips to put under the weight-bearing edges of the tall-boy and positioned it where Myrna wanted it. I looked about the room. There was the bed, the tall boy, the folding table, the chair from Myrna's kitchen. We'd moved my old plain chair to the basement. The wing-back was out on the landing. It wasn't really the place for it, but I'd set up the piano there too, so it could be nice to sit and read while Myrna played, though the space now looked a bit cluttered. We'll see.

There was still Mother's bookcase, though its books were now a mixture of Mother's, mine and Myrna's as we figured out where we wanted them.

There was a built-in closet with sliding doors. Something seemed not quite right. After a bit more looking about the room, I realized that the folding table was fine for Myrna's quilting and other handicrafts, but that these would not provide a good place for her laptop. Nor was there a bedside table. So before I looked at the negative images, I got my tape measure and measured the space beside the bed and realized a modest writing desk would do double duty as a bedside table.

I made a cup of instant coffee and used a squared pad and sketched a simple table that would use 1/2 inch plywood. I could make it out of a single 24 by 48 inch sheet of hardwood plywood, possibly oak or birch, depending on what Myrna would like.

I put my cup in the sink and went up to the office and opened up the images from the negatives, in particular the five that I'd so far not examined.

The first of these was clearly taken at the wedding of Mother and Dad. It had Mother and Dad in the center, with an older woman – wearing a coat with a fur collar and a hat – to Mother's right and two men to Dad's left. The one immediately on his left was about his age but a new face. The other on the end was John Smith. And negatives can't really be written on, so there was no caption to help us.

The second picture was of John and Roberta Smith and Emily/Frieda. In the background was the woman we had tentatively identified as Germaine Hopewell.

The third image was from a 35mm film and showed a naval ship in Halifax harbour. It seemed to be a destroyer, but I'd have to do some research to figure out which class and possibly the name. Ah, there was an H on the side, but the number following was partly obscured by some ropes and netting. So I could look up H-class or maybe Hunt class destroyers. But why the

picture. Ah, an odd antenna above and behind the bridge. So maybe this was a picture taken to provide intelligence to the Germans about naval radar.

The fourth and fifth images showed a woman walking along a path in a park. Did I recall something about the Halifax Public Gardens. There was a statue on a high plinth with water spurting out of a dish like base to the statue. In the first image the woman – it seemed to be Emily/Frieda – was approaching a bench from the right. In the second she was on the left of the bench. There was a man dressed in the manner of a merchant seaman now walking away from the bench on the right.

What was the significance? I copied the images and cropped the woman's image from each and displayed them as large as I could, side by side. Oh. In the first image, the woman has a newspaper under her arm. In the second she doesn't. Back to the image with the sailor, if that's what he was. He's got a newspaper!

So, a message drop. More evidence that Frieda is a German agent.

\* \* \*

We had almost another month before we were going to the East coast. The time went quickly. We either were invited or else invited others for casual dinners, generally barbecue on the patio. I got to know some of Myrna's friends better, and vice versa.

By the Wednesday after Canada Day, I'd made the bedside table / laptop desk. It worked well, as Myrna didn't spend a lot of time on the computer, but found it convenient to be able to do so when she wanted. If we wanted to look at things on the Web, we'd often sit together in my office on the tower machine that had a 26 inch monitor. I even brought up a folding chair that we could keep handy.

I was thinking of getting a second monitor so I could have a working screen and one with material I was referencing. That way I could be making notes on photos that I could see at the same time. I'll have to check if my graphics adapter will support two monitors easily. The operative word is easily. If I ask any computer shop, they'll say yes, but it could be quite a chore to get things set up the way I want it.

We also had the bikes and the sailboat to make sure we didn't stay inside. It had been a long time since I'd had the kind of togetherness that I now rediscovered. With Kelly and Joanne I didn't bike or sail, as I've noted before.

I wondered how it struck Myrna to spend time with me, probably doing things she hadn't thought of doing before. I'm not talking about sex here,

but the bikes, sailboat, and dinners with friends as a group rather than with just one friend.

On a Sunday in mid July it was hot and muggy. We got out early for a ride on our bikes and had thought of later trying a sail but decided the weekend crowd and motor boats along with the heat would be less than ideal. We'd been finding that I could pick Myrna up from work and bring her backpack with sailing clothes and we'd have a nice sail then find a restaurant or pub for a meal afterwards. Since uOttawa mostly quit around 4 in the summer, this was ideal except if the traffic on the Queensway were really bad. Being summer, it was not generally so bad.

So after we got in from our ride, we were both sweaty. We got in the shower and got rid of the sweat. I dried off while Myrna decided to try a new shaver she'd bought on her legs and underarms. I went and got us some soda water with a slice of lemon. It took me a few minutes longer than I intended, as I came across the mail that had come Friday and I'd set aside, forgetting to open. Mostly junk, but a couple of letters confirming that we'd changed addresses or civil status.

I came to the bedroom and found Myrna stark naked and spread-eagled on the bed.

"Is this by way of invitation?" I asked.

"No. No. .... It just feels so nice to have cooler air on my skin."

"Well, well. I'll have to get a private detective and find out if you really were as inexperienced as you told me you were when we met."

"I think you know I was," Myrna said seriously, then brightened "But you've been really wonderful to me, and I'm comfortable being with you, clothes or not. And if you really, really want to put that sausage in me, I'll not complain too much. Though right now, a lie down and a drink would be very nice."

I didn't need to fuss. It was hot out. The A/C was working, for which I was most thankful. It let one sleep decently. So having put Myrna's glass on the bedside table on her side of the bed, I put my glass on my side, took off my robe, and lay down too.

"Did I tell you I found a few letters that I think are related to Kiebitz?" I said.

"You said something. I don't think you said anything specific. When did you find them?"

"What day did you have that staff meeting? The Library put that student in as a sort of security guard for the archives. It was that day."

"I think it was last Tuesday. Doesn't matter. You found something. And you'd mentioned several things from the other two or three times you've come in. It's a pity that it's so much effort for each piece of information, as we discussed before."

"It is what it is. I'll probably wind down my efforts on the archives soon. I think we know the story in outline. There's lots of details that would be nice to know, but we may have to accept that we'll never know some of them. Or even a lot of them."

"Yes. That's a pity, but you're right, we may not know. I hope you aren't too disappointed."

"How could I be disappointed when the search has got me a naked lady lying beside me in bed with her legs apart."

"I seem to have got me a naked man too. But the flagpole isn't indicating I need to be too worried just now about being molested, so I'll assume we both are happy with a comfy lie down together."

"Yeah. It's nice."

You know, last Autumn I had three things that I figured were issues in my life that I would need to sort out."

"Oh. What were they?"

"Well, I'd just got Mother's letter, so one was finding out more about John Smith and his relationship to Mother. I'm not sure I'm so interested in him *per se* any more. Or I've found out as much as I care to, or perhaps more correctly, need to."

The second was that I'd sold my business and wanted to figure out my ... er ... I guess occupation going forward. We don't absolutely need the money, but I probably should have some ongoing direction of what I do to give some purpose to my days.

The third was that with Kelly and Joanne moving on in their lives, I'd need to figure out what to do about ... well ... companionship and sex. You seem to have answered that one pretty well."

"Do you really think so? I sometimes have these little anxiety attacks that you're going to suddenly get tired of me and go looking for someone else."

"Given I'm a decade older, shouldn't I be the one to worry?"

"I'm not looking elsewhere, Joe. At least not to do anything, though I've found since we started ... you know ... I do look at men a bit differently."

"It can be fun to look and ... daydream," I agreed.

"But this. Being just comfortable with each other. That's also new to me, and it's special too."

"While I've had something similar with other women, it's been fleeting, or at least felt that way. Somehow with you, I feel it's more permanent. There's a book by Mary Wesley called *Part of the Furniture...* "

"Yes I've read it. Rather good," Myrna said.

"Yes, I liked it, but I was going to say that Wesley uses 'Part of the Furniture' as a pejorative, while for me, this being able to be really comfortable

and chatty while lying together naked is a state that I kind of want to be like the furniture. Here to stay.”

“Me too.”

Myrna rolled towards me and gave me a kiss. “You know, if someone had told me last Christmas that in about 6 months I’d be lying on a bed naked with a naked man, I wouldn’t have believed them. And if they’d said his penis would be all floppy, I’d have been hurt because it would mean he didn’t find me attractive for sex.”

“As long as you keep the naked on a bed bit, I think we can remedy the floppy bit,” I suggested.

\* \* \*

As I indicated to Myrna, I had been finding a few more letters and documents that impinged on the story of Operation Kiebitz.

---

John Smith Enterprises  
Water Street  
Halifax NS

March 31, 1941

Richard A. H. Swenson  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

File: #55014366

Dear Mr. Swenson,

This is a short note as you requested so that you are kept up to date with our progress.

Indeed, keeping you in the picture will avoid trouble. Our data shows two positive trends: similar production methods for different items yield great efficiencies. How great a gain may be difficult to measure quickly, but we can already distinguish the Bathurst from the Halifax operations on this basis.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

KR for John Smith

---

This decoded to “picture shows two similar items. How to distinguish.” With Walton’s letter of February 1941, it looked like Mother had sniffed out the false Emily by this time, quite early in the war.

Digging through my database, I saw that there was a reply from the Ministry, but not specifically Swenson, on April 10, and a message to Swenson in July.

---

Special Contracts Office  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

April 10, 1941

File: #163312

John Smith  
John Smith Enterprises  
Water Street  
Halifax NS

Dear Mr. Smith,

Mr Swenson has been called away on urgent business, but wanted me to acknowledge your March 31, 1941 letter.

Please keep separate files for each project, with strict use of refnums. Watch that any dates on an item are correct.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline MacNeil (Miss)

---

I struck out words according to the file number and saw

~~Please keep separate files for each project, with  
strict use of refnums. Watch that any dates on  
an item are correct.~~

This letter decoded to "Keep strict watch on item", which I'm sure they were doing, though it would be interesting to know how.

---

John Smith Enterprises  
Water Street  
Halifax NS

July 22, 1941

Richard A. H. Swenson  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

File: #4217XXAQ

Dear Mr. Swenson,

Further report on progress.

Prior to meeting Thursday next, please review paragraph two in the contract addendum so all sides are clear on the implications.

Mr. Michael Cotton will meet with you in Ottawa and he will bring detailed photographs of developments in our operations.

Yours sincerely,

KR for John Smith

Striking out the words indicated in the file reference showed

~~Prior to meeting Thursday next, please review  
paragraph two in the contract addendum so all  
sides are clear on the implications.~~

---

Thus this second letter decoded to “Next paragraph in clear” and that paragraph, not encoded, said that Dad was going to bring photographs. These were likely the two of Frieda showing the message drop. And this was 1941. If John Smith, Mother and Dad knew Emily was an imposter, they had to put on a command performance of pretending she was a well-loved family member for more than another two years.

We had the 35mm photo of Roberta Smith and Germaine Hopewell. When was that taken? And when did Mother and company know about it.

\* \* \*

I had made photocopies of the letters so I wouldn’t have to come to the reading room. A couple of times Myrna found the items I’d identified in the index and would get them copied for me on a payment card I’d got for her to use, so I’d been sorting out the letters above at home.

It was a muggy, thundery day, so we weren’t going to try sailing. Myrna came in about 5 pm. I told her to hit the shower to freshen up and I’d make her a wine spritzer. We’d been given about a dozen bottles as so-called ‘not presents’, and we don’t drink a full bottle at one go.

I put out some chips and the spritzers and set them on the coffee table in the living room. I found the Judy Collins CD Myrna had played for me one time at the apartment and slipped it in the player.

Myrna came down in shorts and a t-shirt.

“Run out of fresh bras?” I asked, noting the rather pleasant bounce in front under the thin material.

“In this sticky heat, a bra feels pretty uncomfortable. And I know you rather like me unencumbered.”



“Indeed I do. I think your boobs are lovely, and attached to the woman I love.”

“I’m still getting used to how you feel about me – the physical me. I told you how the service station guys harassed me, so I knew men were interested in my breasts and so on. But with you, Joe, it’s that you say you find me beautiful.”

“I do. And that isn’t some sort of blindness. I think I see you as you are, which doesn’t follow the kind of image of models on a fashion runway. But you are nice looking, and I don’t think that my seeing you as beautiful is an illusion.”

I gave her a kiss and slipped a hand under the t-shirt for a gentle feel.

