

Return to Flanders



John C. Nash

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Part of the **Thursday Afternoon** series

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For Canadians, Flanders was where a lot of men got killed a long time ago.

For Anna – or Annie or Annje if you wish – it's where she was born, where her father was killed by retreating German soldiers, where her Dad came to see her mother and a flame of affection and attachment caught light into a fire of lifelong love.

For Peter, it was a place to have a honeymoon with Anna.

But most of all, it was the essence of origins and understandings.

Preamble

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

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

John Nash, Ottawa, 2016

July 26, 1965

The train from the Brussels airport bumped along steadily under grey skies. We didn't have trains like this in Canada that served to bring people to the center of town from the suburbs or the airport. Even Toronto's subway only served the center, and only on one line. Montreal didn't even have that yet. Somewhere I'd read it was supposed to open next year. So was the second Toronto line.

It wasn't far to go to the Bruxelles Midi station, which being Belgian, is also called Brussel Zuid. Dad told me once that when he came here with Mom in 1947 the Central station wasn't finished. It's apparently a fairly modest station and all underground. Wonder why my mind was drifting to that.

Outside, the dark, rainy skies added to my fuzzy and slightly sombre state of mind. Peter was beside me. We'd got married on Saturday. That thought should cheer me up.

Married! Wow. He'd be beside me ... 'till death us do part. Suppose I should have thought of that before. Not that I would have called it off. It's what I want. Just that the whole deal is a bit scary when you get down to it. He's going to be there, hopefully, for a long time. That's the good – and the bad.

What if we don't get along after a bit? The big toss of the dice. But I guess he's in the same boat – plane? Train?

We haven't said much to each other for the last 30 minutes. We're both a little disoriented, even though we

had a good flight on Sabena from Montreal. When Dad took Michelle to England, he warned her to get as much sleep as she could on the plane. I already knew this from our last trip to Europe. That time I'd been too excited to sleep. Wasn't good – wasted a couple of days being in a fog. Peter had done the “pond” before too, and we were lucky to find one of the back seats was free and the agent said unlikely to be filled. She warned it didn't fully recline, but having 3 seats between two, we were able to angle ourselves. Actually Peter was very gallant and let me put my head on a pillow on his lap. He got himself wedged against window and the seat – reclined as much as it could – and his feet under the middle seat. We managed almost 5 hours, though a bit broken up.

We're going to spend a few days in Ghent with Wil and Joop. I vaguely remember their house from when I was 3. Mom was back a couple of years ago when we all came over to England. Dad and I went home after the England part of the trip because he had to get back to work, and I needed to get ready for school.

The flights had been uneventful – Dad said any flight where you walked off the plane was a good one. Black RAF humour – or maybe wisdom. Boring was good when it came to flights.

The border agent saw I was born in Belgium and the name Tremblay and started talking to me in French.

“Vous etes originalement Wallon?”

“Non. Je suis née a Ninove en Flandres. Ma mère était veuve qui a epousée un Canadien, actuellement anglais mais avec un nom français.”

“Daan uw spreek vlaamse?”

“Sorry, alleen een beetje. Et maintenant, je suis mariée à ce gentilhomme qui est Canadien d’origine écossais.” I was starting to mix up my languages.

So did the border agent.

“Welcome in Belgium, Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair.”

Hmm. That’s who we were. Better start to get used to it. Was I going to use Sinclair? We hadn’t really talked about it. I’ll ask Peter what he thinks.

No I won’t! He’s almost asleep. His chin is stubbly. No good chance to shave. No wonder Dad wears a beard. Wonder how Peter would look in one. Be simpler for travelling like this. But I’ll let him doze and keep awake to make sure we don’t miss our stop. We’ve got to change in Brussels.

* * *

Given the overnight flight, the airport delays getting luggage and then time spent converting some travellers’ cheques – the “fee” meant the real exchange rate was pretty poor – and the change of trains in Brussels, we got to Ghent after noon. Wil had written that she would meet us if we knew the train we would be on, but we said there could be delays and we’d take a taxi. Following the advice of Dad and Michelle, we had backpacks and small suitcases. They made it easier with the trains. Europeans seemed to think it their duty to make you go up and down stairs. Heaven help people in wheel-chairs.

I’d practised the Flemish for Wil and Joop’s address, and the taxi driver understood me first time.

Peter also had a smattering of Dutch, but he’d never

spoken it in earnest. I had Flemish as my first language, but I was only 3 when we went to Canada, and I hadn't had too much chance to use it since. I'd found a small Dutch / English dictionary. Would help in a pinch, but didn't really give you the quick and ready words.

Wil and Joop must have been watching the street. They were outside their front door before the taxi stopped. Peter paid the driver over Joop's protests, and with greetings and all speaking at once, we came in the house.

"We have talked about how we will speak with you." Joop said. "I speak some English, but Wil speaks Flemish and French."

"Je parle français un peu." Peter said "En mijn muder war in Gorinchem geboren. Ik kan een beetje vlaams verstaan."

"Geud. Geud." Wil said. "Mischien, met frans en vlaams, wir kan praatén."

We all laughed, but we did have a fashion of communicating.

Despite this, it took several tries to explain that we should rest for a while, but get up for supper and then go to bed at a "normal" hour for Ghent.

* * *

Joop managed to convey our wish to take a nap – I suddenly got the word when he said it, "dutje". We asked to be woken at 4, but actually woke up naturally ourselves and came down. Wil decided to stay in, but Joop said he'd like a walk and it would let him practise his English. Good job we had rain jackets – Dad and Michelle had re-

minded us about them too. We walked about a mile into what turned out was the centre of town. The names of the squares were descriptive – Groentenmarkt, the vegetable market; Korenmarkt, the grain market. We could see several churches and Joop said St. Bavo's was the cathedral, but I'm not sure where that one was with so much to see. We could easily recognize the Gravensteen, a castle that Joop said was largely reconstructed, though parts of it dated from 1100.

It happened that we turned down a street called Veldstraat – Field Street, how original? Peter's sharp eyes saw a plaque at number 47.

"Hey. This is where the Treaty of Ghent was agreed in 1814."

"I have seen the ... plate. But what does it mean?" Joop asked.

"It ended the War of 1812, and without it there would be no Canada." Peter answered. "Not that Canadians had any say. There weren't Canadians then. It was British North America, and the Americans thought people in what is now Canada would want to join their new republic. They got a bit of a surprise that the people wanted to stay British. But really the whole conflict didn't change borders, just did a lot of damage and killed people."

"Like so many wars." Joop said sadly. Our silence underlined our agreement.

We took a few photos. Dad had lent me the Pax he gave him for his birthday. Peter had an Olympus Pen – original style. It was a little smaller, but used a half frame on the 35 mm film. He was running black and

white. I decided to do Kodachrome slides. It would cost some to make prints, but with the black and white negatives that could be printed we'd make sure there were plenty of photos for our album, as well as some to give to people. And we could afford to make prints from a few of the colour slides if they turned out to be spectacular.

Hey. "Our" album. We'd be starting a joint one. There's another thing I hadn't thought of before we got married.

It was about 6:30 – early afternoon for us – when we got back. The weather hadn't been marvellous, and we'd actually needed the rain gear for our walk. Tante Wil had made a simple meal of salad with sliced ham and new potatoes, and had the good sense to let us serve ourselves. We wanted something to eat, but were not terribly hungry. Joop offered beer – Belgian beer – and Peter chose to have one, but I stuck to tea.

After supper we showed some pictures of the wedding of Dad and Michelle – ours were still being processed. I heard Wil say "Zo klein" and said

"Ja. Michelle is echt klein. Sie kan koop die kinderkleding."

"Dat is goed-koop. Hier de kinderkleding is haalf van de prijs voor de volwassen mensen."

I'd have to watch prices. While Dad and Michelle had found clothing in England a good buy, I suspected that here the price structure was different.

Around 9 Wil made a pot of tea, but I found myself drifting off even as I was drinking it. There were some speculaas cookies too, but though I had one, I hardly

remember it. Peter was fading too. We said our good-nights and dragged ourselves up to bed. We did manage to brush our teeth.

We'd just put our heads down when Peter suddenly asked

“Did you remember your pill?”

I was almost asleep, but woke up. Had to think.

“Yes. Took it with the continental breakfast on the plane. I was a bit worried we wouldn't have water later, and I also didn't want to take the pill out openly, so I popped it from its package inside my purse.”

Actually, my purse was pretty small. I'd more or less copied the idea of the one Dad had given Michelle, but mine had a fatter shoulder strap and I'd found a belt I could clip on the strap rings of the purse to keep it close. The current pill dial was one thing that was there. Peter was keeping our passports in a pouch under his shirt. Again, Dad's advice, since it was in Ghent that he'd got on the train and the man in the compartment tried to accuse him of stealing his documents. That was back in '47, before he married Mom.

But now I just wanted

July 27, 1965

Must be Tuesday. I'd lost track.

It was still pretty dull out. I'd slept pretty well. Woke up once in the night. Peter was there. It felt odd and nice at the same time. I reached out and put my hand on his hip, sort of as a greeting. He rolled and kissed

me, then we both went back to sleep I guess. I don't remember more.

I heard noise and looked at my travel alarm – I'd remembered to reset the time and wind it, but I'd not set the alarm. It said 7:30. I could hear some noise downstairs. Oh. Need to pee.

My getting up must have woken Peter. When I came back from the toilet – separate from the bath as in England – Peter was looking at the clock.

“Sleep OK?” I asked him.

“Not bad. Still feel a bit strange.”

“Yeah. Let's hope it wears off.”

“Don't forget your pill.” he reminded. Good job he did. I'd asked him to bring some condoms in case I got tummy upset. Didn't want to miss out on the honeymoon special benefits, though right now I wasn't much in the mood. I suspected Peter wasn't either. Travel might broaden the mind, but being moved and shaken and shoved into a different time zone could be bad for the libido.

Wil had put water in the room, and I dutifully took the pill. Hopefully it's purpose would be justified during the trip, though around the 16th I'd have Mary Jane to deal with. I'd packed some tampons – didn't want to have to go searching for shops in a hurry.