We eased apart and sat on either end of the sofa where we could lean into the arms and be able to look at each other.

“To change subject, I took another look at the letters between the Smith organization and Swenson’s team. I realized that they knew about Frieda for two years before Kiebitz. It must have been quite an Academy Award performance on both sides to maintain the fiction that Emily was genuine.”

“Yes. To know that someone you have to pretend is a family member has murdered the real person and is working for the enemy. That’s really tough.”

“I really wonder how they carried out their surveillance,” I said.

“Maybe we can think how we’d try to do it, then look for evidence to support different possibilities.”

“Myrna, now you’re getting me all excited in a different way! Good for you. Yes, I think that may be a useful way to proceed. Do you have any thoughts on how they would have kept track of Emily? Or should we say Frieda?”

“For now, let’s use Emily. They’d have to do that as well, to avoid a slip that would give the game away.”

Myrna was right that you’d want to make it as easy as possible to act normally, whatever that means.

I said “I was trying to figure out when the 35mm picture of Roberta Smith and the woman we think was her secretary was taken. It’s likely that would be one way Emily was trying to transmit or get information by leaning on one or both of them. In that time, homosexuality was treated pretty badly.”

“Does the picture reveal anything about the time of year?” Myrna asked.

“We can look. Why don’t I bring down my laptop, I’ve been copying material to it and back to the tower so I have it at hand when I need it. I should set up some sort of version control. There’s a project called *subversion* that would probably do the trick, but it’s fairly new.”

As I said this I was going up the stairs. I got the laptop and booted it while we nibbled some chips and sipped some wine.

"Here it is," I said, making the image full screen. "Pity it's black and white. We might get more clues from colour."

"Look at the leaves on the ground. There's some on the trees, and the women aren't wearing coats, so early Autumn. 1943 is probably too late – Kiebitz was in progress. So 1941 or 1942, and I'd say late September or early October." Myrna said.

"Let me bring up the index," I said.

"What're you looking for?"

"I think there were some files of household accounts. Something to do with renovations. I came across them in the papers, but didn't pay much attention, but I can go back and look tomorrow."

"What do you think you remember?"

"Well, two things, if my memory isn't too shaky.

The first is about adapting two bedrooms and a bath to be an apartment for Dad and Mother in the Smith mansion. The second was about blackout material for a bathroom so it could be used for photo developing."

"Why were they doing those renovations in wartime?"

"I think the answer is that Emily had to have a cover for her espionage, and got a job with a newspaper. While I think the number of pages for each issue was reduced to save materials, human interest stories were popular. I found some clippings of photo articles by Emily Cartwright about women doing war work. She could probably justify a camera and developing."

"A perfect cover for spying. Didn't one of the 35mm negatives have a ship with a special antenna," Myrna asked.

"Yes.

I'll make a list of things to check tomorrow. In particular, I'll see when that renovation work was done. Oh, I can use the index to see if or when the clippings were in the papers. I tagged clippings because I can cross check those against microfilmed newspapers, though we might have to dig to get the relevant ones."

"Yes, uOttawa keeps only a few series. You may even do better at the Ottawa Public Library. I don't know how you get access to the National Library collection, but I'm pretty sure they keep a fairly complete set. Unfortunately, a lot of that sort of thing is going online with commercial services, and they know how to charge."

"We'll see what we need to look for. I suspect there'll be enough to keep us busy without that," I said. "The main thing is that it should be feasible to check if we need to."

There were a few minutes while I was searching the index.

“Here we go. I’ve got notes that the renovations for an apartment – doesn’t say in the summary who for – were invoiced in May 1941. My guess is that Mother and Dad moved into the mansion around then on some pretext or other. The John Smith organization was doing war work and they needed to be able to work with John day or night. Also accommodation was short in Halifax, so they’d free up an apartment – maybe even two because they’d not long been married and may each have had one. You know, I’ve no idea where they were living.”

“There might be a City Directory. They’ve stopped producing them, but they used to be an important research tool. But they can be organized by street name and number, not the name of the person.”

I said “If we can find one for, say, 1939, we could look for Dad and Mother, but it would be a chore. Oh, but we could look at the Smith mansion, since we have its address. That might tell us if Mother lived there before she married. It would also tell us if Germaine Hopewell lived in, and also some names of people who might be planted or co-opted by Swenson and company. And I’d guess Mother and Dad both would live not too far from the Water Street business office if they weren’t in the mansion.”

“Plenty to keep you busy,” Myrna commented.

“Did you want some supper? I’ve made a salad but not dressed it. We can put on some chopped ham or a tin of tuna. Or are you hungry for a bigger meal?”

“You’re spoiling me. But I won’t complain too much. And I think salad with tuna sounds fine. You know I made an apple and blueberry crisp the other day. I hope it’s not too sweet.”

\* \* \*

We went in together the next day, and from a list I’d made of things to look up I found the renovation invoice I’d been looking for. In the odd notes on the invoice were Mother’s initials on some changes that were made for installation of a kitchenette with refrigerator. Dad had initialled a locksmith’s bill for payment. It looked like they were ensuring Emily couldn’t nose around. I wondered if the locksmith was quietly paid to arrange that Emily’s accommodation was accessible by Mother and friends.

I also found the blackout invoice. It was dated in November 1941, but when I read it in detail, the work was for June and there’d been a mix-up in where it had been sent for payment. Dad’s initials were beside the handwritten “Paid.”

So now we knew that 35 mm negatives probably dated from June 1941 at the earliest.

Myrna met me outside on the library terrace for our sandwiches at lunch. I said "I think Emily tried to blackmail Germaine or Roberta in 1941. She'd want to have as many channels to move information as she could, so I don't think she'd wait."

"But then there'd be a long period where there are people who are not going to be kindly disposed to her," Myrna countered.

"Well, what if Emily claimed she needs a favour for a friend who's got into trouble with a boyfriend, or has been caught in bed with a same-sex companion even, and the photo just happens to be on the table. That photo isn't explicit enough to be used in court, but it could be awkward in society circles. Even if not pushed on the sexuality front, it could be construed as fraternizing with the servants. Especially if the photo was taken where Emily could possibly be taking pictures for some perfectly justifiable reason."

"I see what you're getting at. Emily stays in character as a member of the Smith family doing her bit for friends in need. But she also plays innocent with a lit bomb."

"Yes, I think that could be how she'd get either Germaine or Roberta to do something for her like carry a letter somewhere. It would be nice to have the equivalent of the day-timers for John and Roberta."

"They weren't there? People sometimes include them in their papers," Myrna asked.

"Not that I saw. And not in the index. So unless they were left in the storage shelves, we don't have them."

"Possibly they would be destroyed if they gave away information about the identity or actions of counter-espionage agents."

"Yes. Seems likely. Even after the War, there was a lot of keeping quiet about secret stuff, even if it wasn't necessary."

"I'll see if I can find any more communications between the Smith companies and Swenson's group," I said as we headed back inside.

\* \* \*

Though I intended to look at the letters right away, when I got back to the reading room, I decided to make sure I'd put the various house expense records for the mansion back in good order. In doing so, I noticed a work order for a telephone extension to be put in a certain bedroom. The work order was during September of 1941. The phone number was given, and I realized it wasn't the house number. Then I realized that a phone had been set up for Dad and Mother's "apartment", while this extension was for a number that I guessed – and eventually found listed on a letter to a

charity supported by Roberta – belonged to Mrs. Smith. Moreover, the work acceptance for the extension was initialled "GH".

An extra note was stapled to the file that more or less confirmed the special phone line for Mother, and presumably Dad also, assuming they were both involved in watching Emily.

---

John Smith Enterprises  
Gannet House  
Halifax NS

June 13, 1941

MT&T  
Installations Dept.  
By Hand

This is to confirm our instructions that we wish a third telephone line to Gannet House, connected to a telephone in the apartment of my private secretary.

You are asked to confirm this installation with Officer Commanding, Halifax Citadel at Halifax 4693 under Wartime Requisition HFX836. However, charges for this work can be sent to the address above.

Yours,

KR for John Smith

---

I realized that the telephone might mean fewer letters from this date in 1941 forward, but in fact there were some others, as we had already seen. Possibly Swenson wanted to keep a level of traffic that was fairly consistent over time in case there were anyone watching. He would want any enemy agent who could see the communications to view them as 'normal'.

It was also likely there were quite a few other players that Myrna and I had not yet identified. But one we already were aware of.

---

John Smith Enterprises  
Gannet House  
Halifax NS

October 28, 1941

Richard A. H. Swenson  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Mr. Swenson,

An opportunity has arisen about which I would appreciate your opinion.

As you know, my wife Roberta has undertaken to provide some measure of respite for merchant sailors. In this, my cousin Emily Cartwright has been assisting her.

Miss Germaine Hopewell, personal secretary to Roberta has -- following a suggestion of Emily -- offered to help them in providing aid so merchant seafarers can send and receive letters, and exceptionally telegrams, to their families. We would be grateful if you could put us in touch with someone familiar with security measures to ensure no information helpful to the enemy is deliberately or accidentally communicated.

Yours sincerely,

KR for John Smith

---

This last letter hinted at the pressure Emily was putting on Germaine, but it also indicated Mother was in the know. That meant Germaine might actually be informing the Canadian intelligence people of anything Emily transmitted through her.

It was also interesting that the letters were in clear. Possibly they thought Emily may be reading some of them, and telephones made a lot

of racket when they rang. The messages in the unencoded letters were sufficiently benign that their significance to Swenson or Mother could be left to interpretation. Clever.

Another apparently innocent letter was addressed to Mother in person.

---

Richard A. H. Swenson  
Ministry of Justice and Attorney General  
Box 24A, Ottawa, Ontario

April 5, 1942

Katherine Rivers-Cotton  
John Smith Enterprises  
Gannet House  
Halifax NS

Personal  
=====

Dear Katherine,

A brief thank-you for arranging with your Aunt Erminia that Roger Symonds could lodge with her. I know that she is advancing in years, and did not wish the work involved in having a boarder, but it seems they have come to an arrangement highly satisfactory to both sides. This is particularly helpful given the shortage of accommodation at present, and also given that we would rather Roger lodged with someone well-known to us. Some of the liaison work Roger will be doing with the John Smith companies and others could be sensitive. This may be especially true now the Americans are in the fray and sending materials and work via Halifax.

My greetings to Michael.

Yours sincerely,

This could be the arrival of reinforcements to the agents watching Emily. Was I mistaken in thinking the letters – in clear – were a way to build a suitable cover for the counter-espionage team. Almost certainly they actually had work to do within their nominal jobs. For Mother particularly that was clear from the papers in the archive. Michael and Germaine had their own tasks, and it was likely Roger and probably some others I had not yet and may never identify were doing both regular and counter-espionage work.

\* \* \*

That afternoon I suggested to Myrna that we have dinner in the Highlander Pub on Rideau, where we'd celebrated our birthday. It was a place I enjoyed for the throwback items on the menu, though I've never ordered the haggis. Or, in fact, any of the supposedly 300 single malt scotch whiskeys. We got there fairly early, even though we stopped off at the apartment to check what we still needed to clear out.

"What do you want to drink?" I asked.

"A glass of white wine, I think. But also some water, given the temperature."

I planned to order a beer for myself.

"I found a few more bits and pieces today," I said.

"Anything really big?"

Just then our waitress – wearing a very short kilt-like skirt – came to take our drink order. After she left, I said "Nothing I found was a game-changer, but I found that Swenson arranged with Great Aunt Erminia that one of his people would lodge with her."

"That would avoid having other people around who might intercept confidential messages," Myrna said.

"Swenson sort of says that in a thank-you note to Mother.

I also found a letter from Mother to Swenson talking about Germaine Hopewell being willing – at the suggestion of Emily – to help merchant seamen to send and possibly receive letters and, in exceptional circumstances, telegrams."

"Given the pictures of Emily doing an apparent letter drop to a sailor, that would fit in perfectly. Emily might want Germaine or Roberta to help a particular sailor get a message home, for instance to Sweden or Spain, both of



which were neutral and hotbeds of spying and smuggling. Emily could avoid direct contact with her drop by using the other two.” Myrna was thinking out loud, but her ideas made sense enough to be worthy hypotheses.

“Decided what you want to eat?” I asked.

“Do I dare try the butter chicken curry?” Myrna asked.

“Sure. I think it’s pretty mild. The Brits are big on curries from my experiences when I’ve been over there.”

“What about you?” Myrna queried.

“Fish and chips. At home chips are a nuisance. Frying smells up the house.”

“Yes. I love bacon – crispy bacon – but then the house gets that smell that lasts and by evening it isn’t so great.”

“We’ll just have to have bacon out, or do it on the barbecue.”

\* \* \*

Though we had over a week left on Myrna’s apartment lease, the weather forecast for this Saturday, July 22, was relatively cool but dry, so we decided to do the final emptying. When we returned from Toronto, we’d put an ad on Kijiji, a fairly new classified advertising site at the time, offering the sofa and chair to the first person willing to take both away at an agreed time. We’d thought of calling the St. Vincent de Paul or Sally Ann, but some colleagues of Myrna said they’d had one of these show up with a truck, see a coffee stain on a chair arm and refuse the items. And the truck would come ‘sometime Tuesday’, which could mean waiting around and still being stuck with the furniture.

A bit more than a week ago, a pair of students moving out of residence into an apartment needed furniture, and their apartment was just a block away. When I realized how close they were, I pointed out that my hand truck with straps would allow the sofa to be trundled along the side-walk if they had enough manpower. The chair could be moved similarly and slightly more easily.

I knew I didn’t want to do any lifting, but wanted to keep an eye on my hand truck – the sort of item prone to disappearing – and also to supervise the removal of the furniture from the apartment building to minimize the chance of wall damage. I said I had to be very careful lifting – true for anyone – but would be willing to help with strapping and with holding doors. Some phone calls were made to fellow students offering beer and pizza and the next afternoon around 5 p.m. there were four students at the apartment door, three guys and a girl.

I'd already brought up the dolly and straps and set them beside the sofa. The students lifted the sofa onto the dolly and we strapped them together, then they more or less carried it downstairs and outside where the wheels that were on one end allowed one student to move it more or less like a large wheelbarrow, with the others helping out at curbs and with steering. I noticed that the girl – it turned out she was in kinesiology, which used to be called phys. ed. – had more useful strength than any of the guys.

Within 20 minutes of the arrival of the students the sofa was in its new home. We rolled the dolly back to Myrna's apartment and repeated with the chair, which was actually as much trouble because the wheels were not as well positioned to trundle along the side-walk. Still, it was well before six that I walked the dolly to the car.

That was, as I said, over a week before. I'd also taken apart the two bookcases – we'd already moved the books Myrna was keeping and dropped off the rest for a local charity book sale. I didn't think much of the cases as I've noted before, since they were particle-board and it was somewhat damaged and the shelves sagging. Still, the pieces might be useful for some basement storage or odd jobs, and they stacked flat. Well, some of the shelves were stacked bowed. I put some boxes on the top to see if they'd warp back a bit, but didn't have a lot of hope. I could once again hear Mother's voice telling me 'Waste not, want not.' But we'd found a new bookcase for the room transitioning from Mother's items to Myrna's handicrafts, and Mother's small bookcase came into the bedroom for books currently being read and other personal items. We'd got a narrow vertical set of shelves with clear plastic bins for Myrna to use in lieu of a tall-boy that fitted in the large walk-in closet. Myrna's old tall boy we put out on garbage day.

This 'moving' Saturday we made sure the cooler and ice blocks were in the car, that we had cleaning tools and materials (the shop vac was still at the apartment), and ate a bowl of cereal before getting in the car to do the close-out. The kitchen table had already gone. It was in the basement still with its legs off. We were mulling over whether to put it in place of the one I had. Or something else. At the apartment, there were no large items left. The air mattress hadn't been inflated. We just wanted to check everything one more time and do a cleaning, even though it was almost certain the rental company would have someone come in. Myrna would go to a phone company office Monday and cancel her phone. I'd already phoned NCF yesterday, and we took out the modem and line filters today, along with Myrna's land-line phone. Wonder where we could use that. It was a quite solid one in a nice design.

With the car loaded – everything fit easily inside, though a bit awkwardly given the buckets and mops – we locked the car and came up for a last check. The rooms were bare and echoing, since two rugs went out the other day.

“All the cupboards checked?” I asked.

“Yes, and while you were undoing the bed frame I checked there’s nothing in my storage cage downstairs. We’d looked the other day, but I wanted to be sure there was no garbage there.”

“One more walk round then, just for good measure.”

When Myrna finished this – it cannot have taken more than thirty seconds – I gave her a hug and we went out and pulled the door shut, making sure it was locked. The keys would go to a rental agent next week sometime. They said we could just drop them off, but I suggested firmly that we make an appointment to inspect the apartment together and do a sign off. There was still a deposit of a month’s rent, albeit the rent of over a decade ago. This would be next Wednesday. A time during the mid-morning was offered in the hope we would beg off in order to be at work, but I was, of course, available.

In the car, Myrna said “It seems a bigger step than getting married for some reason.”

“You haven’t moved for quite a while, and it was your home. I hope you’ll be happy with our place. And we’ll start looking soon to see if there’s anything we like better.”

“Actually, I’ve been finding it nice to be reorganizing your ... I mean the ... house. Especially to have a room for my own activities. The apartment was mine, but somehow a separate room for quilting and other things is ... special.”

“I’m glad to oblige. We’ve got the room more or less set up so you can use it for reading or spreading out quilts or whatever you like. Oh, I picked up a telephone jack and some wire so we can put a landline extension in that room. If you like I can also run some CAT5 – Internet style wiring.”

“Won’t wi-fi be enough?” Myrna asked.

“Yeah, should be fine. Though I like to use a wired connection for banking or when I enter a credit card. I even have a separate credit card with a limit of \$350 for buying things by phone or on the net. I should make sure you know how to use that one if you want to order anything.”

“It’s all still new. Sometimes I wonder if I’m going to wake up and find I’m still single.”

“Yeah. It is a bit new,” I agreed.

“Joe, do you think Katherine and Michael had a similar ... I don’t know ... shake-up perhaps, that is when they moved to Ottawa when you were born?”

I laughed and said “Of course, I wasn’t there, since I was born in Ottawa. But on a serious level, it was probably quite a wrench for them. I don’t know if they were still in Gannet House. I guess we could check that, possibly in a City Directory.”

“If we come across one for 1954, I’ll remind you to look. But it’s probably not hugely important. It won’t tell us how they felt about the move,” Myrna said.

“From my readings, the early 50s was a time of a lot of phony morality. The War was, I think, rather rampantly sexual. There’s those books by Broadfoot where he interviews people he met randomly as he travelled across Canada and he put them into little anecdotes. *Ten Lost Years* and *Six War Years*. After the War, you had pretty strong Anti-Red sentiment and heavy-handed oppression of women who ‘got into trouble’ while the men swanned off on their lives. I suspect Mother figured it would be better to be somewhere where gossip about my arrival was less likely.”

“What did they do when they got here?” Myrna asked.

“Michael had some sort of job organizing some records. I was never told exactly what they were about, though somehow the words ‘War production’ seem to stick in my mind. As I’ve said, he was apparently very good at keeping track of documents and money. It wouldn’t surprise me that he was engaged to put the files on Kiebitz and other operations in proper shape and maybe destroy anything awkward.”

“And he was close to retirement too, wasn’t he?” Myrna asked.

“Yes. 63 when I came along. I suspect Swenson or someone in that crowd arranged a contract for him that would carry him to 65. I know he retired just before he was 66.”

“And Katherine wasn’t working then?”

“No, she decided that she would be a stay-at-home Mom until I was in school, so around 1961, when she started doing some secretarial work. Not steno stuff, but more like the private secretary work she’d been handling for John Smith. And after Dad died, I think she expanded that.”

“It must have been a big change for them. Where did you live?”

“They bought a house – I guess right away when they came to Ottawa before Christmas 1954. It was not far from the Civic Hospital. A pretty modest house, though now they go for a lot because of the location. That was before the Sir John Carling Building went up on the Farm. When I was small, the three of us would go for walks round the Arboretum and along Dow’s Lake.

They both actually did gardening. Something I’d guess neither of them did before in Halifax. Another change.

Mother kept that house until she moved into the retirement home about 9 years ago. And she got a good price for it. I was surprised she wanted to stay in the house alone after I moved out – that was when I went to Waterloo. When I came back I didn’t much feel like living with my mother, given all the stereotypes that go with single men still at home. In fact Mother said she hoped I wouldn’t want to move back in. I think by then she had a

boyfriend. There were occasionally men friends around, but it was difficult to discern if anything was going on other than socializing. It's a different way of organizing the aspects of one's life that I'm not sure I can really grasp."

"You're talking to the wrong woman to get insight on that," Myrna said.

"Maybe. But maybe you haven't had a mess of experiences that colour your opinions on how men and women should interact."

"True, but the experiences of the last few months may have ruined my advice-giving abilities. You've showed me that there're a lot of levels on which a man and a woman can share things. A lot of ways one plus one is more than two."

"Thanks. I feel the same way. How I share with you is definitely not the same as with anyone else."

\* \* \*

Roger and Laura wanted us to stay with them in Bathurst, but Myrna simply said "But we're on honeymoon still." That was in a phone conversation a few weeks before our drive down to New Brunswick. The main problem was getting past Montreal. The choices were to go north of the Ottawa River and the Island of Montreal into Quebec City, or else take Highway 417 and Autoroute 40 into Montreal and then the La Fontaine Tunnel to Autoroute 20. We decided the latter, but packed the car the day before and woke at 4 a.m. and were away before 4:30. Now that Myrna was comfortable driving the Subaru, it meant we could take shifts. We decided to push as quickly as possible and have breakfast at a McDonalds in Boucherville or Saint Hyacinthe.

Indeed it in was the latter that I pulled off the highway. Myrna had driven 417 to the Quebec tourist center just over the provincial border. Not even the restaurant and toilets were open, and definitely not the tourist office. If I can, I like to pick up a new map, though I have last year's one somewhere. No it must be the 2004 one I think.

At the McDonald's – no apostrophe in Quebec – we used the toilets, then I ordered us breakfast. Some McDonald's are now offering better coffee, but not this one. We were in line to order, and I asked Myrna "One or two McMuffins?"

"Oh, I'm a bit hungry, but ... no ... just one."

"Three between two?"

"Good idea. And a coffee with milk. I'll get us napkins and a table."

When I joined her, I said "Eat half of that one, then give it to me."

"You don't mind that I've bitten it?"

"If I do, I guess I'll have to stop kissing you."

“Oh, yes. Stupid of me.”

“Not stupid, just still not used to that sort of sharing. Nor am I. But I’m liking how we do share.” I touched her hand, and she smiled at me.

“Joe, Do you think Michael and Katherine – if you don’t mind, I think I prefer to call her that rather than saying ‘your mother’ – do you think they shared like this?”

“As a little kid, you probably don’t notice. Or else, it’s so normal that you treat it like the wallpaper. It’s just there. But your question probably touches on what was between them. Mother could be formidable, otherwise she wouldn’t have been much of a private secretary to John Smith, but while she could be direct with Michael, she was never nasty, if you get what I mean by that. By the way, I don’t think I ever said, but they slept in a double bed together, and I remember they’d sometimes be lying in each other’s arms.

Mother was so organized. I wonder if they had friction over how things were arranged in the closet. Remember around Canada Day, we were both kind of annoyed with each other for some reason. I think it was which way round each of us put the hangers.”

“Well, you just put them any which way, then you can’t tell if you’ve worn something. I put the hangers with the hook to the front until I’ve worn the garment, then I put the point of the hook to the back.”

“Oh. But except for my suits which get dry-cleaned, I just wear and wash, so it doesn’t matter.”

“But your suits. What about them?”

“I solved that problem before you came into my life.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Really. Except for the suit I’ll wear tomorrow for the reception, I suspect I’ll hardly wear a suit any more. I’m a gentleman of leisure, you know,” I said, putting on a devil may care attitude.

“Hmm. OK. Maybe we can put any suits you’re going to keep in proper suit bags – you will want a couple for special occasions ....”

“For my funeral, so you can bury me properly?” I teased.

Myrna looked alarmed. “Joe. Don’t say that. Remember Joanne’s husband.”

“Yeah. You’re right. But to go back to the friction between us. It amazes me that it’s the little things that really aren’t that important that can get us annoyed and crochety.”

“Yes. I suppose. Actually, I’m both surprised and glad we’ve had so few things we’ve butted heads over.”