I heard the toilet flush, but Peter didn't come back. However, I heard water running in the bathroom. Oh. He was shaving. I wasn't used to that yet. Dad had a beard which he washed every morning. I might as well save time and have a quick wipe-down in the tub.

“Peter. Can I come in?” I asked after knocking on the

bathroom door.

“Sure.” He said, opening it so I saw a foam covered face.

“I’m going to take a quick wash in the bathtub while you shave.”

“Trying to get me to watch in the mirror and cut myself, hey?”

“Your problem if you can’t deal with a naked lady in your bathroom.” I shot back.

Actually, we were already rather comfortable together. I never felt I needed to cover up if I was undressed. And I felt a lot more awake after kneeling in the tub and washing all over. Peter even helped with the back as he finished shaving.

“You want me to wash your back too?” I asked as I dried myself.

“Might as well. Especially as I’m getting it done by this nice naked lady,” he said, gently tweaking my pussy before I could get out of range, then pulling off his PJ bottoms and stepping into the tub.

I washed his back, and waited while he did the rest and dried off. We peeked out and scooted back to the bedroom with towels around us. Both of us clearly thought about fooling around, but could hear the sounds of breakfast, so dressed quickly and went downstairs.

“Morgen. Tante Wil.” I said, coming into the kitchen.

“Morgen. Slaap lekker?”

“Ja goed. Echt goed.” I said.

“Van dag, ik denk dat julie hebben geen regen, mar morgen de voortelling is veele regen. Mar van avond Tom en Eef met all die familie kom voor diner.”

Clearly tonight was going to be an event.

“OK. Is het goed als wij terug-kommen voor half-ses – vijf dertig.”

Had to be careful. “Half six“ was half an hour before six o’ clock here.

“Ja, ja. Het familie kom vor ses. Die kinderen mutten in bet niet zo laat.”

I noticed there was a selection of bread and cheese on the table, along with some jam.

“Koffie op thee?” Wil asked.

“Voor mij, thee, alstublieft.” I replied.

“Ook thee, alstublieft.” Peter said, with not a bad accent, too.

We each took some bread and started eating, and Wil brought out our cups of tea.

“Tante Wil, terwijl ik hier ben, wil ik iets over Luc Joos leren als ik kan.” I’d been working that one out to ask about my birth father, which is how I thought of him. Now I hoped I’d understand her reply.

“Ik weet niet veel. Maar wat ik me kan herinneren, zal ik proberen om u te vertellen.”

“Misschien mijn vragen uw herinneren.” I said, knowing that I’d scrambled my Flemish.

“Ja. Zoals ik uw hier ziet, ik herinner me dingen over Clara.”

* * *

A good part of the morning was spent talking about Luc. I worried Peter might be bored, but he seemed almost more interested than I. The conversation was in mixed

languages, and it sometimes took several tries to sort out the story.

I already had, from Mom, Luc's dates of birth and death. October 2, 1909 and August 31, 1944. It seems his parents had what the English would call a small-holding – a tiny farm – somewhere near the Belgian-Dutch border. He'd been, like Mom, the baby of the family, with older siblings. Wil had suddenly remembered that his older brother, who she thought might be called Jan, was killed on the Dodendraad.

Peter and I hadn't heard that word – literally the "dead wire". It sounded ominous, and when Wil explained it, it sounded pretty awful. The Germans had invaded Belgium in the First World War and nearly made it to Paris. But Holland – strictly the Netherlands, since the true Holland was only two of the provinces of the original 7 but now 12 – was neutral, though probably more pro-German at the start. A lot of Belgians fled as refugees to the Netherlands, and there was continuing movement and smuggling, so the Germans put up an electric wire with 2000 volts through it in 1915. Wil said between 2 and 3 thousand were killed by it or summarily shot for being close to it. And Jan was one of them. Wow. I should really hate Germans. They killed my uncle in the First War and my father in the Second.

But I don't actually hate Germans, just the things some of them did. And Jan and Luc are almost characters in a story rather than real people whose lives affected mine.

Wil said she thought there was an older sister as well as the parents. She said Luc had been an orphan since

1919, and had grown up in an orphanage. I'd asked

"What happened to his family?" I said this in English, then more or less repeated in French.

Wil replied in French that Luc had said something about everyone getting sick, so it was likely the Spanish flu. Luc had apparently had it too, but survived. She said he'd been in an orphanage – she inserted the Dutch word "weeshuis" into her French, which somehow I now remembered – in Antwerp as she recalled, then after the age of 15 had been working as an agricultural labourer in different places.

I'd learned from Mom about the bevolkingsregister, a listing of everyone living in a municipality, showing when they came and when they left and where to. Started by Napoleon, or at least his regime, at the start of the 19th century. We were hoping to see if they'd help us track down some information about Luc and his family.

I asked Wil if she knew much about how to use the archives, but it soon became clear that she knew about them, but not much of the details or where they were kept. I knew some had been destroyed in the War, in some cases deliberately to keep the Nazis from learning who was Jewish. Others had been victim to bombings by one side or the other, or even old-fashioned fire and flood. Administratively, some would have been moved as municipalities – gemeente in Flemish – were amalgamated and reorganized. We'd have our work cut out for us.

Wil said "C'est fort probable que vous devez visiter des petites villages où il n'y a pas d'autobus. Peut-être vous voulez emprunter les bicyclettes. Nous avons les

anciennes de Tom et Eef. Et ils sont assez anciennes que ce n'est pas un désastre s'ils sont vollées."

"Wow. That would be great. C'est formidable." Peter said, forgetting which language to use. "We can take them on some of the trains here and that would let us get around much more easily."

"And get wet too!" I was remembering the weather yesterday, and heard Joop complaining that the forecast for tomorrow was terrible.

In any event, we went and took a look. Wil showed us where there were tools and a pump, and Peter got to work cleaning them up. I was planning to help him, but when I came in to go to the toilet, Wil buttonholed me in the kitchen.

"Anna, tu as parlé de Luc. Mais comment va Martin. Et sa nouvelle femme?"

Oops. Maybe she thought things were a bit cool between me and Dad. Not so! I responded,

"Je suis très content qu'il a trouvé Michelle. Elle est une Canadienne française. Peut-être tu ne le connais pas."

"Non. Je ne l'ai pas connu. Est-ce que tu la trouve une bonne femme pour ton père?"

"Oui. Vraiment. Elle a particulièrement insisté que nous nous rappelons de Mama – Clara. Est j'ai une nouvelle soeur, Andrea. C'est une change, mais une change agréable."

"Bon. La morte de Clara est arrivé lorsque Martin est a une period importante de sa carrière, lorsque on a besoin du conseil d'un épouse."

"Oui. Je sais. Je pense que Martin et Michelle ont

trouvé l'un et l'autre à un moment chanceux.”

“Bon. Ça me rend beaucoup plus calme. Merci.”

I took that as a chance to see how Peter was doing. It turned out the bikes were pretty serviceable, and Peter suggested we try them out. We asked where there was a bike store or a hardware, so we could look into getting a puncture kit and possibly a rain cape each, as well as something to strap on luggage. We'd need to plan. The bikes would allow us to make excursions, but we'd need to have a base in different areas, and plan to return to Ghent.

Anyway, we got away around 11, and told Wil we'd find our own lunch. With a crude map, Peter led the way and we found the stores Wil said may be useful. We found some bungee cords, the puncture kit, and a small adjustable wrench, but decided our jackets – we'd a couple of windbreakers that were more or less waterproof – would do for riding in a shower. If it really rained, we'd not want to be riding anyway. Wil had locks for the bikes – those would be needed if we wanted to “park” them anywhere, but Peter decided to buy a length of chain and a padlock too. Something we'd probably leave behind at the end. We used this when we found a little café for some lunch. We each had a frikandel – essentially a hot dog – and coffee.

“The bikes are going to change our plans a bit.” I said between mouthfuls.

“Yes, but it will be nice to get away from the tourist areas and see some of Belgium.”

“It will make it much easier to see the farm Mom had, and visit François and Maria.”

“Peter. Are you sure you want to do all this sleuthing with me? Maybe we’d be better to have a real honeymoon. You know. Romantic places and lazy nights in bed. Or even days!”

“Getting cold feet?”

“Perhaps literally given the temperature. But I’d like to see what we can find out. I just worry that you might not find it very much fun.”

“No. I’d never heard about the Dodendraad. It seems like it might be quite neat to explore around there. We’d be seeing places that don’t get a lot of attention back home. And I’m sure we’ll get plenty of bedroom fun when we are not with family.”

“Yes. I feel a bit inhibited in Wil’s house. I don’t know why.”

“Can’t make your usual noises.”

“Am I that noisy?”

“Sometimes a bit. But I really like that. And yes, I think I’m a bit reluctant too with family in the next room.”

“Peter, When we were on the train from the airport, I noticed your stubble was pretty raspy. Have you ever thought of a beard? Dad’s is nice and soft. Tickles, but it doesn’t scratch.”

“Never given it much thought. But it would be nicer for travel. Do you want me to start one? It could look pretty bad on the trip.”

“I’ll ask Wil what she thinks. Then she won’t think you’re a slob if you stop shaving.”

And that’s what I did. Wil found it highly amusing to be asked, but said she thought it might be practical,

and also would probably look good on Peter, as it did on Dad. In fact, I've only old photos of Dad to know what he looked like without a beard, and that a long time ago.

So Peter decided to stop shaving. For a couple of days it would almost certainly be a bit scratchy.

July 28, 1965

Wednesday

We had a fairly noisy family dinner last night. Tom and Eef both have kids – Tom a boy and a girl, Eef a little girl. All under 10. All but the oldest couldn't grasp that we didn't really speak Flemish, at least not enough to pick up kid-speak. Children's voices sound the same in most languages, but that doesn't mean you can understand. And they are either nearly silent or full-on loud. Mostly the latter.

Today was going to be rainy. We decided, even though it would be more efficient to do things in a more organized itinerary, to go to Antwerp for the day and both play tourist and visit the archives. Basically work out what we should do to research Luc and the orphanage, but also look around.