“I think Mother and Dad had this thing about spoons. Mother said they should be in the drawer so the handles faced towards you or towards the right if the tray was so aligned. And Dad said that then all the bowls of the

spoons were at one end, so they didn't fit so well in the organizer. I don't think they ever compromised on that one."

\* \* \*

It was about 5:30 when we got into the Comfort Inn we'd reserved in Bathurst. There'd been the change in time zone to move things later in the day. Fortunately, we'd planned for that.

In advance we'd arranged to go to Roger and Laura's at 8 for dessert and coffee. We knew we'd want a bit of a lie down, so as soon as we were in our room we showered and lay together. We dozed more than slept – I'd set an alarm for 7:30 – 6:30 to us – and by agreement we'd decided no dinner. In fact we'd had a fairly good lunch in Edmunston.

Susan Baird – my new mother-in-law – seemed genuinely pleased to see Myrna.

"What an interesting engagement ring."

Myrna said "It's quite old, at least about 70 years, since it belonged to Joe's mother Katherine who married in 1940. She died last October. The wedding ring is her's too. There's an inscription inside 'First friendship, then love'. But I'm not going to show you. It might be bad luck to take off the ring."

Laura said "Yes, and even if not bad luck, a chance to drop it down the drain or the heating register. But what a lovely sentiment. And, mother, don't forget to welcome Joe into our family. Welcome, Joe."

I liked Laura. Roger was, it turned out, very quiet. We had a very nice cheesecake for dessert, prefaced by a toast to Joe and Myrna in some Harvey's Bristol Cream. I actually prefer dry sherry, but Harvey's is always tolerable. The evening – kept quite short since we'd had a long day – was mostly taken up by telling about my background, though leaving out a great deal about Kelly and Joanne.

\* \* \*

On Saturday, Myrna wanted to show me Bathurst as she knew it. We had a nice, and fairly big, breakfast in a local diner, then did a walkabout. We also dropped in at the hardware store. I even bought a multi-tool for the car. Can't resist tool shops. We got through before Roger saw us, then we got a second tour of the store, including the warehouse. It was a busy, traditional hardware. I liked it and said so.

At about 1 o'clock we went back to our hotel, rested for a while, fooled around rather lazily, then cleaned up and got dressed. Myrna put on her wedding dress and I put on my suit. We looked classy, but nobody would be absolutely sure we were bride and groom. We were picked up by Laura at 20 to 3 – we were told in no uncertain terms that we were not going to be allowed an excuse to refuse a toast – and arrived at the Legion hall ten minutes later.

Myrna's family had done a great job of organizing the event. Before the non-family invitees arrived I got to meet Roger and Laura's children and grandchildren. There were two sons and a daughter and 6 grandchildren under the age of 9.

A rather general announcement had gone out for a reception from 3:15 to 4:30, giving a clear hour before a family dinner that was being catered at about 5:30. Some champagne-like wine was chilling for the obligatory toasts and a non-alcoholic punch and soft drinks were on offer, along with a good selection of finger snacks. A welcome table was set up with Josephine, married to Victor, Myrna's youngest nephew, insisting everyone coming in sign a guest book for us indicating their relationship to the party and then put on a label with their name. She said "Myrna might still know you, but Joe won't," though I think the main reason was to keep out the freeloaders.

Roger had told me he'd arranged a cash bar for those wanting to drink, but for Myrna and I to ask him if we wanted anything. The cash bar was another measure to discourage drop-ins who were simply there for a free drink and food.

Last night we had left the bottom layer of our two-layer wedding cake with Roger and Laura. It was now prominently displayed. We'd be cutting it together and sharing it out with the guests.

Thomas, the oldest nephew, and his wife Lynn were schoolteachers, though with Jack, 8, Susan, 5, and Nicola, 3, Lynn was not working at the moment. After the crowd left and we were getting ready to sit down for the family dinner, Thomas said to me "Myrna says you're going to Maisonnnette on your way to Sackville."

"Yes. Did she say why?"

"No, but I'm guessing something to do with Operation Kiebitz. I teach history, and that's something local with a bit of drama to get the kids to pay attention. They think Bathurst is the backside of nowhere."

"It was an interesting event, and after my mother died last year, I came across some items that may link her to the operation to try to capture the U-536, as it turned out to be."

"Really! What did she do?"

"Well, the evidence is a bit sketchy, but it looks like she was involved in trying to find out who was helping the German Prisoners of War. We



are pretty sure that a young woman from England who was a relative of a prominent Halifax family and whose parents died in the late 1930s was on her way to live with the family. We think a German agent who looked a bit like her pushed her overboard and assumed her identity. The second young woman was reported to have died on the night that the U-boat was to pick up the prisoners. The newspapers reported she fell off a train near Bathurst. But there isn't a lot of information, and we suspect the story was a cover for something else. Mother left a rather mangled bullet from a Beretta pistol. We think it was dug out of Mother's leg. Still lots to sort out."

"Do let me know – if the story ever gets clarified, I'll be able to get full classes and have them pay attention.

By the way, I've often wondered why the Germans called it Kiebitz. It means Lapwing, a largish member of the Plover family of birds. But the odd thing is that the Lapwing's range is across Europe and Asia and South America, but not North America. Perhaps the name was pulled from a hat and had no relevance to the plan, or they were thinking of a shorebird for the idea of picking up of the POWs from Maisonnnette, but didn't know there were no Lapwings here."

\* \* \*

Tuesday, August 8.

Yesderday was a civic holiday in New Brunswick. It had been rainy – nearly 9 mm. That put paid to much outdoors, so Myrna and I drove to Campbellton and back along the coast road, Number 134. Mainly gentle sightseeing. I'd reserved a table for five at a restaurant we'd found recommended on a tourism site for 6 pm. Myrna and I were treating Roger and Laura and Susan. This worked well. It was interesting to see Myrna confident in herself. Questions about intended job and family matters were answered without hesitation or confusion, and in essence with a statement like "We've talked quite a bit about that, but want to take things a little as they come."

Today we drove to Maisonnnette, more to get the feel for the place than anything else. Afterwards, we'd drive on to Sackville. We had a reservation for a night in the Marshlands.

Maisonnnette was a sleepy little village. We found the local park, but didn't see the lighthouse marker – the lighthouse itself Myrna had learned burned down after being hit by lightning in 1949. We walked west along the northern arm of the point. An elderly man was walking a slow-moving Labrador dog.

Myrna asked, in French, where the lighthouse used to be.

The man responded in French that was difficult to follow that it was nearby – he pointed with his arm.

He switched to English. “It was where they took the German prisoner who had escaped in Ontario. They caught him trying to signal a U-boat. But the Navy had ten navire à guerre ready, though the U-boat got away, but it was sunk a few weeks later on the other side of the Atlantic, but by Canadian corvettes.”

We knew this, of course, but it was interesting to hear it said by a local.

“Were you here at the time?” I asked. He seemed old enough.

“Oui, J’ai onze ans. Eleven. We were told to stay indoors. My uncle Jean Godin was gardien de phare, but also membre du Régiment de la Chaudière. But our house was so close, I slipped out my window and hid behind a wood pile to watch.”

“Did you see much?”

“I fell asleep, but woke up when I heard some people walking along the road. First one, then two others. Then there was a fuss as the police and army found the German along there maybe two or three hundred yards, and they took him up to the lighthouse. He was caught only two hundred metres from it, but the other side from here. Sorry, I mix the English and metric units. He had papiers – documents – that were pretty good, but eventually Commander Piers who was in charge of the operation saw that the signature on one of the documents was – what you say – counter... ”

“Counterfeit?”

“Oui. C’est ca. And that was later all put in les journaux, though the sous-marin got away which was a disappointment. But they never put the shooting in the report.”

“There was a shooting?”

“Oui. Ici. Directement en avant.” He pointed to the beach, then continued, “A woman had been hiding near. Almost where I was watching, and she got up and was trying to signal with a flash-light. She had seen the German taken away, je pense, and was trying to warn the sous-marin.”

“So how did the shooting happen?”

“Another woman jumped up and ran towards this woman. She yelled a name, I think she said ‘Emile or is it Reda’. Then the first woman shouted ‘Get back Katherine’ and they struggled and there was a shot. But there was a man coming just behind the second woman, and he picked up a rock and hit the first woman on the head. I guess pretty hard, because there was a noise like eggs breaking, and I think she died. Then the army were there, and they got a car – we had no ambulance nearby then – and took away the second woman, I guess the one called Katherine.

And then an army truck came and they took away the first woman, who as I said must have been dead. I went home before anyone saw me. I wanted

to ask about it all, but everyone pretended it was just the German officer who was here. I often wondered what it was all about.”

“We have some ideas,” I said.

“Vraiment?”

“Yes. Shall we walk and we can tell you what we know?”

“S’il vous plaît.”

“My mother’s name was Katherine Rivers. I have a bullet from a Beretta .32 calibre pistol that I believe was taken from her left leg, where she had a scar. She worked for an industrialist in Halifax as the personal secretary. A cousin of this man, Emily Cartwright, was a young woman whose parents were killed in an airplane accident in the late 1930s. She was supposed to come to Canada in 1938 to live with her family in Halifax. On the boat from England there was also a woman named Frieda Bohm who looked like Emily. Frieda apparently fell overboard. She was reported as lost at sea. We think it was Emily who was pushed overboard and Frieda took her identity and was actually a German spy. She may have helped provide Wolfgang Heyda with some documents, as he apparently had very good forgeries. Heyda was the German Prisoner of War who had escaped from Camp 30 in Bowmanville and came here to be taken away by the submarine U-536. The newspapers reported that Emily died about the same time as the submarine was here, but they said she fell off a train near Bathurst. We’ve not been able to find any documents to support that.”

“Alors, so that is what probably happened. But why was your mother here?”

“We think she had a role in discovering that Frieda was not Emily. Perhaps the army or police needed someone who could identify her.”

“I wonder why the man with your mother didn’t have a gun. I don’t think he was with the police. The woman who was shot – Katherine – he asked her where she was blessé – injured, and she told him in her leg. From where I was, I couldn’t see much, but I think he put a handkerchief on the blessure. And now I think about it, she said ‘Please don’t leave me Michael’.”

Myrna said “Joe’s father’s name was Michael, and he also worked for the industrialist. He was too old to go in the military.”

“This was ten years before I was born,” I said.

“It was a long time ago, but I am glad you told me what you have learned,” the old man said.

“It was good to hear what you knew also. Did you ever tell anyone?”

“Oh. Some of the family, but they all thought it was les fantaisies of a boy with imagination. I even began to suspect my own memory.”

Myrna and the man – Robert Godin – exchanged addresses. I noticed the breeze was off-shore, and said “M. Godin, my mother asked that her

ashes be scattered in the sea somewhere in the Maritimes. Do you think anyone would be offended if we did so here.”

“Non. Pas du tout. It is a place that had importance, to her and to many others. My condolences.” He waved as he and his dog shuffled away.

We walked back to the car and dug out the canister of ashes. It was a simple one of cardboard, inside a velvet bag. Knowing I intended to scatter Mother’s ashes, I’d not paid money for an urn. In silence we walked back to the waterline. I took off my shoes and socks and rolled up my pants enough to wade in a few feet. I allowed a wave to reach its high point and checked the breeze, then let the ashes stream gently out onto the water, though I broke up the process into three waves.

I hadn’t noticed Myrna grab a towel from the car. Indeed, she had thought of bringing towels, saying “You never know when you get caught in rain.” So I was able to dry my feet. We said nothing during all this, but Myrna put her arm round me as we walked back to the car.

After we’d driven just out of Maisonnnette, Myrna said, “We seem to have found out most of the story, at least the important parts.”

“Yes. You don’t think of your parents in the middle of a spy thriller, and your Dad and Mother taking on someone with a gun. I wonder if there was a fuss that Michael killed Frieda. I’m sure the authorities would have wanted to interrogate her,” I said.

“I’m sure they would have, but in some ways having a body for Emily allowed the family to avoid awkward questions. If she’d just disappeared, there might have been ugly rumours. This way, there was an excellent cover story.”

\* \* \*

Thursday Aug 10

Rain was predicted for tomorrow in Halifax, so I persuaded Myrna today would be our outside day. As early as we could, we went to the HMCS Sackville. I wanted to see what her sister-ship HMCS Rimouski would have been like.

“Not far above the water,” I said as we stood on the deck near the stern.

“And this is calm water,” Myrna added.

The corvettes really were pretty small warships. Canada had the world’s third-largest navy in 1945 in terms of number of ships, but they were almost all corvettes or smaller.

We wandered about the ship, sometimes together, but sometimes a bit apart. As we met up near the bow, I said “It makes you really respect the men who had to sail and fight in these small ships.”

Myrna responded "Yes, I overheard a guide say that they had a crew of about 85, but there weren't enough bunks, and near the end of the war the extra guns and radar meant sometimes over 100 crew. I can't see where they'd all be put."

"And they had to reload the depth charge throwers on the deck there with waves splashing over them. They weighed over 500 lbs. in some cases," I added.

"What about that thing over there, called Hedgehog?"

"That was easier to reload and would fire the mortars but not all at once. The idea was to drop them in a ring where you thought there was a submarine. They exploded only on contact, so you didn't mess up the sonar like depth charges did. And you didn't bother to set the depth.

I don't know if HMCS Rimouski had Hedgehog at Maisonneuve. Rimouski had just had a 5-month refit, so I think it probably did. But one article about U-536 said they escaped because it was too shallow to use depth charges near shore. However, sometimes authors mix things up. I suspect it's more likely that the small navy craft were quite vulnerable to their own depth charges, especially when they didn't have a lot of room to manoeuvre. It may also have been that the sonar – I think we Canadians called it ASDIC like the Brits – could not be used actively in shallows. That is, they could listen, but if they sent out a ping it would reflect all over the place. One report said U-536 heard the sound of ships and that was why they decided to abort the pickup. I guess they left Frieda behind too."

\* \* \*

It was rainy on Friday as predicted.

We went to the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Myrna wanted, in particular, to see the Maud Lewis exhibits.

There was a nice coffee shop called Pavia, and I ordered us each a large latte while Myrna found a table. To share I also got a chocolate croissant and an apple Danish. Actually, I still wasn't fully aware of Myrna's taste favourites, so I chose things I would happily eat and then let her have first pick. I asked for a knife when I ordered and the barista smiled knowingly.

It turned out Myrna wanted to try both treats, as did I. Myrna was taking a croissant crumb out of my beard when a lady aged somewhere nearing 70 came up to our table and asked "Excuse me, but may I ask your name? You look familiar, but I cannot place you."

Normally I am reticent to give my name, but decided it would be less trouble to acquiesce. "Joseph Cotton. How might we have met?"

"I don't think we have, at least in 50 years. But if I am correct, your mother was Katherine Rivers, or Katherine Cotton to give her her married name."

"You knew her?" I asked, waving to a chair.

The lady sat down carefully. "She worked for my father. I'm Victoria Walton, formerly Smith."

Myrna said "And you saw my husband and a resemblance that might be ... er ... awkward? Sorry. I'm Joe's wife, Myrna." That was the first time I'd heard Myrna introduce herself that way.

"Yes. You do rather look like my father, Mr. Cotton. And actually it is not a huge shock. My mother and father had a quite long and successful partnership, but it was a dynastic marriage between two business families. My mother had no interest in business, but she liked to be the doyenne of the established social scene. She and my father had few common interests other than the promotion of the family and its fortunes, and they worked together for that purpose. My father was discreet, and your mother perhaps even more so. I never talked to my mother about how much she knew about Katherine and later Anne Sylvester, but I was in my late teens when Katherine retired to have you. By then I knew where babies came from. I never talked about the possibility I might have a half-sibling, and until today did not give it much probability."

I wanted to avoid any early suspicion that I might want anything from the family, and to change the subject asked "Did you know Emily Cartwright?" Victoria must have been a child, but would possibly remember her.

"Oh yes! She came to us when I was very young, about 2 or 3. She became my mother's great ally in social events. And she read me stories. She had this big book – I still have it – and each night would bring the book and read me my bedtime story."

"My mother died last Fall and left a letter and some odds and ends that made me curious. And your father's papers are at the University of Ottawa. Myrna here is the archivist. That's how we met this past Winter."

"But you said 'wife'," Victoria said to Myrna.

"Yes," Myrna answered, "We married in June. I'm wearing Katherine's engagement and wedding rings." She held out her hand.

"Of course. I hadn't noticed before, but I knew those rings. They are special. 'Friendship first, then love'. I remember. I think Michael and your mother loved each other very much."

"This is extremely interesting, Ms. Walton." Then it struck me. "Walton? There was a Navy man named Walton who had known Emily."

"Yes. His nephew is my husband. I went to England to spend a year in 1958 and my father suggested I look him up. There was a photo of him – the Navy man, James – with Emily and another woman who fell off the ship

who rather looked like Emily. Father looked for it, but couldn't find it."

"I have it," I said. "It was with Mother's things. Actually, I have a scan of it on the laptop that's in our hotel, along with a lot of other information."

"Then we must talk further. Let me telephone home and see if we can do dinner, assuming you are free."

"We can be," I said.

Victoria had a cell phone and found dinner could be arranged. We were given an address and phone number and asked to come at 6 pm. Also asked if there was anything we could not eat.

"Tell me a bit about yourself, Mr. Cotton."

I gave a capsule biography, mentioning Michael and my business and its sale.

"So you may have inherited that nose for business from the man you resemble, though truthfully I suspect Katherine shared that ability and interest too. I'm sure it was part of how they worked so well together both professionally and personally."

We had finished our coffee, and Victoria had to get somewhere, so we said our au revours.

"You'll have to organize the material so it is easy to show," Myrna cautioned.

"Yes. Well, given the weather, I guess I could prepare a Powerpoint. In fact, I have a blank CD, so I can burn a copy to leave for Victoria. We'd better get some wine to bring too."

\* \* \*

We had no trouble finding the address Victoria had given us. The house was pleasant and quite modern, not far from the Armdale Rotary. It wasn't the mansion I might have imagined.

"Come in, come in, and I'll introduce my husband, Stephen."

There was the usual round of introductions, and we went into the living room, which was comfortable and old-fashioned.

"Sherry?" Stephen asked in an obviously British accent.

It turned out we could choose between several varieties. There were some nuts and other snacks, and we sat down to get acquainted. The Walton's were a seafaring family, and Stephen – a couple of years older than Victoria – had been in the heavy freight business, and come to Canada to provide an outpost in Halifax.

Victoria said, "I suppose I have money in the John Smith shares, but most of that is tied up. My brother and his son and daughter run all that."

Stephen and I wanted to avoid the family politics and we enjoy what I call a cordial independence.”

“I like your style, Victoria,” I said.

“And I will warn you that John Jr. and his family will consider you an interloper, unfortunately.”

“You needn’t worry. My mother was quite explicit that I should seek no gain nor recognition from the John Smith family or businesses. However, I am extremely grateful for your warm welcome, and I hope the materials I have will be of interest to you. We’ve got a presentation on the laptop, and I see you have a plasma TV. I think I may have a cable that can make that work.”

“Wonderful. But we’ll eat first if that’s OK. I see our meal just arriving.”

Indeed a van was just pulling into the driveway. A woman got out and retrieved several boxes from the back and was met at the door by Stephen and Victoria.

In the dining room, Victoria explained “There’s a local restaurant we love. They’ve made shrimp and scallop vol au vents and salad and vegetables.”

The meal was splendid. We talked about our own lives. Stephen and Victoria were very taken with the fact that Myrna and I were essentially on honeymoon in a first-time marriage in our middle years. There was talk of sailboats and quilts and computer programs. It was 7:30 before I said “Perhaps we should look at the Powerpoint before it gets too late?”

“Yes, yes. We’ll do dessert after.”

There was a bit of fiddling to reach the VGA slot on the TV, but after the cable was attached and the input selected, I was able to get a good image on the TV.

The first image I put up was of Katherine and Michael, my parents.

The second was of James Walton, Emily and Frieda.

“There’s Emily, on the right,” Victoria said. Myrna looked at me knowingly. “And Uncle James in the middle,” Stephen added.

I put up the caption for the photo next. “Braving the weather, Nov 1, 1938, Myself with Emily (left) and Frieda (right)”

Victoria looked puzzled. I put up the newspaper clipping about ‘Frieda’ being lost overboard.

“What does this mean?” Victoria asked.

“We believe Frieda was a German agent. She realized that there was a good chance to assume Emily’s identity. James Walton was – perhaps you have information to confirm this – part of the crew of the RMS Nova Scotia who joined the Navy when war broke out. That ship was torpedoed with great loss of life in November 1942. There was another ship of the same name that sailed the Atlantic from 1947 to 1962.



But to go back to the story, it was fairly likely that Frieda could avoid meeting up with James Walton or anyone else who was likely to expose her if she changed wardrobe and hairdo. It was a time when women wore hats with veils, especially if a 'friend' had died."

"She was so nice to me," Victoria said. "As I told you, she read me bedtime stories. After Emily – well, who I called Emily – died, we found the book. I kept it. It's over here on the bookshelf."

She got up and retrieved a quite solid book. It had very thick end-boards. *Bedtime Stories for Children* was printed on the spine and front cover.

"Might I look at it while Joe continues the story?" Myrna asked. "I'm well aware of what he'll tell you, and can hear where we are."

Victoria handed her the book, and I continued the presentation.

I showed the picture of the garden party with the different groups.

Victoria said "Oh there's Emily with two sailors. And my mother and father – I guess our father – with your mother and Germaine Hopewell, my mother's secretary."

"We'd guessed that's who the lady is, but you've confirmed it.

I have another photo, but perhaps it is awkward to show."

"Why would that be?"

"It's of your mother and Germaine holding hands. I think it may have been used to blackmail one or both of them into helping Frieda."

"Can I see it?" Victoria asked.

I put up the picture. It wasn't, of course, really very embarrassing, but in the right hands – or rather the wrong hands – could be used to pressure someone.

Victoria said "Yes. It's possible that Mother and Germaine were close. In those days it was all considered terrible and illegal. Well, with Michael you will now appreciate that.

By the way, you know Germaine is still alive?"

"No, we didn't," I said. "Her name and address were crossed out in Mother's address book."

"Yes, she's in a senior's residence since she took a fall several years ago, so possibly they lost contact. She's doing quite well for being around 90 now. I'll give you her address and phone number. I try to see her about once a year. What you've said suggests she was probably more to Mother than I thought."

"To move on, here's a newspaper clipping about Emily's death," I said, and paused while they read it.

"And here is an image of a box with two bullets found in my mother's possessions after she died last year. You'll note the dates. I believe the Mauser bullet is one that hit John Smith at Vimy Ridge at Easter of 1917."

"My goodness," said Stephen. "Did we know he was there?"

"I think I did, but as a child you tend not to realize the importance," Victoria answered. "But what about the Beretta bullet?"

"My mother didn't wear shorts very often, as she had a round scar in her left leg. And we've found a wallet with a hole in it." I presented the photo of Mother, Dad and I with the image of the damaged wallet.

"Who shot her?" Victoria asked.

"We are fairly certain it was Frieda / Emily. Just this week we were in Maisonneuve, New Brunswick, and met a man who was a boy who saw a woman try to stop a woman she called Emily or Frieda from escaping to a German submarine or else signalling to warn it away. There was also an escaped POW who had been a U-boat officer. That story in itself is interesting."

"Oh. Is that where Desmond Piers was involved? I've met him several times."

"Yes. He was in charge of trying to capture the sub and they did recapture Wolfgang Heyda, the escaped POW.

Anyway, Mother apparently tackled Frieda, who had a gun which went off. Michael was right behind and he hit Frieda over the head with a rock from the beach. Apparently hard enough to kill her."

"Oh my!" Victoria said.

"We have quite a lot of corroborating information, though nothing that would likely be definitive. I've put some of it on this CD for you, and I'll be happy to share more information. We think Frieda, as Emily, was communicating to the POWs, and possibly providing or helping to provide forged documents that the POWs were going to use, though we've not found evidence of that. The prisoners of war – mostly U-boat men – were in Camp 30 at Bowmanville in Ontario. That's 1000 miles away. But Heyda actually got to the beach and his documents were good enough that he almost was let go. The sub – U 536 – apparently heard propeller noises through their sonar and aborted the pickup. HMCS Rimouski and a bunch of other boats were hiding behind Caraquet Island. We think Germaine and your mother were sharing whatever messages Emily asked them to pass on for her with Mother and Michael, so the Canadian authorities knew the plan. But the sub managed to get away, though it was sunk two weeks later by HMCS Calgary and some other ships on the other side of the Atlantic."

"This is so fantastic, it's hard to believe," Victoria said.