About 11, we got to the Venusstraat and found the archive. The staff were pretty friendly, and were able to look up where some orphanages were or had been. There was some question of whether children at the orphanages would be recorded in the regular bevolkinsregister or not. Also what records, if any, there were of kids who had been there.

Worse, we learned that on November 16, 1944, a V1

had landed on the Boys' Orphanage at Durlletstraat, killing 26 boys and injuring 125. Then the next day a V2 blew up the St Joanna Institute at Ferdinand Coosemansstraat, killing 32 of the nuns. The staff weren't sure, but suspect the nuns had some role in looking after orphans, and the Institute may have held records.

Of course, Luc was long gone by then – he was shot by the Germans a couple of months earlier – but the records might have helped us track him down.

* * *

It was getting towards 1 pm when we left the archives. We were near the University, and spotted a modest restaurant that looked quite busy. It had a daily menu in the European fashion. Usually good value. Appetizer or soup, a main dish, dessert and sometimes a drink. We went in and found a tiny table.

"I'm going to have the daily special, the waterzooi."

"What's that?" Peter asked. "It must be Flemish, because I don't think I've heard of it from Mom."

"It's a stew. Typically chicken. Sometimes fish. Mom made it sometimes."

Peter must have noticed a sudden change in my face.

"A bit of a sad reminder?" he asked.

"Yes. Sometimes little reminders take me by surprise and I get a terrible sense of missing her."

He took my hand and gently squeezed it. People talk of words of comfort. There just aren't any that work. But his hand was a reminder of here and now. A lot better than words at that moment.

We both had the special. There was a salad first. Nothing out of the ordinary, but it was honestly made with good ingredients, though I noticed that the salad dressing was the same we'd had at Wil's last night. Maybe all of Belgium used the same stuff. It was OK, but just OK and nothing more. On the other hand, the waterzooi – which was chicken as it turned out – was really good. There was a rice pudding for dessert. We each had a beer to drink.

After we'd finished the salad and were waiting for the main course, Peter said

“You know, I'd heard lots about the V1s and V2s, but all about London. I hadn't realized that Antwerp got just as many.”

“And the worst one of all where the V2 landed on the Rex cinema and killed 567, nearly 300 of them allied soldiers. And earlier in the Teniers Square, when a V2 hit as a military convoy was passing.”

“You know they weren't far apart. In the archives I was looking at a map that showed the bomb hits, and those two were specially marked. Maybe we'll walk there after lunch. I sort of feel strange – like I should go there to honour those people who died or were injured in the fight so you and I can live better.”

That wasn't my usual sunny-disposition Peter. But I kind of felt the same way, so I said

“Yes. Let's. We owe them a moment of remembrance, even if we don't have a close link to the people. At least a link we know about.”

* * *

We were a bit surprised that you really couldn't see any sign of the damage done by the rocket-bombs. The Rex had been rebuilt in 1947. With a bit of looking, we found a plaque. There wasn't one we could find in Teniersplaats, just the statue of the artist David Teniers the Younger.

"Do you know what sort of paintings he did?" I asked Peter.

"As I remember, he did stuff with crowds having a good time. Dancing, eating and drinking, and the usual consequences."

"Meaning?"

"Sometimes there's someone pissing in the corner, and a couple who are obviously going to end up having sex. In the 17th century, lots was implied by dress, sometimes food – oysters for instance."

"I'll have to watch for a chance to see some of his work, even prints."

"Hard to imagine the square as it must have been after the V2." Peter said.

"I saw a couple of photos with bodies and ... well ... parts. And lots of destruction."

"And the blast broke a water main, and the square flooded, making it even worse."

We were silent for a few minutes, just watching the busy square. Without any explicit communication, we walked away holding hands.

* * *

It was mid-afternoon. We were poking around in some of the little streets a bit out of the center. I spotted a store that had needlework – naaiwerk – and wanted to look around. Peter said

“I’ll buy some chocolate in that grocery over there round the corner.”

“OK.” I responded. But I was more interested in the needlework, especially some kits to make small teddy bears and other stuffed animals, including a penguin. They were flat, about 5” by 7” – the kit didn’t include the stuffing.

I browsed for several minutes, then bought 4 of them – they were only a few francs each, and would be nice for Andrea and Jane and Marcia. One for me too!

Exiting the store – with my receipt for the possible use with Canada Customs – I turned left towards where I thought Peter had gone. After about 100 yards I realized I’d gone wrong. There was no grocery here. I backtracked, then saw what I thought was the store across down another tiny street. No luck.

I was starting to get nervous now. In haste I tried to go back to the sewing shop, but made a mis-step. I quickly sorted that out – I’m pretty good with directions, but these little streets were not straight and they blocked the sky so my sense of direction got twisted. Still, after a couple of minutes, I found the store.

Then I realized the grocery was off to the right. I found it, but Peter was not there. I managed to ask the clerk if she had seen Peter – I used “mijn man, een

Canadees”, and even had a small photo of him in my small purse. From the torrent of Flemish, I gathered he’d left 10 minutes ago. That wasn’t good news.

Back to the sewing shop. It was about 20 minutes now since we’d parted. Panic starting to set in – he had my passport and a lot of the money, and the train tickets. We were going back to Ghent tonight. I wasn’t worried I wouldn’t have enough money for the train, but more whether Peter would know that’s what I’d do. We’d been stupid not to plan.

Of course, given Dad’s tales of caution, I did have money – quite a bit – but going back to Wil’s and waiting seemed a bit drastic. I’d miss the dinner we’d planned, and would Peter know to go back?

Now it was starting to spit rain. I felt lost, very alone, and was starting to worry about Peter. And I was also feeling very angry with myself and with Peter. We should always set up a meeting point in case this happens. Which it obviously can in almost an instant.

For now I figured I’d stay put near the sewing shop. It wasn’t late – the shop would be open for another hour or so if it came on to really rain. But I wanted to stay outside so I could watch for Peter.

Finally I saw him far down the street. He was looking lost. I kept my eyes on him and walked towards him. It wasn’t easy. There were people, dog shit – sorry, dog poo – cobblestones, curbs, and traffic of all sorts. So I had to go slowly so I could watch him and not have an accident.

At last he was in shouting distance.

“PETER!” I yelled, and saw palpable relief as he waved

to me.

We quickly joined up.

“I took a wrong turn coming out of the shop.” he said.

“So did I. I’m soooo happy you’re back. We need to make better arrangements”

“Let’s get a cup of tea or something.” he replied.

“Yes.”

On our way to a nearby cafe, I almost squeezed the blood out of his hand, I’m sure, hanging onto it.

* * *

As it turned out, we didn’t have dinner. At least not the dinner we’d talked about. The lunch had been really enough for a main meal of the day. With the rain, we spent about three-quarters of an hour in the cafe with tea.

We were both rattled by losing each other.

“It’s a bit of a shock to realize how much I was upset by getting separated like that.” I said.

“Me too. Kind of underlines my feelings for you. I guess that’s what love really means in a way.”

“I love you too. I nearly panicked there. What do you think we should do to avoid that?”

“Well. How about before we separate, we agree who will stay and who will come. If you’d said ‘I’ll wait here for you’ I’d have eventually found the sewing shop, as I eventually did. But I’m guessing we both were looking for the other and missed each other several times.”

“Yes. That makes sense. And I’ll suggest that we agree a time, so I’ll say ‘I’ll wait here for you. Meet at

4:15'. Then if we get an hour overdue, we go to where we're staying. And in future, I should have my own train ticket."

"Sounds like a plan. I sure don't want to have that happen again."

"Me too." I kissed him, even though it was a bit awkward across the table. I noticed the young waitress's eyebrows raised.

"Nieuwe getrouwde!" I said loud enough that she could hear, and held up my left hand. I learned later it should have been "pas getrouwde". But the meaning was clear. When she came for us to settle the bill – de rekening – she said

"Hartelijk felicitaties. Kom je uit Nederland?"

"Kanada. Maar ik was geboren in Ninove."

We exchanged small talk as best we could while Peter counted out the money and a small tip. Then back out into the drizzly street.

We decided to walk to the Grand Market – Grote Markt – then back to the station and find something to eat along the way.

"Peter. Mom told me about the first ... I guess 'date' that she had with Dad when he came back in 1947. They went to Brussels for the day, and Dad wanted to have a waffle – the Liege or Luiksewafel kind, not the Brussels type like we have in Canada. They ended up having that and some frites for lunch. Maybe we could do that for dinner."

"Sounds worth a try. And I've several chocolate bars for dessert. It's a lot cheaper in the grocery than in those fancy chocolate shops."

“The chocolatiers are selling the fancy wrappings. For those who want the chocolate, the plain bars are surely better value.”

“About a quarter the price on a per gram basis.”

“Your Dutch and Scottish heritage is practically screaming out loud.” I said.

“Meaning?”

“You haven’t heard the old groaner about copper wire being invented when a Dutchman and a Scot spied a penny at the same time.”

I got an elbow in my side. So I said

“If you do that too often, you might lose your privileges.”

“Oh. But then you’d lose yours too.” Peter shot back.

“True. If all the men were as good as you, the prostitutes would be giving it away.” Might as well keep him happy. There’d been moments when it was my certain conviction that he was that good.

Peter gave me a surprise kiss. He must have picked up on what I was thinking. Several people on the street were looking at us. Too bad! Even if it’s not Paris, my husband can kiss me when he wants.

July 30, 1965

Friday

It was raining heavily. We decided to stay in and get ourselves organized for tomorrow, when Peter wanted to go to Ypres, now spelled Ieper since it had become more Flemish, and Sunday, when we’d go to Ninove, where

Francois and Maria were expecting us. Wil had a washing machine, so we did laundry. As we did so, we told her what we'd found out in Antwerp and talked about our day – Thursday – in Brugge. We'd done the touristy things, including a boat ride. It was fun and relaxed. Peter was scratchy, but figured another day or two and things would not be so bristly.

Peter spent much of the morning in the bike shed. He figured that he could use a bit of wood and some nuts and bolts and scrap metal to fashion a way to put one suitcase either side. He'd have a rucksack on his back, and had to be a bit careful his heels didn't hit the cases, but it meant we could at least move from place to place more easily, even if he wheeled his bike. I could probably use bungees to put my rucksack on the carrier of Eef's old bike. It also had a basket in front which was useful.

He tried it out and decided some adjustments were needed, so it was 1 o'clock before he was satisfied. Funny how I'd picked a practical guy like my Dad. Oh, how to talk about Martin? He was the man I thought of when "Dad" or "Father" or "Papa" were said. Guess Dad is the right word. Luc was my father – biological father. I wanted to know about him. Not to let him be forgotten, but he wasn't Dad. I think I'll just say "Luc".

Before lunch, Wil and I went out to the shed between rain showers and looked at the results. From Wil's reaction, I could see she was impressed.

"C'est très pratique. Félicitations."

"Oui. Je le pense." Peter replied. "Et nous vous remercions pour l'emprunte des bicyclettes. Ça nous permet de faire beaucoup plus que prévu."

July 31, 1965

As I mentioned, Peter wanted to go to Ypres. We put the bikes on the train – it was less than an hour’s trip – which meant we could ride out to Passchendael to the Canadian cemetery. A very simple column with the bust of a soldier with his head bowed and a lot of red roses instead of the usual crosses or tablets. Didn’t mind tax money going to something like this. We also went to the bigger Tyne Cot cemetery. Very sad how many men (and some women) died here with all the fighting. What for?

And the Menin Gate. Nearly 60000 names of soldiers whose remains had not been accounted for. Pretty horrific. Guess there’s also a big cemetery for German soldiers too, but we didn’t go to it.

We looked at the tourist places. The Cloth Hall – I suppose with my Flemish background I should say Lakenhal – was one. Destroyed in the Great War, the reconstruction was still going on, though we could see it was mostly complete. There was more damage when the Germans came again in 1940 and when they were pushed out in 1944. Do we ever learn?

On the train back, I asked Peter if he had a particular reason for wanting to come here.

“Robert said something about one of our great-uncles having been killed here and that another served. They would have been in Scottish regiments. If I get very interested, I’ll have to dig deeper. But I thought since we were close by it would be worth a look. Ypres was a static front for four years. It was really a mess at the end of that time.”

“Yes. I saw those photos and the reproductions of some of the paintings. There was a description that said one of them was going to be part of the War Memorial in Canada, but then the organizers changed their mind and built the monument by the Chateau there.”

“Did you have any family in that War?” Peter asked.

“I don’t know. Probably, but nobody close. I think their ages and the jobs they were doing were probably such that the people I know about didn’t get into the War. Of course, there’s Luc’s brother Jan. I tend to think of Dad’s family. And Mom’s were probably just victims of the German occupation, but as farmers would, I think, have mostly been left alone as long as they weren’t acting against the occupiers and kept up production.”

“The images are almost commonplace. We see them each year. But coming here – seeing how relatively small the battlefield is for the number of dead and wounded – gives a much better understanding of how horrible it was. And I suspect there are really relatively few pictures and we see them replayed in different ways. I never realized how many Canadians died here, nor how many were never found. Appalling.”

“Yes. And such a beautiful medieval city. All destroyed and now, at least, being rebuilt in the same style.” I felt I had to say something a bit positive.

We were silent as the wheels played clickety clack for a while. I’d noticed a lot of the track was welded and didn’t give the traditional sound. Pretty soon we were back in Ghent.

August 1, 1965

Sunday

We managed a direct train to Ninove. Got the tickets so they included the bikes, and the conductor was helpful. We had miniature Canadian flags on our backpacks, and he wanted to tell us about his cousin in Vancouver, and did we know her. Oh well. I suppose it is a bit difficult to understand that Ghent is almost as close to Ottawa as Vancouver is. Well, since I'm a physicist, I should really say that the distances are "of the same order of magnitude".

Our original plan was to take a taxi to François' farm. The bikes meant we didn't have to. But as we came out of the station at Ninove, I had a moment of panic.

"Peter. I just realized I don't know how to get to the farm."

"Don't worry. I talked to Joop last night and he showed me a map and we drew it on a piece of paper. We go that way." He pointed to our right. Then he added. "I don't want you to be chasing me, so I'll stop and tell you each stage."

"First we're going along here – the Astridlaan – until we hit Beverstraat. I'll stop there to make sure you're with me. It's a T junction where we turn left in order to cross the River Dender. We'll turn right after the bridge and stop to plan the next part of the ride."

Off we went. The traffic was light, but we were on unfamiliar bikes and we had luggage. The route Peter had described was only about 500 metres. We turned after the bridge, but the road was right on the bank of

the river, so Peter kept going until the road bent to the left and there was a place we could be off the road.

“The road here winds a bit, but we stay on it until Pollarestraat is on the right. I hope there are signs, but it is the last road before the main road. We want to turn right and go to the village called Pollare.”

Off we went. It wasn’t difficult. Pollare was about a kilometer. Then we bore right and then left and finally came to a road called Heirebaan. That was the road with the farm, and we found it pretty quickly, with a big “Dehooge” on the barn. We turned into the farmyard and I yelled out

“Hello! It’s Anna and Peter.”

Maria came bustling out of the farmhouse door.

“Hello. Hello. Het is mijn lieveling Annje.”

François came out of the barn. Both of them were much older than I remembered. Silly me. So was I. I was a three-year old rug-rat when I last saw them, and they would have been between 30 and 40 then, perhaps a bit more. So they were probably in their late 50s now. But they looked well.

There were introductions all round and we went into the farmhouse where coffee and conversation were immediately started.

“They didn’t seem to know quite what to do with the maple syrup, even though you knew the name – esdoornstroop.” Peter said as we walked along the road to the next farmhouse – the one where I’d lived as a baby.

“It’s not made here in Europe to my knowledge, and probably only known as something exotic.”

François had to do some chores, and Maria wanted to

cook, and they suggested we walk over to the other house – the one I’d been in as a baby – which was occupied by their son Max.

“Just call loud.” François had said. He had also told us to watch for the stone tablet he’d placed as a small monument where the mine blew up. I’d asked about the bush that caught me. Apparently it had got old and broken, but one of its descendants was almost on the same spot, about 30 feet along from the stone marker. We read the simple words

J McMichael & J Taylor, RAF
L Joos, Vlaamse boer
gedood door de Duitsers
Sept 1944

Peter took a couple of pictures, and a few more with the bush. Then we walked to the farmhouse and called out for Max. However, it was his wife Julia who came out.

“Hello, Hello. You must be Peter and Annje, though maybe you no longer use the diminutive.” She spoke excellent English, with just a soft Flemish tinge.

“Yes, I use Anna now. But where did you learn to speak such good English?”

“I had a year of exchange at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester in England. I was the only Vlaamse there, so I had to learn. It has helped, and now I do some work off the farm with companies wanting to do business with the UK and USA, and I suppose Canada.”

We tumbled into an easy conversation, and Julia let me look at the farmhouse. It was much altered, and

they'd added an extension, but the cow shed was still there, and I had to look. The light, the smells and the cows took me back to that time when I was very small.

"Max says that at 3 you would lead to cows to be milked." Julia said.

"I didn't know that." Peter interjected.

"I've got to save some surprises. And now you know I can handle big animals if you start to get awkward."

Julia and Peter laughed. I went on

"Seriously, I suspect the cows knew their way without me."

"They often do. We still keep a few, but mainly because we like to have them. You need to have a bigger operation to make dairying pay. And we like to make a little cheese for ourselves, or have fresh milk."

We had a nice chat, then we all trooped back to the parental farmhouse, where Max had already gone directly from the fields. We were introduced, but his English was not anywhere like as good as Julia's, so we fell back on our clumsy Flemish, some French with the odd bit of English that Julia translated. Most of the conversation was about Mom and Dad – my Canadian Dad that is. I did get to ask a bit about Luc, and got much the same story as from Wil, though François managed to add a few details. I guess he and Luc had chatted over coffee or beer. I'd heard some things from Mom, but I think because she was so much younger than Luc, he tried to protect her from some of the sad bits, or didn't think she'd understand.

It seems that with the destruction of the First War still making life very difficult, the Spanish flu threw some

communities into complete chaos. Apparently he'd been at home. His brother had already been killed on the Dodendraad, then in late 1918 the epidemic came. They were four in the house, and all got sick soon after the Armistice. One morning, Luc woke up and his parents were both dead in bed, and his sister would not wake up. He had to go and tell his Aunt, but she was sick, and her husband had died a couple of days earlier. She sent him to town to tell the policeman or the Mayor or someone like that.

François said his Aunt kept him a little while, but then sent him to the orphanage. I wasn't quite sure how François meant that, and I think our language difficulties may have made it sound harsher than intended. I can't see an Aunt doing that. She might not have been able to keep him if she herself was sick and probably struggling to put food on the table. So "sent" may be too strong, but "had to ask the orphanage to take him" could very well be true.

August 3, 1965

Tuesday

We stayed 2 nights in Ninove, and managed to get some idea of the town. Tante Griete's house was still there, but now owned by a local businessman. Mom had actually received a small legacy when Tante Griete died in 1952 at age about 75, as had Wil and Joke, her sisters.

We did look in the archives at the Town Hall, and found the record where Mom and I left for Canada. Earlier was the record of when we moved from the farm. We

found a note of Luc's death, but the records of when he likely came to the farm were rather jumbled. If we'd had lots of time we might have made some progress, but we were beginning to feel we knew the narrative. Now it was time to see some of its context in the streets and countryside.

Today we shifted to Antwerp, or rather its suburbs, and with the help of the Tourist Office found there was a pension in Kapellen a bit north of the city and on the rail line. We went there straight away on the train – it was quite a wet day – and had a quiet afternoon doing what honeymooners do. We thought we deserved a bit of that. Arriving when we did at the pension, we were able to arrange dinner there and be thoroughly lazy and wicked. Well, we're married, so maybe it isn't wicked any more. Perhaps that makes it a bit less exciting, but it sure is nice to just tumble into bed and know you have a license to have fun like that.

After dinner, we took a little walk as the rain had stopped.

"Are you still OK with tagging along on my biological father search?" I asked Peter as we walked.

"Yeah. Fine. Quite enjoying it. And we've been making sure your panties don't get too glued onto your bum."