"We have found some letters, some in my mother's collection, and some in your father's papers that show us my Mother and Dad were actually working with the authorities beforehand. Indeed, we have some idea that Michael Cotton had been involved in counter-espionage as early as the First World War. Your father – I guess our father – was likely in the know on a general level, too, but he probably had to act through Katherine and Michael. Here's

two pictures of Frieda that we think show an information drop. Notice the newspaper with Frieda in one and the man dressed like a sailor in the other.

What we don't know yet is how or why Mother and Dad got to Maisonnnette, so there are still some details to learn. We think Frieda was to be taken out on the submarine with any POWs who got to the beach."

"I remember someone saying Michael worked at the Citadel in the First War. There were people interned there who had to be checked out, including, I've heard, Leon Trotsky for a little while," Victoria said. "In that context, Michael had been in the game a while."

Stephen said, changing topics, "Victoria told me why she'd approached you. It must be awkward trying to distinguish fathers."

"I use Dad for Michael," I said. "Mother left me a letter last year that told me John Smith was my father, and also told me that I must not seek gain or recognition in that regard. However, I am very grateful to have the opportunity to get to know you both."

Myrna said, "Victoria. Have you ever looked closely at the binding of this book?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the binding is very strongly sewn, and the end boards seem thick, which is not so unusual in children's books, since they have to withstand a good deal of heavy handling. But I think these end boards are rather like the covers I remember making for school textbooks. There even used to be heavy paper covers you got from the bank or other businesses that you folded and slipped over the end boards as protection for the books."

"May I see," Victoria asked. Myrna looked relieved. Victoria said, "I think you're right. Can the boards be slipped off?"

"We should do it carefully," Stephen said. "Shall I help?"

Between them they gently folded back the end boards and the book slipped out. A piece of acetate dropped on the floor. It had a repeated alphabet. The front of the inner book, now revealed, had a set of rows of alphabets all scrambled, along with some tables of dates and numbers. The back cover had a lot of tiny writing. Stephen got a magnifier.

"By God, it's a code book!" he said.

"And the strip and the table are a ciphering aid, I think," I added.

"And in my story book. What a hiding place!"

"This is a historical artifact," I said. "I hope you'll allow me to take some photos now, but will get it properly imaged so it can be shared with historians. It's very special."

"And rather confirms Emily's – oh, you said Frieda's – guilt."

"Yes. It does rather," Myrna added. "But we still don't know who created the forged documents or how precisely they were transferred to the POWs in Bowmanville, or who else helped them."

“To think that people I knew were in the middle of it all,” Victoria said. Stephen said, “Joe. If you have a camera, please take some photos of the book, as I think it is important not to lose any information at this remove from events. And Victoria, I think we need some coffee and dessert.”

We also took some photos of ourselves, and made sure we exchanged contact information. Victoria seemed to be rather smug about knowing something John Jr. and his children did not, and was appreciative of the CD I’d made. I told her there would be another when I had time to include information and photos from the present trip.

\* \* \*

Next morning, we telephoned the residence where Germaine Hopewell lived. Germaine was hard of hearing, but with the help of one of the staff, we managed to arrange a meeting at 10:30 a.m. I brought along my laptop.

Probably for reasons of security, a woman from the staff led us to a room just off the main lobby where we would be visible from the front desk. Good for them. I asked if I could plug in my laptop – the battery is getting a bit older and an hour of running is the best I can expect. I had the image of the garden party up when Germaine came in using a walker and accompanied by a staff member.

“Oh my! You look like John Smith did!” she said before we’d even done introductions.

Speaking clearly, we introduced ourselves. Germaine said “I lost my address book when I took a fall and was in hospital then moved here. I’ve not been able to work out how to write to Katherine and some other people.”

That would explain the crossed out address in Mother’s address book. I told her as gently as I could that Mother died last Fall. A shadow of sadness crossed Germaine’s face.

We were sitting at the small table where I’d set up the laptop. As I turned the laptop so Germaine could see, I didn’t have to give any explanation, since when she saw the photo, she started to talk.

“That was in 1940. Katherine and Michael had just got married in the Winter beforehand. Look at John Smith, then look at you now. I have trouble not saying ‘Mr Smith’, but you said your name was Joseph. Joseph Cotton. Well, we knew Katherine had a special relationship with Mr. Smith, though they were very discreet.

And there’s Emily, acting like butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth.”

“Did you know she wasn’t really Emily?” I asked, quite loudly, as I put up the image of Germaine and Roberta.

“Oh. Where did you get that?”

“We found it in a packet of negatives taped to the bottom of one of Mother’s chest of drawers. We think it may have been used to blackmail you.”

“Yes. Emily, or whoever she was, found out about Roberta and I. I’m old enough to still be frightened, but today there’s the Pride Parade, and if I could walk better, I’d go along despite my anxiety. She made us post letters for her to addresses she gave us and in our handwriting. They didn’t seem to say much, so must have been in code.”

I said “Mother said Michael was gay too, so I think she was sympathetic.”

“Yes. We didn’t really say anything, but I suppose we knew. And that was why I told her about Emily asking us to send letters for her. We arranged that she or Michael would look at them, and sometimes we’d make up a second envelope so anyone getting them wouldn’t see they’d been opened.”

We showed some more pictures, but communication was difficult, so we didn’t press for more information. We arranged to send some prints of the pictures of interest to her, and gave her our address in case she remembered anything else. The meeting did not bring us new information, but it did underline that our guesses were more or less on target.

\* \* \*

A few nights later we were in Québec. Our lucky meeting with Victoria had – as far as the story of Mother and Michael was concerned – provided enough information that we could, if we wished, close the book. As Myrna had noted, however, there were other players who must have played a role. Perhaps we’d find out some day.

Today we’d arrived about mid-afternoon, in any event before the rush hour, and checked in to a nice small hotel near the Rue St. Jean. It was called a Chateau, but we joked about Faux Chateaux. However, it was fine as a hotel. We had a large bed and a luxurious bathroom. We shared a tub and an entirely wicked hour enjoying each other, then found a pleasant little crêperie that offered a variety of ciders. We were both slightly wobbly on our feet when we tumbled into bed.

“I like taking you on honeymoon,” I said. “I think we should make ‘honeymoon’ our primary occupation.”

“It has been nice, but it might wear off after a bit.”

“Strange how this last year has gone for us, with one thing leading to another, to another. Sort of ‘Seek a book, find a wife’.”

“What about me? Help a client, end up married to him.”

“You want a refund?” I asked.

“Don’t even think about it!”

"I wasn't. I was asking you. You never know."

"I'm not planning to let you go easily."

To follow the subject of occupation, that seems to be the last item on your wish list that hasn't been settled. Have you given it more thought?"

"Actually, yes."

I was thinking about how you said to try to think how things happened and to develop a scenario as a hypothesis. So I started writing a short story about the chase from Halifax to Maisonnnette at the end of September 1943."

"Did it work?" Myrna asked.

"I'm not sure. It let me inject a whole lot of ideas that may be total rubbish, but might be how things happened. We could try to check some of the possibilities, or simply enjoy the story if I've written it well."

"When do I get to read it?"

"It's on the laptop. I could print it out if you want. But I'd suspect the dinner and cider mean tomorrow is a better time."

"Yes, but tell me how you think it might answer your occupation issue."

"Well, if it is any good, or might become so with some work, it might be an activity that would give me a lot of satisfaction, not be something I have to do at any particular moment, and I already find I enjoy. Perhaps "occupation" is too grand a word for that. You know I also plan to learn some more computer stuff, and maybe do some contract work or see if there are young people I can mentor and invest in, though I don't want to make them see me as a banker, and I'd like them to be a bit hungry for business. At the moment MKJ Inc. is really just a holding company for stocks and other securities. I could and should spend a bit more time keeping an eye on possibilities."

"Joe, You're making me feel tired with all this energy."

"Actually, right now I want to cuddle and go to sleep, but somehow the subject came up."

"I'll probably bug you about it in the morning, but right now I just want to feel you close too."

\* \* \*

### **An End to Intrigue**

My name is Michael Cotton. I should preface my tale by telling you that my wife and I are employed at this date at the end of December 1943 by a fairly wealthy Halifax industrialist I'll name as JS. Katherine is his private secretary and I am called Comptroller, though I keep records of all sorts. If I do say so,

I am very good at my job, and the files are in tip-top condition. I learned how to do this during the last War, the one we called the Great War, when I was an Interrogation Officer for internees and enemy aliens at the Halifax Citadel. One of my colleagues from that time, Richard Swenson, is still linked to counter-intelligence in Ottawa. He somehow met Katherine through some of the work JS was doing with the government in the late 30s, and wrote to congratulate us when we married in 1940. I'm a good deal older than Katherine, who is now in her early 30s, while I am over 50. We were the people to set up meetings for JS and made sure they ran smoothly with both physical comforts and proper information and communications. When we were not needed in the meetings, we spent a lot of time in ante-rooms waiting to be called to do something or other. We had plenty of time to get to know each other and found that we liked each other's company very much, though I'm afraid I'm not really the type of man to make a good husband. I've not a lot of interest in women, which many people find strange or worse, but fortunately not Katherine.

Swenson's congratulations on our nuptials were not entirely unencumbered. He wanted us to act as part-time agents should the need arise, and to keep him informed of anything that might be suspicious. JS companies were involved in War work.

Now sometime in 1941, Katherine was at a small party to provide some welcome and friendship to Navy officers. A man named Walton was there, recently promoted to First Lieutenant on an escort vessel, I believe one of the 4-stackers the Americans gave to the British in exchange for use of a base in Newfoundland. When Katherine told him she worked for JS, he said he knew a cousin called Emily Cartwright who'd been on the RMS Nova Scotia in 1938 when another young woman had gone overboard. He mentioned a photo of himself with both young women. Unfortunately, after the loss overboard of one of the two, he'd not been able to express his condolences to the other – Emily – as she had put on dark clothing and a veiled hat when not in her cabin.

I don't know what insight or intuition prompted Katherine to suggest that there may be a more sinister side to the story, but she asked Walton if he would come next morning at 10:30 to Gannet House where JS lives and Emily was resident. Katherine arranged – she's a marvel at such things – that a dress shop

she knew Emily patronized would send a messenger with a \$5 gift certificate to thank Emily for her not-inconsiderable custom, but that a receipt from Emily would be needed. Walton was in the bushes with binoculars and noted that the woman who presented herself was the one known as Frieda Bohm who supposedly fell overboard.

Walton said he had his photo in England. We had to hope he would not get torpedoed on the way home. Katherine impressed upon him the need to make sure there was a copy or a negative before committing one to the wartime postal services. In due course, we got the photograph, though by then we had alerted Swenson of our suspicions.

Gradually over the next two years a team was built up to keep an eye on Emily/Frieda, though for now we'll use Emily. Of course, she had her own fish to fry. She managed to show a remarkable talent for social activities, in which Roberta, JS' wife, was one of the local chatelaines. Roberta was, somewhat like me, less inclined to conventional matrimony and preferred the company of women. Emily discovered that Roberta and her private secretary Germaine were particularly fond of each other, and managed to snap a picture of them holding hands. Nothing very incriminating, though employer and employee don't usually sit on a bench with joined hands. Emily had access to photography as she had wangled a job as a reporter or columnist to write articles about women and their War work. This gave her a lot of range of movement and a camera allowed her articles to be illustrated. To give her credit, she was good at this, but it meant those of us watching her were kept on our toes. Almost certainly we missed some of her actions.

It was fortunate that Germaine had sensed that Katherine understood how some people were more inclined to friendships with their own gender, and told her that Emily had asked her if she could write and mail some letters, ostensibly to help young women who were 'in trouble'. Roberta was also recruited. Having the confidence of both Germaine and Roberta, Katherine and I were able to intercept the letters, get them suitably copied and then forwarded, and Swenson's people would then sometimes watch, but more often simply arrest and replace, the recipients. Those poor folk were kept incommunicado until at least now, and probably will be out of circulation until the War's end, let us hope it is not too distant.



We played cat and mouse for about two years. It wasn't entirely clear how Emily received information. Roberta was involved with various activities to provide some measure of welcome and respite from stress for both merchant and naval seamen and officers. Indeed, Katherine was similarly active, and that is how she met Walton. On one occasion in the Public Gardens I got two photos showing Emily making a letter drop to a seaman. By then we had several agents in Halifax, but we unfortunately did not get my photos developed fast enough to arrest the sailor, who was posing as a Swede. His ship sailed just as we were getting information on his nominal identity.