"Hmm. That was nice this afternoon. Do you think Mrs. Callens knew what we were up to?"

"Possibly. But we weren't noisy, and we didn't break the bed."

"Peter. For the Netherlands part of our trip, do you want to put the bikes on the train, or use the bike paths and ride?"

“Doesn’t that depend a bit on the weather and the distances?”

“Yes. I suppose so. And our load. We’ve given away 2 of the 4 cans of syrup. After Gorinchem there’s just the one for Joke in Liege.”

“Indeed. They’re the heaviest part of our luggage. Though I did add that chain. It’s good that you have the front basket to hold that.”

August 5, 1965

Thursday morning.

Yesterday we’d been back to Antwerp and done some touristy stuff. In particular the Plantin-Moretus Museum about early printing. That technology sure made an impact. Dad thinks computers and their communications possibilities will too. I don’t disagree.

After the museum, we wandered about and took some pictures by the riverfront and had a nice meal near the big square. And, heeding Dad’s advice, had another wafel.

We’d been told by our hostess at the pension that the forecast – voorspelling, I think – for today was warm. However, Peter and I did our bit to warm it up a bit more with some wake-up honeymoon activity. Peter’s stubble was now long enough to bend rather than scratch. Over breakfast, Peter made what turned out to be a brilliant suggestion.

“Anna. There’s a market here this morning. Why don’t we wander round and see what it’s like. We might get an idea of how the local small-holders operate. And

markets can often be fun in and of themselves.”

“OK. I’m game. And then we can maybe ride over to Brasschaat and back and get a feel for the countryside.”

“Good job we can leave the luggage here. It already feels a bit sticky.”

We had a good breakfast with eggs and some cold cuts and lots of milky coffee. I’d have to watch I didn’t get fat, though the bike would help that.

The pension was close enough to the market that we didn’t need to bike, which was good since we’d then have to wheel or park them. The market wasn’t large, but had a half dozen fruit and/or vegetable stalls, a couple with baked goods, one with candy, three with clothing and a couple with what could only be termed mixed junk. There was also a fish truck and a butchers. Can’t say I’d want to trust meat or fish from either with the day getting hot and nowhere obvious for the workers to wash their hands.

It didn’t take us more than 20 minutes to have a good look round, and we were about to walk away, when I realized that the vegetable stall we were beside had, like all the stalls, a cardboard ticket about 6 inches square that was clearly the vendor’s permit or permission to have a stall. This one had the name “J Joos”.

“Wil je wat fijne wortels, mevrouw?” the lady behind the stall said. She was possibly 40, perhaps a year or so less or more.

“Ik heb geen keuken. We zijn Canadees, maar ik ben geboren in Vlaanderen.”

“Welkom in Kapellen. Mischien wat fruit dan?”

“Peter. Do you want some apricots? We could have

just a few.”

“Ok. But just a few.” he answered.

“Ongeveer 10 van die abrikozen alstublieft. Ook mijn naam was Anna Joos, nu Anna Sinclair.”

“Hello Anna Joos. Ik ben Grietje Joos. Heeft uw familie komen van hier.”

With some violence to the Flemish language, I told an outline of my story.

“Ik moet mijn man vertellen, en moet je hem ontmoet. Ik denk dat hij kan eventueel een neef van je vader te zijn.”

“Misschien later deze middag? We hebben een paar foto's van Luc.”

Gretje asked if we had some form of transport. When I said we had bicycles, she drew a map on the back of a blank receipt and suggested 4 pm. It turned out the “kleine boerderij” was more or less between Brasschaat and Kapellen, so this suited our plans very well.

* * *

Brasschaat was nice. Essentially a single long main street with a couple of side streets. There was a big brick church, some shops and such. We'd been told – I think it was Joop, but maybe Tom – that Brasschaat had the unfortunate luck to be the first victim of a V-2 in Belgium. Thought to possibly be a ranging shot for Antwerp from a battery not far from the Hague. Brasschaat got several more all the way into 1945. The allies had a big problem finding and destroying or disrupting the rocket launchers. But now you didn't see any war damage.

We got to the Joos' farm – if you could call it that, as it couldn't have been more than about 10 acres. Let's see – it was about 150 metres by 300, so 4.5 hectares. Times 2.4 gives a bit over 10. Am I a physics student or what!

Grietje introduced us to Jan. He spoke a bit of English, and we muddled along with Flemish and English and handwaving.

Jan said "I was 3 when my father died in 1918 of the Spaanse griep. My mother Ria was very sick, but she recovered, and died in 19 and 60."

I asked "But Luc was the only one from his family?"

"Ja. Hij was negen. Nine. His father and his mother and his sister all died. And his bruder Jan was killed trying to get to Holland through the dodendraad – er – death rope."

"Luc stayed with us for a few days. And then they took him to the weeshuis in Antwerp. I don't know which one. Mother could not take him. We had no money, we'd been very sick, and she only just kept the farm. He was my cousin. My father's brother's child. And I think we wanted to keep in touch, but somehow the contact was broken."

We showed the photos of which I'd brought copies on the trip, and Jan found an old album. There was some resemblance between Luc and Jan's father, but you would be hard pressed to call it proof. Nevertheless, we all concluded that it was almost certain that my biological father was Jan's cousin.

We had tea and managed to share a bit of information about Canada and Ottawa, and learn about their lives

and family. We exchanged addresses, thanked them and rode back to the pension.

* * *

“Do you feel satisfied you’ve got Luc’s story?” Peter asked over dinner. We’d found a small restaurant that offered some simple fare.

“I think so. I’d thought of going to the various archives and trying to trace him. But now I’m not sure that I’ll find more. I believe that Jan is Luc’s cousin and that we’ve got the reason he was an orphan. The Spanish Flu. I’ll try to keep in touch with them, but I suspect it will be a Christmas card sort of contact.”

“There might be some medical information to share.” Peter volunteered.

“But clearly Jan won’t know much. He was 3 when Luc was put in the orphanage. Same age as when I went to Canada. I barely remember anything, and what I do is fuzzy ... well, mixed up. The images can be clear, but they’re just snippets, and jumbled.”

“Yeah. I have some clear recollections of Falkirk, but I can’t really put them into a story. They’re just kind of floating pictures of a place and time.”

“Do you remember anything of the War?”

“No. Don’t think so. Maybe men in uniform, but no bombs. Later there were bombed out buildings in Glasgow – I remember them. But I think there was not a lot of damage around Falkirk and I was too young to know what was going on.

But I remember the time after the War. How grey

everything was. I think it was 1947 or 1948 before I have any colour memories. Almost like movies being black and white until the late '40s. My memories are monochrome until I was 6 or 7."

"Was that Scotland or the times?"

"I don't know. Probably a bit of both. You know they just removed the points – the rationing system – on candy a month or so before we came to Canada in 1953. But we called candy "sweets"."

"That's got to be a big deal for a boy of – what – 12?"

"Yeah. I'd turned twelve in February before we came to Canada."

"I still get a bit of the Scottish accent sometimes, but mostly it's gone."

"I didn't want to stand out and get bullied. It was easier to soften the accent and fit in."

"I never had that sort of problem. Little girls of 3 are generally considered 'cute', and apparently I was a fairly well-behaved child."

"Given your Mom had to look after you herself, she probably wouldn't put up with any nonsense."

"I hadn't thought of that. She certainly never said anything like 'You'd better behave because I won't put up with you being naughty'. I think the only time I ever got a smack was when I got the ink on the skirt and blouse I was to wear for Mom and Dad's wedding. And good ol' Dad saved the day by being calm and constructive. Mom was really cut up."

"He really managed to keep calm?"

"I asked him about that last year. He said he wasn't calm, but he knew that Mom was upset and she and

I were both crying. He said he knew I'd not been doing anything naughty – I just wanted to try his pen to draw with. You know how I like to scribble and sketch. Anyway, he took me away and cleaned me up as best he could, except we couldn't get it off my nose. Hence my nickname Bluenose, now Blue. And he suggested how to fix the skirt and blouse."

"I guess you didn't have any others to wear?"

"You were just talking of rationing, right!"

"We tend to forget how few things and how little money people had then. I still am amazed that we used to only take a bath about once a week when I was little."

"We've got to be a lot more fussy in the last two decades."

August 8, 1965

Saturday

Yesterday we managed to ride to Kalmthoutse Heide. I think "heath" is probably the best translation of heide. Anyway, it's where the dodendraad was, or at least a stretch of it. And because the ground is very sandy, it's not very good for agriculture, but kind of pretty for walking around. It made a different outing, and absolutely no tourists!

Today we took the train to Gorinchem. Actually 3 trains. First to Roosendaal. Then to Dordrecht and finally to Gorinchem. It was a bit of a nuisance to have to load and unload the bikes, but we managed. Peter had been to his grandparents' house before. During the War, they'd lived in the old town, but now had a house in

an area not far from the station. Still, Peter wasn't sure enough of the way to ride, so we walked the bikes and he found the street and then the house quickly. That was good, because it was raining steadily, and we got quite wet, even though we were only out about five minutes.

"Kom binnen. Kom uit de regen." Peter's Grandma greeted us after we'd rung the bell. I went along in, but took off my wet shoes and pulled my slippers out of my pack. Peter stayed outside for a moment with his grandfather and put the bikes in a shed at the side of the house, which was self-standing rather than the usual terraced house.

There was the usual circle of introductions. I asked if I could call them Oma and Opa as Peter did, and was pleased that they agreed. It would be easier and less formal. After we'd been shown our room and washed up, coffee was served and we handed over our gift of maple syrup. Clearly this wasn't the first time – both Robert and Ellie had brought some before, and it was clearly something they would enjoy.

"Je spreke Hollands?" Oma Goldstein said.

"Ik was in Vlanderen geboren." I replied.

"Een orloog kindje?"

Peter and I went through the story, though Peter had earlier told me Ellie had written about me to them. They were getting up in years. Possibly getting forgetful, or else eyesight meant reading was more difficult. While we were chatting, Oma set out the bread, buns, and cold cuts for lunch.

We were going to stay until Monday, then go on. We knew we were extra work, and in advance Peter had writ-

ten to say we wanted to take them out for a meal – their choice. When we talked about this, they said they thought tonight was best – Sunday a lot of restaurants could be closed. Moreover, there was an Indische restaurant they wanted to try. I thought that meant Indian, but actually it was Indonesian and more Chinese than anything else.

In any event, the Goldsteins had a map for us, and we decided we'd have a bit of a rest, then in the late afternoon look round the old town and meet them at the restaurant at 6:30.

The rain had let up a bit, but it was still spitting. Gorinchem isn't that big, and we were able to walk round the old boundaries, walk a few of the old streets, see the City Hall which was impressive, and look out from the harbour over the river, called the Merwede, but part of the Waal that runs into Rotterdam and to the sea.

We sat on a bench for a bit just to watch the river. Peter said

"I was looking at the map, we could go to Geldermalsen and Zaltbommel then back here tomorrow on the bikes. It's about 60 km total, but it looks like there are bike paths."

"You don't think that's too far?"

"Well, it would be a way to find out. If it works, I thought we could go to Delft on Monday, which is about 60 km., and we could do so via Kinderdijk where they have the windmills and then Delfshaven where the Pilgrim Fathers left for America."

"Do you think we'll find accommodation OK? You know. With a place to secure the bikes."

“I think so. We could spend a couple of nights in Delft, and the Hague is only 8 km. away, though I’d probably suggest a tram or train for that. Then we could either go up the coast to Haarlem or to Leiden. Then to Amsterdam, Utrecht, and work our way back to Belgium. When we get tired of cycling or the weather is bad, we can get on a train. What do you think?”

“As long as we take it steady. I don’t want to feel pushed too hard. And I wonder if we’ll find toilets and such.”

“Yes. That might be an issue. But we should find some cafés in most towns.”

“Hope so. I don’t think service stations here have toilets.”

“Do you want to look at the paper and see what’s happening in the world?” Peter asked, taking the Herald Tribune he’d bought at one of the stations this morning.

“Yes. I feel out of touch.”

“Looks like Lyndon Johnson’s been busy. He signed the Medicare and Medicaid legislation the other day and now a new Voting Rights Act. I wonder if the negroes will become politically active.”

“It’s overdue. The Civil War was 100 years ago, but they don’t seem to be much better off than when they were slaves.” I commented.

“Nor are our Indians. They only got to vote in 1960. And they didn’t get formal citizenship until 1956, though it was backdated to 1947.”

“I remember Mom thought it was odd that Canadians used British passports until 1947. In fact Dad used one when he returned to Canada that year.”

We drifted into silence, both reading the stories on the page.

“Can I turn the page?” Peter asked.

“Yeah. I’m pretty well done on these.”

We read on.

“Hey. The Brits have banned cigarette ads on TV.” I said.

“Of course, there’s no ads anyway on BBC.” Peter noted.

“I wouldn’t be sad to see smoking disappear.”

“Nor me. Seems like a big waste. But a lot of people do it.”

“Yes. And it makes my hair and clothes stink. I know Dad says he has to wash his beard if he’s been with smokers of an evening.”

“Something I’ll have to note. My beard seems to be coming in. Oma was a bit annoyed by it I think.”

“Did she say something?”

“Yes. But quietly. I told her my stubble gave you a sore chin – at least that’s what I think I said!”

We both laughed. Peter added.

“Actually I might get into some epidemiology of tobacco. It’s likely to become a hot field.”

It was time to make our way to the restaurant. The “Indische / Chinees” food was clearly a colonial import. We could have ordered a rijstafel, but as a group decided on a noodle dish called Bami Goreng – literally fried noodles in the Indonesian Malay language. There was a bean salad called Gado Gado and some interesting stuff like fluffy potato chips called kroepoek. At least those were the dishes I remember. I was a bit tired. Not

used to the travel and the effort of working in several languages.

Fortunately, the Goldsteins believed in early nights. And I liked a cuddle before going to sleep.

August 9, 1965

Monday

Our excursion to Geldermalsen and Zaltbommel showed us we could cover the distance, but we didn't have a whole lot of time for sightseeing. Fortunately, we were mainly interested in seeing the countryside and the quaint towns. The fact it was Sunday meant a slight awkwardness in the morning, but it turned out the Goldsteins were churchgoers but not particularly devout. Also there weren't a lot of places open, but we found a cafe in Zaltbommel for some lunch – croquettes as it turned out.

The 60 kilometers was a good ride. We were tired at the end, but not totally exhausted. However, it could be a bit more trouble with the luggage. Peter'd done a good job with his rack to hold the cases, and we'd managed to get a small canvas bag that would go in my front basket so the bags all could be lightened.

Today we'd started quite early – on our bikes by 8 a.m. after a quick breakfast and goodbyes – to cycle to Delfshaven near Rotterdam via Kinderdijk. Though we could probably have made the whole journey to Delfshaven in about four hours if we'd been trying, we got to Kinderdijk about quarter to twelve and managed to find the classic view of the windmills.

“They’re for pumping water, not grinding grain.” Peter said.

“I’d heard that somewhere too. But pumping water has to be important in this country where so much of the land is below sea level.” I countered.

“Let’s see if we can find some coffee somewhere.” Peter changed the subject. Actually I wanted a toilet more than more liquid. We’d brought some sandwiches and some water, so we wouldn’t go hungry. However, since Kinderdijk was touristy, we found a café and ordered a couple of koffie verkeerds and used the facilities.

* * *

It was about two in the afternoon when we got to Delfshaven – really part of the city of Rotterdam, so we had to be careful when we got closer to not get in the way of vehicles and especially the tram tracks. Peter had already worked out the procedure. We’d agree where we were going for the next 5 to 10 minutes and arrange a stopping point, then repeat this step by step so we didn’t have to chase each other at intersections. Also we’d agreed that whenever there might be a turn, the lead person would stop and wait. It slowed us down, but avoided a lot of worry.

When we got to Delfshaven, we made for the Pilgrim’s church, which apparently the Pilgrim Fathers may never have been inside. Oh well. But we figured there’d be accommodation nearby, and sure enough, we saw a sign for a pension just down the street from the church. Peter rang the bell while I stayed with the bikes. He came back

after about 5 minutes will a piece of paper.

“They’re full up, but the lady phoned a friend who has a B&B – at least that’s what she called it – and I’ve directions.” Peter explained.

We looked over the directions and got them in our heads, then made our way carefully across a couple of canals and several streets to the place suggested. It turned out to be nice, and we could even bring our bikes through to the rear so they were not on the street. We arranged to stay two nights, which was all they could manage due to other bookings.

Given the ride, we decided to wash up then lie down for a bit. Turned out we didn’t sleep. Peter asked if my bum was sore after the long ride and offered to massage it. His focus shifted quickly and we enjoyed a very quick bump and grind.

“Sorry. That was a bit quicker than I’d intended.” Peter apologized.

“Why apologize. I enjoyed it. It doesn’t always have to be a Hollywood blockbuster to be nice. We’ve a license now to do it every which way.”

“You’re right.” he brightened. “I suppose somehow I thought that it should be fantastic every time. But this was kind of nice in a different way.”

“You mean more a comfortable pleasure than earth moving drama?”

“That’s one way to put it.” Peter replied.

“Talking of earth moving. You realize today is the 20th anniversary of Nagasaki? I forgot about Hiroshima on the 6th.”

“Actually I’d forgotten too. And I shouldn’t. Last

year I met a guy in Montreal who was in Nagasaki on August 9.”

“Wow. Was he hurt?”

“No. He was down a coal mine. A Dutch colonial civilian from Java who ended up transported as a slave labourer to mine coal. He said the next shift never showed up so they walked out of the mine – I think the tunnels went down at a slope.”

“What about radiation?”

“I didn’t really have a chance – nor the inclination I guess – to ask lots of questions. He said his buddies were vaporized. And that he saw a lot of very badly burned people. So bad that he couldn’t even tell if they were Japanese or not. He even said he doesn’t really recall how long it was before help arrived. He thought about 10 days to two weeks. And he said the first outsider was British and the second was Dutch. Weird. But I suspect everyone wanted to know what the A-bomb would do. A lot of that information will still be classified, I think. He didn’t say anything about radiation. Though fallout may have been elsewhere. There were winds, and he was down the mine for some hours after the bomb went off.”

“And there was just one bomb, so none up-wind. Though there could have been some stuff on the ground.”

“We’ll probably not know for years. Anyway, he was Jewish and returned to Europe and married a woman who had been at Auschwitz. Despite the vaunted German engineering, she was three times in the gas chamber and three times it failed. What’s the odds of that? And what a couple! If they can make a go of life, I’m sure we can.”

“Yes. Makes us look like a pair of selfish idiots if we can’t make our marriage work.” I said rather quietly.

We fell into some minutes of silence, with me lying in Peter’s arm, my head on a pillow on his shoulder. Then Peter said

“Shall we go explore?”

With this we got up and dressed – we were both still naked from our diversion – and went out to look at the quay from which the Pilgrims supposedly departed. Strange lot – they wanted religious freedom, but were pretentious enough to refer to themselves as “saints” and treat others rather unkindly. What was it that Reader’s Digest joke definition said? Oh yes, a puritan is a man who cannot admit he was born in bed with a woman. Such a pity there are so many people trying to tell others how to live.

* * *

It turned out our accidental choice of Delfshaven for a place to stay made it easy to walk to Het Park and the Euromast. We didn’t go up – somehow it didn’t fit our mood. And Monday is not a good museum day, so we’ll go to the Boijmans van Beuningen tomorrow. We mainly walked, either hand in hand or arm in arm, not saying much. After Het Park, we made our way to the old harbour. The Holland America building on the Wilhelmina Pier was rather impressive. Gives one a bit of a sense of history of all the emigrants leaving for the New World a couple of generations ago.

We poked around the center of the city, and eventually

found a small restaurant to have our dinner. I wasn't sure what to have – frankly I was feeling spiritually a bit lost, though physically I seemed to be fine. Perhaps we both were. Anyway, we ordered Kapucijners – field peas or beans done like baked beans in Canada – and Uitsmijters – ham and eggs, and decided to share these. I ordered Spa Rot to drink – sparkling water, but Peter decided to have a Pils (beer). We were fairly quiet as we ate, but we got a koffie verkeerd each after and Peter asked.