It is to be imagined that Emily received information by similar routes, but we never did fully uncover all her methods. Nevertheless, sometime in August of this year, we intercepted one of her letters to someone living in Newcastle, Ontario. Swenson said that the person was an Irish immigrant woman who had been an active supporter of the IRA. She had a 13 year-old daughter. I suspect Swenson's people threatened malfeasance on a defenceless daughter whose parent had disappeared if there weren't cooperation. Richard is an extremely nice man, but he is very dedicated to the task of defeating the enemy. I've discovered recently that I am the same. Well, I hope that I'm also a nice man. Sometimes war can make us do very evil things.

There must have been other German agents. We were able to get wind of the plot to have a number of prisoners of war who'd been captured from U-boats, particularly officers of high rank, escape and make their way to the Baie de Chaleurs in New Brunswick where a U-boat would pick them up on the night of September 26. The moon would be a waning crescent, just 6% full.

Apparently most communications with the POWs were via letters transmitted through the International Red Cross, but these were being scrutinized and somehow the code was broken. The German plan was allowed to ripen in order that the Canadian Navy would have a chance to capture or sink the submarine being sent to extract the escapees at Pointe Maissonnette. The RCMP were called in to help monitor the POWs' progress with several tunnels, even managing to 'miss' a cave in. Once it was felt that the submarine was on its way, the Canadian authorities acted to seize the prisoners and collapse the tunnels. However, one POW, Wolfgang Heyda, used a crude slider on

electrical wires to get over the fence and escape. Despite massive search parties, he got onto a CN train to Bathurst, and somehow got to Maisonnnette in time for the rendezvous.

We now know he had excellent false papers. Even after he was arrested on the beach and taken up to Maisonnnette lighthouse, his cover story was almost accepted until one signature was seen to be wrong. Who did the forgeries we don't know, at least Katherine and I have not been told. If they were done inside Camp 30, the prisoners would still need images of real documents and signatures. I do know that nothing we intercepted was quite related to that. Still, a good clandestine operation would use multiple, independent channels so the opposition cannot get the whole pie in one grab. And, as I said, we didn't manage to know everything Emily was doing.

Then in the last week of September, Katherine got a phone call from Ottawa when she was at work with JS. JS was not privy to details of what was going on, but he had been made aware by Swenson that there were important activities that Katherine and I would sometimes be needed to do in a hurry. The caller on this occasion said he was verifying information about a particular contract number which was a tip off that we were to do something. He then said that the JS Bathurst operation was to be the site of a meeting to discuss a new production method. Such messages were common enough in wartime. One did not say what exactly was going to happen, nor who should attend. However, we had been previously told that our carcasses should be where we were requested immediately if not sooner if we received a message mentioning the particular contract number.

Katherine told JS that we were needed in Bathurst and asked if she could call to ask that we have use of a car when there. Then she called a cab, found me down the hall and we quickly packed an overnight bag. The cab made it to the train with only a few minutes to spare. The person who had telephoned from Ottawa had arranged for our tickets to be waiting with a loitering naval officer. As we were being given the tickets, we saw Emily board the train. This was a look up.

If Emily were on the train, we were fairly certain we didn't want her to see us. I approached the train conductor at the back end of the train – Emily had got on several cars forward.

“Excuse me, my name is Michael Cotton. I’m afraid I cannot provide documentation immediately, but I and my wife Katherine are tailing an enemy agent who we do not wish to see us as there is a bigger operation in play. Here are our tickets. We’re not trying for a free ride.”

“What do you wish me to do? I can’t promise anything out of the ordinary without an order.”

“We can probably get an order, but not before the train would leave. However, we do have genuine occupations apart from our counter-intelligence work, and we can show proper ID and also a way for you to verify us later. What we really need is a place to stay out of view until Bathurst, where we believe our target will get off and so will we.”

“I’ll note your information and check when I can. But you can sit in the baggage room, though I’ll want to check you’ve got no bomb.”

Our bags had little in them. The conductor wrote down our names and addresses.

“You live at Gannet House?” he asked.

“Yes. You could ask one of your station agents to phone there – don’t even trust the number on my card if you like – and ask. But better to call the Officer Commanding at the Citadel and ask about Team Swenson. I’ve written that on my card. The train can be stopped at Truro if they don’t confirm we are genuine.”

“Fair enough. We’ll be a couple of minutes late anyway now. Afraid you’re going to be locked in for a bit. I’ll let you out in the corridor at Truro so you can use the toilet providing they don’t send a squad of Mounties.”

We had a rather uncomfortable ride to Truro. Apparently the conductor was taking security seriously. He got someone to call the Citadel and apparently after a bit of chasing round there was a message waiting at Truro that we were OK and furthermore to facilitate our activity as far as possible. From Truro to Bathurst the conductor left the door to the baggage room unlocked and we could get to the toilet. He also brought us some sandwiches and coffee, for which I paid him. No sense in him being out of pocket.

We’d boarded the train at a bit after 1 p.m. and it was well

past 9 p.m. when we got to Bathurst. We watched carefully and Emily got off the train and was met by a woman with whom she walked away. Katherine got off quickly and sprinted after them. I was surprised at her quickness. She never ceases to amaze me.

A couple of minutes later she was back, "They got into a taxi. I got its number."

Our own reception committee was Roger Symonds, who had been sent by Swenson to be our liaison in Halifax. I hadn't realized he was up here already. However, there was apparently what the Brits call 'a big show' planned.

We told Symonds about Emily, and he drove us right away to the local police station. It was pretty small, but there were some extra RCMP officers more or less camping there. They said they'd follow up with the cab and see what was going on.

Katherine decided to phone Gannet House and got hold of Roberta Smith's secretary Germaine, to see if Emily had said anything about where she was going. Apparently the cover was an article about a woman who was the champion knitter of woolen gloves in heavy lanolin wool for seamen on corvettes. She had knitted some hundreds of pairs over the last eighteen months since her son had become a member of a corvette crew. A reasonable cover for being here, and the sort of article the newspapers liked.

Symonds had a room for us in a private house. Actually an abandoned house the police knew about and had set up as a place for people like ourselves who should not be seen in public. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could for the night and let the police locate Emily for us.

We didn't wake until nearly 8 in the morning and were not as presentable as we'd like when Symonds came at 8:15. The police knew where Emily had been taken by the taxi, but the house was that of the family of a man who'd been captured at Dieppe the year before. Another cover story? Later we learned that indeed it was. Emily spun a good yarn and asked to sleep on the sofa, offering payment for food and accommodation as well as flattering her hostess.

Symonds was all for staking out the house, but the Bathurst police called on a trio of local boys – one suspects the type labelled 'well-known to police' – to watch as a team, with one

available at all times to run to a nearby telephone. About 10, Emily left the house and walked a couple of blocks to a house with a separate garage. She coolly opened the garage with a key and drove off in a rather scruffy Model A Ford. The telephone call said one boy was following as well as he could by bike, but had lost her as she left town on the coast road to the east. That led to Maisonnette, which we knew was the rendezvous point.

The boys had had the good sense to note the license number. Symonds got the locals to phone to Maisonnette and tell them that they might expect a young woman in a car with a particular license and that we would be trying to follow. There weren't many phones along the coast, but the police said they'd try to contact them and ask to be informed if Emily came their way. To increase the level of interest, Emily was now advertised as a 'suspected German agent'.

It's 40 miles give or take to Maisonnette, and on the rough roads, we weren't there until nearly 1:30. We didn't drive all the way into town right away. Symonds climbed a telephone pole and we hooked up a telephone set and he called the lighthouse. Jean Godin was in charge there. He was lighthouse keeper but also an active service soldier. He already had talked to Symonds and knew his voice.

Godin sent someone to look around the village. They soon spotted Emily's car, which she'd parked in the entrance to a closed-up seasonal cottage. The man – a teenager really – who'd been sent was a Mi'kmaq and he easily traced Emily's footprints in the dusty road. He apparently sauntered back to the lighthouse after noting where she'd turned into a small bushy area overlooking the beach, where she obviously hoped to avoid being seen. However, an urban German woman was not a match in hiding her tracks for a Mi'kmaq woodsman.

Godin told us how to drive to the lighthouse in a way we would not pass where Emily was hiding. In fact we parked our car well away and Godin walked down to find us. He told us that the bushes where Emily was could be watched reasonably well from the lighthouse, but it was possible that Emily could get away unseen especially as it became dark. We decided to use the lighthouse until dusk, then Katherine and I would be driven to a nearby house where we'd watch from behind a shed. We'd hide on the floor of the car that would ostensibly make some

sort of delivery, which would actually be to explain to the house residents something of what was going on.

Clearly some action was imminent. There was a structure on the rise behind the beach. We learned later that it was a form of the new radio direction finding. Someone said the Americans say radar. We also learned later that there were no less than ten naval vessels hiding behind Caraquet Island, but they were all small. The largest was HMCS Rimouski, a Flower Class corvette. Not really very big. The smallest was a motor boat. Most were peacetime boats like trawlers and motor launches armed with a machine gun and maybe a modest 3 or 6 pounder gun, and maybe some grenades.

As sunset approached, we were taken to the house where we'd watch for Emily. There was nobody home. We settled in behind the shed, taking 1/2 hour watches, as paying attention was stressful. It was a long wait until after 11. At one point, Katherine needed to pee. Good job we're married. I followed her example of watering the weeds a few yards back of the shed out of view of where we thought Emily was.

Then we heard some commotion down the beach nearer the lighthouse. I could hear that someone was going to be taken to the lighthouse to have their documents checked. As the group making that noise moved into the lighthouse, I saw movement by the bushes. Someone got up and was walking down to the beach. I tapped Katherine on the shoulder and pointed, and she took off up the road as quietly and quickly as she could. I followed. It was difficult moving and keeping quiet.

Emily was holding up something and pointing it towards the sea. I realized a bit later than Katherine that Emily was signalling, probably to the submarine. Since someone had been arrested further up the beach, it was more likely she was warning it off than asking to be picked up.

Katherine yelled "Emily or is it Frieda" and rushed towards her.

"Get back Katherine," Emily said, though now it was clear it was Frieda Bohm.

I realized Frieda had a gun. Katherine and I were unarmed, but Katherine continued forward and grappled Frieda. I reached down and in the faint light I quickly picked out a smooth round

rock a bit larger than my fist. Katherine and Frieda were entwined and turning slowly. There was a bang and Katherine cried out but didn't let go of Frieda.

I realized that if the shot had not been fatal, another could well be, and Frieda would still have the rest of the magazine to take care of me. Probably at least 6 shots. However, for some reason, what made me mad as hell was that Frieda might take away my life companion. We weren't the usual married couple, but there was something silent but fierce that united us. I didn't think. I reacted to the situation and brought down the rock on Frieda's head. Hard. Much harder than I ever thought possible for me. There was a crunch noise and Frieda fell to the ground.

The shot must have been heard because there were feet running towards us. Roger was one of the first to reach us. By then I was asking Katherine where she was hurt. She said her leg. Her left leg. I had a flashlight and turned it on and saw a hole in her skirt with blood spurting out. I took my handkerchief and pressed it to the wound.

"Please don't leave me Michael," Katherine said.

I assured her I would stay with her no matter what. There was a policeman and a soldier with Symonds and he asked one of them to bring the car as quickly as possible. The soldier ran off while the policeman checked Frieda.

"She's dead," the policeman said. Then he carefully took the pistol out of her hand and shone his flashlight on it. "Beretta M1935. A .32 calibre, 8 shot compact pistol. The bullet that hit your wife should have gone right through. Better check for an exit wound so we can stop the bleeding."

But there wasn't an exit wound. However, Katherine's jacket had the pocket ripped and burned badly. I saw the wallet she often carried in her pocket so she wouldn't need to carry a purse was on the ground and damaged. I felt it and there were some bent coins.

"Katherine carries a wallet in her pocket so she doesn't have to carry a purse. It seems it partly stopped the bullet. She tackled Frieda even though she knew Frieda had a gun."

"If she hadn't, Frieda as you call her could have got away. And shot you. Symonds filled us in, but we didn't realize she was

armed. Most agents aren't, because having a weapon is enough of an offense to get you detained and charged, as well as being pretty much an admission of guilt.

How's Mrs. Cotton doing?"

"She's passed out. I can feel a pulse, and she's breathing. I hope that car gets here fast."