“Any reason we're both so quiet?”

“I was wondering the same thing.” I replied. “I'm feeling a bit “fish out of water”. Not sure why. Perhaps it's realizing that my life – our lives – are changing and we're becoming, oh, I don't know, maybe different people as we become a married pair.”

“That's sort of how I've been feeling too, though I probably wouldn't have used those words.”

He paused, then went on,

“Have you become suddenly aware that there's going to be this other person around, well, kind of always?”

“Yes. Bit scary at the same time it's nice.”

Peter laughed. “Scary nice? An interesting concept, but it does capture the feeling. Are you getting cold feet after the fact?”

“No. I like that we're married. And I think it's pretty obvious that I enjoy having a license to enjoy ourselves in bed. But also being able to be close, the way we were this afternoon when we took a bit of a rest, or walking hand in hand. It's just new, and it takes some getting used to.”

“Yes. It is new, and I hadn’t realized how many little things in life are changed.”

“Meaning?”

“Well. We go in the bathroom together. Help each other wash and such.”

“And I have to watch out I don’t get my tits man-handled or my you-know-what stroked.”

“You don’t like that? You do it to me, and I have an easier ... er... handle.”

“No, I do like it. Just it’s new. Maybe unexpected. Do you think we’ll still do it in twenty or forty years.”

“I guess a lot of people lose interest. I hope we don’t. I think it’s kind of a form of affection. But we’re neither of us quite accustomed to it yet I think.”

“And for me, there’s been a whole lot of ideas and thoughts about Mom and Dad and Luc to get my head around. My feelings about Mom and Dad haven’t changed, but maybe my perspective on them has been altered – I think enlarged – by the things we’ve learned about Luc and his family.”

“Is there more you’d like to find out about him while we’re here?”

“No. I don’t think so. It’s more important to get used to each other and maybe talk about what we want together. Plan a little – not in great detail except maybe for a bit of mutual daydreaming and learning about each other’s likes and dislikes. But getting a bit of a roadmap for us.”

“Anna Sinclair, you are so lovable when you tell me the things I was thinking too.”

“Really, you were thinking about that sort of thing.”

“Not necessarily in those words, but definitely along those lines.”

I leaned across and gave him a kiss. An older couple at the next table smiled at us, and the woman said in English

“You must be Americans. Dutch young people seem only to kiss before they get married.”

“We’re Canadians, though both of us have Dutch or Flemish backgrounds in part.”

“And you are newly married?”

“Yes. Just over a week ago.”

“For us it is 35 years. Most good, some not so good in the War. But we stay together, and we give to the other strength.”

“Thank you. We’ll remember that.” Peter offered.

* * *

We took a tram back to the pension. Our feet were tired! It wasn’t too hard to find one going to Delfshaven, and it was still light out. We decided to take a shower and tumble into bed. I think we both expected to dive right away into more honeymoon fun, but somehow we just curled up together.

I asked

“Peter, earlier tonight in the restaurant, you called me Anna Sinclair, and I sort of like that, but I’m used to Anna Tremblay and in Belgium I had a feeling – sort of like a dream or an idea that hovers at the back of your brain – that I was Anna Joos. All the names add to that sense of ... well, transition I guess.”

“Do you want to be Anna Sinclair, or stay Anna Tremblay, or even revert to Anna Joos?” Peter was being very diplomatic.

“Oh, I couldn’t go back to Joos. That would hurt Dad for one thing, and I’ve never been conscious of that name. It was when I was too little to be more than Annje, and when you’re a kid, you’re not really cognizant of family names. You know, Mom and Dad are hardly Clara and Martin at that age – they’re Mom and Dad.”

“Yes. I get that. But between Tremblay and Sinclair there is probably a decision for you, and I’d guess that it’s a bad idea for me to express any opinion.”

“No. I’d like your opinion, but I don’t want to cause you upset if I don’t follow it. In fact, I do want to make that decision myself. And I’m pretty sure that it must be my own decision, or it will be an irritation to us getting along.”

“Perhaps you could use Tremblay for your career, and Sinclair for us as a couple, maybe eventually as a family. That’s more or less my opinion, since you asked for it.” Peter volunteered.

“I was going to ask what you thought about that. I think it’s a good compromise. But it introduces that other topic – family – or more precisely, children.”

“We’ve been rather silent on the topic of kids.” Peter admitted.

“Yes. If we were Catholic, it would be obvious, I suppose. I don’t think it was part of my reason for wanting to marry you.”

“Oooh. Anna the sex-maniac!”

“Make that Anna and Peter the sex-maniacs, surely?”

“Guilty as charged, Milady.” Peter mugged while tweaking my left tit. I grabbed his penis and gave it a gentle yank in return and we ended up in giggles.

“Seriously, Peter, I haven’t given much thought to children. Have you?”

“No. I don’t think I want to consider them until we’ve got our careers in order. How about you?”

“About the same. Though if I got pregnant, I’d not be able to ... you know ... try to get rid of it.”

“Since it’s illegal and often dangerous to get an abortion, I’d feel the same.”

“We should have talked about this before. What would we have done if you wanted a dozen in the first few years and I wanted none at all?”

“Have to start a nuclear war to eliminate the problem, wouldn’t we?”

At this point, Peter realized I didn’t have panties under my nighty, and he – or certain parts of him – showed a decided interest in what could be considered baby-making if the good old Pill were not being taken. I didn’t mind at all – we seemed to be on safe ground together.

August 14, 1965

Saturday morning.

We’d cycled up to Leiden on Wednesday and found a rather nice hotel. A bit more expensive than we’d intended to spend, but we got an ensuite bathroom and could indulge ourselves. I remember Mom always commenting that she and Dad had such a room when they went to Paris in 1947 together, and how much of a lux-

ury it was to have your own bathroom. Not having to share that space was really important to her.

Hmm. That was BEFORE they got married. Funny. Mom was never coy or awkward about saying that they went there together. She just never bothered to mention that it was pre-wedding.

We found that Leiden was really quite a good place for visiting the populated west of the Netherlands. We could easily get to Haarlem, Amsterdam, the Hague, and Utrecht. While the bikes were a possibility, we'd decided to use the train except for a couple of local tours.

I woke fairly early – around 6 – and went to the toilet. It was light enough that I didn't have to turn on the light and I didn't shut the door because it was a bit stiff and made noise. Peter should get his beauty sleep – he was rather gallant about carrying the lion's share of the luggage and such.

Good job I'd put some TP in my panties last night, as my period was just starting, so I dug out a tampon and inserted it before going back to bed.

I jumped as Peter said "Things arrived on schedule?"

"I didn't know you were awake. I was trying to let you sleep."

"Thanks. I appreciate the thought. Actually, it was kind of interesting. Guys don't have to put in tampons. I'd never realized how you have to sort of angle things in."

"Suppose I should be embarrassed, but with you I'm not. Guess that makes us really married, heh?" I queried.

"Something like that. I guess some people are pretty bashful about bathroom time. But I rather like how we

just ... well, get on with things together.”

“Me too. But it’s a lot nicer when we have it to ourselves like this. I was just thinking how Mom used to say that having your own bath was important to her. She insisted that Dad find them accommodation in Canada where she wouldn’t have to share the bath. And I know they liked to sit in it together. I used to hear them sometime when they thought I was asleep.”

“You mean fooling around in the tub.”

“Possibly, but more just talking and having a chance to relax and be close. When I was in the toilet just now I realized Mom said she and Dad had a hotel room with an ensuite bath in Paris together. That was before they were married. It was sort of neat that she never hid the fact it was before the wedding, but neither did she advertise that. It was sort of like they were already married, but hadn’t quite had the ceremony yet.”

“From what I remember of your Mom, I don’t think she would let small details get in the way of the essential truth. She and your Dad were a true couple, and the wedding was simply a rubber stamp on that as far as I can understand.”

“She actually told a story about their first date in Brussels where the waitress / restaurateur said she thought they looked “une vraie couple”, possibly because she still wore her wedding ring from Luc. Peter, do you think we give that appearance?”

Peter thought a few seconds. “I’d like to think so. But it’s much harder to see yourselves as others see you. And harder still to make it a reality, if indeed it’s something conscious.”

“Do you think it is something we can make happen, or does it depend on luck and fate?” As I said this I had a bit of a lump in my throat.

“Well, you know that expression ‘The Lord helps those who help themselves’? I think it’s like that. There is luck, but it gets amplified or directed by hard work and conscious effort.

There’s likely a lot of luck in finding the right person to be with, and I think you and I – Anna and Peter – have a lot of the right ingredients of background and education and, let’s be honest, enough money and resources, that we have a strong start. But beyond that we’ve got to make some effort to keep on track.”

“Some people get sidetracked with career, or gambling, or drugs, or affairs with other people. It sometimes frightens me how many obstacles there are. But on the other side, Mom and Dad and also Michelle and Dad, Aunt Penny and Joe, and your parents, all give examples of people who have succeeded in one way or another.”

“You’ve touched something that is probably pretty important – that there are several ways to succeed as a couple. Succeed in a marriage. I know I want to succeed, and I think you do too.”

“Of course. And to some extent it feels like Mom is watching to make sure I do. I know that must sound pretty silly, but ...”

“It doesn’t sound silly to me, because I know you, and I know how much she meant to you.”

“Thanks for that. It’s not been so long since she died, and Dad and I had to avoid too much wallowing in grief

or we'd bring each other down. I still get some moments."

"I've noticed a few quiet moments, and guess that some of them are linked to your Mom. If you want to have a few minutes to yourself, or just sit and hold hands or whatever, you don't have to say more than 'Can I have a moment?' The reasons are less important than one of us giving the other the time and acceptance to take some moments to sort out some thoughts and memories."

"Thank you for that, Peter. It makes is so easy to love you. And on a lighter note, I'm rather getting to like the beard. Makes you look a bit more mature, and slightly roguish. But don't get any ideas of being a rogue with any other woman."