As I said this, the soldier came up in the car. He said "We're to get the wounded lady to the doctor in Caraquet as fast as possible. What about the other woman?"

"She's dead," said the policeman. "Take care of the living first. We'll sort out what to do here."

We loaded Katherine in the back seat with me holding the handkerchief tight on her bullet wound all the time. As we were lifting Katherine into the back of the car, a local teenage girl came up to tell us Godin had asked her to ride in the front seat to point the way to the doctor's house in Caraquet. That was useful, as I don't think we'd thought exactly where we would go for help with Katherine. Roger drove and I had to crouch over her as we bumped along to Caraquet.

The girl banged on the doctor's door when we got to his house and told him what had happened in a torrent of heavily accented French. We carried Katherine into his kitchen and laid her on the table, and he fetched his bag from another room. We lit a pair of lamps – the electric light was a single dim bulb. After checking her vital signs, the doctor cut away Katherine's damage skirt around the wound then he asked me to take my hand off the handkerchief.

I was a bit surprised that blood didn't spurt out. It oozed a bit, but not too badly. The doctor had us all wash hands, then we cleaned gently around the wound.

"There is no exit wound. The bullet must have been deflected," the doctor said. I had the wallet in my pocket and showed him that and the ripped pocket. The doctor nodded.

"The bullet is still in her leg, I think" I said.

"Yes. I think so too. But it may have hit her bone and broken in pieces. I don't think the lady is in danger. If you can get her to the Dunn Hospital in Bathurst, they have an X-ray."

The car was still outside. The doctor bandaged the wound in case it started bleeding. We found a blanket and some pillows



and got Katherine – now semi-conscious – into the back seat. The doctor's wife was talking to the teenaged girl who would spend the night at the doctor's house and be given a ride home with the postman tomorrow.

We expected a couple of hour's ride to Bathurst, and the doctor phoned to let the hospital know we were coming. As we finished putting Katherine in the car, explosions could be heard out in the Baie de Chaleurs. This was, we were told later, an unsuccessful attack on the submarine that was supposed to be there.

We got to Bathurst just before 3 in the morning. The Dunn Hospital was small, but they were expecting Katherine. Within an hour and a half she had been X-rayed and, since the bullet was in one piece and not very deep in her leg, had surgery to remove it. I fell asleep in a waiting area. The staff let me sleep until after 9 in the morning.

I woke and asked a nurse about Katherine and was told where she was, but I also asked about a washroom where I'll admit the toilet was a great relief and where I was able to give myself a small wash.

"There you are," Katherine said as I came into the room she was in.

"How are you doing?" I responded.

"My leg hurts, but the doctor who took out the bullet said it didn't hit anything vital. I'll have a scar, but a round one. He got the bullet through the hole it made when it went in."

"Did he need to put you under?"

"No, he injected something near the wound. It hurt a bit when he dug out the bullet, but not too bad. I'll be released later today. The surgeon put the bullet in this pill bottle for me.

Can you tell me what happened to Frieda?"

"I'm afraid I killed her with the rock. I suspect there'll be some fuss about that. I might even get charged with something, but the policeman who arrived first and took the gun from her and said she was dead told me that your actions stopped Frieda from getting away or warning the submarine. It's hard to know what she intended. And I really am surprised how angry I felt towards her when I realized she'd shot you."

“You mean you hit her harder than you intended?” Katherine asked.

“Yes. It rather scares me.”

“I’m grateful and proud. Thank you, Michael.”

Sometime after lunch – the hospital kindly offered me some food too – Symonds came with the car and Katherine was released. A hotel room had been found. We were going to wait in Bathurst for Richard Swenson to arrive the next morning. In the meantime, Frieda’s body had been brought into Bathurst and delivered to a local undertaker. A local lawyer acted as coroner for the town. People usually think it will be a medical person, but it doesn’t have to be. And in small places, the job is part-time. Fortunately, Symonds had already contacted him and said the magic words “Official Secrets Act”, but told him he would be given as much information as possible to fulfil legalities.

Both Katherine and I slept that afternoon. I arranged a light dinner to be brought to our room. I don’t know if it was indifferent fare, but neither of us ate much. Then we slept again. I think the excitement had worn us out.

Next morning Katherine was able, with crutches, to descend to the dining room for breakfast. We both managed a decent meal. The sleep seemed to have worked.

At about 11, we were driven to City Hall where there was a meeting room so there could be a debriefing. Swenson was there and came over right away to say hello, but added “Leave the details until we start. You can avoid having to tell the story twice.”

I recognized Desmond Piers, and Jean Godin, and though I didn’t know names, a couple of the police officers both local and RCMP, and the soldier who had been with Symonds when they rushed up after Katherine was shot. The local coroner was ushered in and sworn to the Official Secrets Act. He would be allowed to stay as long as operational details weren’t discussed. There was also a stenographer, apparently accompanying Swenson.

Swenson chaired the meeting, and said we wouldn’t talk at all about how information concerning escaped POWs or the presence of an enemy agent had been uncovered. He also asked

Lt-Cdr Piers to interrupt proceedings at any time if discussion veered into matters we should not raise. And we would not be discussing any issues relating to naval operations apart from the introductory comments Swenson would present himself. The purpose of this meeting was solely to record how Katherine came to be shot and the woman known as Emily Cartwright came to be killed. He stated that Emily Cartwright had been a real person, but that the person on the beach had assumed her identity and that there was very strong evidence she was a German agent. He asked that we use the name Emily in these proceedings.

He furthermore said that thanks to a number of loyal Canadians, there were resources on hand to intercept Emily and also at least one escaped POW. The latter had been re-captured almost as he, and likely Emily, were to be picked up by a German submarine. He asked Katherine to give her account, starting from the time she and I were delivered to the lighthouse.

Katherine gave her story, as I have described above, leaving out the mention of her challenge where she used the name Frieda. She added the detail that as she charged Emily, she had grabbed the arm with the gun and pushed it down, had heard the bang and felt a hard knock in front of her left hip where she kept her wallet rather than carry a purse, and felt something hit her left leg. She said she didn't feel any pain at that moment, and continued struggling for a moment when she heard a crunch and Emily fell to the ground and just afterwards, so did she. At that point she felt pain in her leg and putting her hand there, realized she was bleeding, asked me to stay with her, then passed out.

I was then asked to give my account. I did so, mentioning that I had not intended to kill Emily, and that my strength of reaction surprised and shocked me.

The soldier who came up with Symonds and the policeman was asked to confirm his role, which was mainly to bring up the car. The policeman, whose name was Richardson, was next, and he presented the Beretta pistol, which had six rounds still left in the magazine that was now separate from the gun, and one round that had been taken from the chamber. He also had the spent shell casing from the round that was fired. It had been picked up from the beach. The gun and ammunition were in an empty candy box – probably pre-war given that boxes of

candy weren't easily available – and were passed to Swenson.

Symonds then gave his account. I'd almost forgotten he came onto the beach right away after the shot. He added details of how we took Katherine to Caraquet and then the Dunn Hospital in Bathurst.

Swenson then asked if there were any details we'd overlooked in the history.

There was a short silence after which he summed up.

"We have a situation where we have managed to obstruct an enemy operation, capture an escaped prisoner, and stop an enemy agent. However, that agent was posing as, and known in the community as, a member of a respected family. We also do not want the enemy to learn that we have, to some extent, penetrated their clandestine operations.

First, I would like officer Richardson to go to Maisonnnette and Caraquet and have the young woman, the doctor and his wife sworn under the Official Secrets Act. It is a bit after the fact, but I think we can impress upon them that it is in the national interest that mention of the shooting be kept quiet.

Second, we need to have a suitable cover story for the death of Emily Cartwright. It is unfortunate we did not capture her alive, but I believe what we have heard here points to Katherine and Michael acting appropriately to the situation that presented itself to them. If we had managed to capture Emily alive, we would have to keep secret her existence and also explain the disappearance of the character under which she was known. While we might have learned more about how rather good forged documents were provided to the POWs, and possibly uncovered other agents, it is entirely probable this agent was but one channel of communications among several. Furthermore, she may have managed to avoid revealing information, possibly by means of suicide. Some agents are believed to have cyanide in tooth fillings.

We do, nonetheless, need an explanation of a woman dead of a serious head injury."

At this point the lawyer who was the acting coroner spoke up. "There was a death I had to certify some years ago where a man fell off a train and hit his head and died. Would that be a possibility?"

“Thank you very much,” Swenson said. “That would work well, and I take it you are willing to provide suitable documentation.” The lawyer nodded. Swenson continued “I presume we can deny details to the press on the grounds that train movements in wartime are information we regard as on a need-to-know basis?”

The last question was, of course, rhetorical. The meeting was adjourned, though Swenson asked Symonds and Katherine and I to remain. After the others had gone out, Swenson said “I’m going to ask that the three of you take Emily’s body back to Halifax at the soonest opportunity. I want Emily’s rooms and anywhere she could hide anything searched. I’ll suggest the Cottons do that and Roger try anywhere else, possibly where the seamen gathered or the newspaper office. I doubt we’ll find much except possibly at Gannet House.”

“Do you think there are any operations still active?” Symonds asked.

“We must always assume so,” Swenson replied, “But with Emily dead – I’ll avoid her other name while there may be ears around – we’ve probably reached an end with anything she was involved in. We’ve not so far found how documents were created for the prisoners. It may be Emily had other contacts that she used directly and that we couldn’t or didn’t detect. Or there could be one or more other routes. We know the Red Cross parcels and letters were used. We found some stuff and were able to decode it, but that doesn’t mean there weren’t other things we missed.”

We left Bathurst later that evening, getting into Halifax in the morning. We had a coffin in the baggage compartment. At least we didn’t have to travel with it.

There was a family funeral. John and Roberta Smith put on a good show, and there were suitable formalities for a dead cousin. Before that, I’d helped Katherine into Emily’s rooms and we went through them with a fine tooth comb, even looking for loose floor-boards and things stuck under drawers. Things like that.

We found a few bits and pieces. A handkerchief with FB embroidered on it, though a genuine Emily might have kept such a souvenir of a lost friend. A couple of 35 mm negatives were in an envelope slipped between the back of a bathroom medicine

cabinet and the wall. I needed to use a letter opener to tease that out from its hiding place.

We did find a cigarette box, some tobacco, some cigarette papers and a rolling machine.

"She didn't smoke very often," Katherine said.

"Wonder why one cigarette has lipstick on it," I asked.

"Why don't you unroll that one carefully," Katherine said.

Actually we decided to take these things back to our apartment. When I carefully undid the lipstick cigarette, we found a bunch of tiny writing in faint pencil on the inside of the paper. Groups of numbers, almost certainly a code. We packed this in a fresh envelope. Symonds could take it to Ottawa. He was moving back there now the Emily operation was finished.

We checked all the other rolled cigarettes. There weren't many, and I noted the tobacco was very dry. They must have been for show. The key cigarette was the lipstick one. A clever idea. Offer a cigarette to your contact, and they can take the marked one. You somehow find your matches got wet or your lighter doesn't work. "Well, you can smoke it later, sorry," and it's pretty easy for the cigarette to be pocketed. And if there's a chance your message may be intercepted, you smoke that cigarette to destroy the evidence.

Since Thanksgiving we've not had to do any more work for Swenson. That doesn't mean we've been idle. JS and his companies are very busy as the War continues. At least we seem to be making some progress, but it looks like at least another year or so before we may see an end.

Katherine's wound is healing. It looks bad, but she says it no longer aches. That's good. I know now life without her would be very dreary.

\* \* \*

"You've been busy," Myrna said as she finished reading it before we went down to breakfast the next morning. "When did you find time to write it?"

"Mostly when you've been at work. I write pretty fast. But I took some time in the last couple of evenings when I said I was checking email to revise the story based on what we'd learned."

“It seems like the real story.”

“But you should remember it’s experimental. It’s a fiction to try to fill in the gaps in our information. New evidence will force a change, and I could have got it all wrong. Plus some of the characters are totally invented, like the doctor and the coroner.”

“What about the meeting to debrief?”

“There must have been some such meeting or meetings, but who, when and where I’ve no clue. What I wrote is just a guess. I don’t even know if Mother was in the Dunn Hospital. It’s gone now, I think it burned down before I was born.”

“Am I mistaken in thinking you enjoyed writing this?” Myrna asked.

“Yes. I did.”

She came over to me and gave me a kiss. “I think you may have your occupation.”