He gave me a kiss and we cuddled. We were a long way from home, but I felt "at home" in his arms.

* * *

That evening we were in Amsterdam, having played tourist a lot of the day. We'd wandered from the Centraal Station via a circuitous route to the Rijksmuseum to the Leidseplein then back down the Kalverstraat to the Damrak. We found a small Indonesian restaurant to have a rijstafel, even though it is really a colonial meal and not authentic Indonesian.

"Did you have a good day?" I asked Peter. "You were a bit quiet sometimes."

"A bit tired I think. We've been going pretty steadily since we got married three weeks ago."

“Hey. I’d sort of forgotten. It’s been three weeks already.”

“Maybe tomorrow we can do something lazy. Go to the seaside at Scheveningen or Zandvoort and watch the Dutch at play?”

“Depends a bit on the weather doesn’t it?” I didn’t want to actually kill his idea, but seaside in the rain can be a bit of a sad experience.

“Yes, I wouldn’t want a reminder of Scottish Seaside. It always rained and was pretty cold. I don’t know how the businesses ever made any money.”

“Probably just fronts to launder money for the mob.” I joked.

“Could even be true. They certainly don’t seem to have much to suggest they do any real trade 99 percent of the time.”

“Well, I’m not letting you come back to the Red Light district to play with the girls.”

“That’s almost as sad an idea as Scottish seaside in the rain. Actually it has a lot of the same problems – paying money to have to pretend to be having a good time with someone trying hard to be artificially cheerful.”

“You didn’t think any of the prostitutes were attractive?” I was a bit curious.

“You’ve spoiled me. I want someone who gives me a great time, who genuinely has a great time with me, and who I can cuddle with and talk to.” Peter explained.

“And they don’t offer men to entertain women. Mom used to say “not fair” about a number of things. I think I’d put a “not fair” on that.”

“Would you ever really go to such a person?”

“Nah. Like you, I want the real exchange and the cuddle after.”

“What about with a friend you liked? Say someone like Fred.”

I felt a surge of annoyance.

“Or you with Evelyn!”

“I didn’t mean it as a matter of faithfulness. I simply wonder if you feel that I’m the only man you could ever be with.” Peter explained.

That was a big one.

“Tough question. If I’m honest, it’s kind of interesting to wonder what it would be like with different men. Bet you feel the same way about women.”

“The curiosity is always there, but I don’t think I want just a physical presence. I’m pretty sure 90 percent of the experience is related to attitudes and enthusiasm if we’re talking about something that is worthwhile.”

“That would make it more dangerous. It’s why I’ve heard some people talk about relationships that are “just physical” not being serious. I don’t think I could be like that. You know I cared about Fred, though my feelings for him weren’t like those I have for you. And I’m pretty sure you cared about Evelyn, and you’ve told me you still have affection for Janice.”

“Yes. There’s this awkward dilemma that it’s probably not really worth having a purely physical relationship, but such an interaction is a lot less threatening to our marriage. Promise me you’ll keep talking to me about these sorts of things. I’m sure keeping them to ourselves won’t be positive for us.”

“I hope I can. It makes me pretty uncomfortable.”

“Talking is a lot less uncomfortable than having to untangle the mess that one can get into by doing something. Look at Michelle’s experience with her ex.”

“Yes.” I said quietly.

* * *

After dinner we made our way to the Centraal Station and found a train to Leiden. On the journey, we talked mainly about the things we’d been doing. Touristy stuff. The “Anna project” was largely behind us except for learning a bit more about Tante Joke in Lieges.

Peter was summing up.

“You know, we’ve done quite a lot. We saw a good deal of Rotterdam, went up to Delft, then moved to Leiden and had a good explore there. The cities are so compact, it’s much easier than in Canada to walk about.”

“Then on Thursday we got to look at Haarlem. I really found that so typically Dutch. And the faces in the Frans Hals.”

“The faces?” I queried

“You know, the benefactors and the Board members of the Stichtings. I call them Wall Worthies – the self-important local big-shots.”

“It’s a good name. Do you mean because they are local “worthies” and they now hang on a wall.”

“Yes, of course.” Peter replied, though I thought it wasn’t necessarily obvious. I was getting to know how his mind worked on things like that, and we shared a number of silly expressions like this, but it didn’t seem to me that the outside world would be so quick to comprehend.

“And I even liked the Hague, though it seems a bit stodgy.” He went on for a bit talking about the things we’d seen, but my mind was drifting. Being a tourist was hard work, and tiring.

Fortunately, our hotel was quite close to the station, and we were back by 9 p.m.

“I’m going to run a bath.” I said.

“What if I want to go first?” Peter teased.

“Of course. You get in first, then I get to use you as a pillow to lie on.”

“Oh. Too lazy to wash your own tits, hey.”

“Sure, sure. But notice I’m already naked. Slowpoke.”

“Slow Poke is later. If I don’t get too excited washing your tits, of course.”

We got in the tub.

“That sure feels good.” I said.

“That it does. Feet is definitely a four-letter word. In fact, it may be our main F-word lately.”

“Agreed.”

We were silent for a while, enjoying the warm water and being close.

“The wedding seems a long time ago.” I said.

“I’ve trouble remembering the details. I think because there was a lot going on.”

We’d had a number of ideas about where to get married, but finally settled on St. James. There’d been serious discussion of having Uncle Joe officiate in Brockville, but it turned out it would be less travel for our friends to have the wedding in Ottawa. Marcia was my Maid of Honour. Peter’s brother Robert was his Best Man. We’d been lucky with the weather – rain threatened but didn’t

dampen the parade, and the temperature wasn't too hot. We had the reception at home. Dad had managed to rent a tent without walls. And while we had about 40 guests, things weren't too crowded because they could spread out to the garden and about the main floor of the house.

There were no family heirloom wedding dresses. I thought of getting a special one, but talking with Dad, Michelle and Andrea, decided that the gown I'd worn at New Years', which was Mom's wedding dress for her Canadian ceremony, would be a good choice. So we weren't conventional. It made me feel good, and Peter said it made me look good too. Actually his comments – in private – were unprintable, but the meaning was clear.

Thinking about what went on before the wedding, I asked Peter

“How soon after we get home do you think we'll move into our apartment?”

“Well, we rented it from the 1st of August, and I gave Robert a letter authorizing him to pick up the keys. He's going to round up some help from Dad and your Dad and maybe Stephane and move in our furniture and the boxes we packed of our things. So we can go there from the airport. I was going to make it a surprise, but it's the sort of thing that can backfire when you're tired and just want to get home after a trip.”

“Thanks for telling me now. I don't know how I'd react, but I like the idea of starting off right away in our own place.”

“Since we married, we've not slept in our parents' houses.”

“Hey. That's true. I hadn't thought about it.” I said.

We'd had a night in the Chateau after the reception, and been on the plane the next night.

"The only thing that's a concern to me is where Robert and Co. will place furniture." Peter said.

"We've only the bed and the kitchen set and our chests of drawers so far. So things won't be crowded. We'll have to work out what else we need as we go."

"Yes. We should be able to adjust." Peter agreed.

We'd found a place off Main Street, which in Ottawa was really a community south-west of the University by about a mile, and nothing like the main street of any other city. One bedroom, living room, kitchen and bathroom. Parking outside, but off the street, and we'd turned down a slightly nicer one because it had parking in a shared driveway. Too much messing around moving cars. Though if the downstairs occupants got a car, there might be some need to make clear arrangements in winter when we needed to pile snow somewhere.

Of course, we didn't yet have a car. We wouldn't need one desperately, but probably would end up getting one soon enough. We could walk to the University, though it was a goodly hike. And it wasn't too far from Dad and Michelle, though getting to Peter's folks would mean a bit of a bus ride. Shopping wasn't great, though there were a few local small stores. We'd manage and we'd learn.

Laundry would be in a shared washer and drying on outside or basement lines, else in a laundromat (or a trip home, though that felt like defeat).

Peter was soaping my front. He loved doing that. It had a remarkable effect on his penis too! I reached back

and caressed his balls, then followed the shaft and gave the head a gentle squeeze.

“Careful. It might be loaded,” he quipped.

“You just want me to make you squirt, don’t you?” I countered.

“Of course. It feels good when I squirt.”

“Then lets rinse off and see what you have in the tank. But you know I just put a fresh a tampon in.”

Despite this, he didn’t need much encouragement, but when we were on the bed I made him lie back.

“I want to take a good look at it. You’re always in a hurry to hide it in my hole.”

“True. It feels so nice in your hole. And you seem to like it there.”

“I do. But I like to look at it, touch it. Do this to it.”

I ice-cream licked it, then put my mouth round it and swirled my tongue over the two lobes then round the back of the helmet.

“Oh. Be careful or you’ll get a mouthful. You might not like that.”

“Sometime I’d like to find out, but perhaps not tonight. Probably when you’re licking me and I’m really excited, then I probably would find it extra exciting no matter what the taste.”

“Just thinking of that could set me off.”

“Well, it is making you ooze the clear liquid, and I like the salty taste of that.” I licked him again, and heard him inhale quickly.

“Peter, apropos our earlier conversation about other men and women, one of the things that does make me curious is the ... er ... differences.”

“Meaning size etc.?”

“Maybe, though I wasn’t thinking of size. I’ve only Fred and you for comparison, but he looked ... er ... different. I think we talked a bit about that before.”

“Probably because he wasn’t circumcised. Most European men aren’t, and in my case it was only because the foreskin wouldn’t retract. I was about 4. A bit traumatic. You can see the line of the scar behind the head.”

Now that he mentioned it, I could.

“But it’s rather nice to be able to see and touch and lick the whole head. Like this.” And I gave him another full mouth swirl. In response he grabbed me and almost threw me back on the bed with my feet up near the headboard and buried his head between my thighs. Oh. So intense. I squealed and writhed, but he kept at it and I felt a couple of orgasms come and go, then I realized I could take him in my mouth and I did so. Now we were both thrashing about a bit and suddenly my mouth filled with something sort of sticky. I let it ooze out round my lips, but didn’t back off. The taste wasn’t nice, but not horrible.

I was about to take my mouth away from his cock when he used his tongue and lips to attack my clit. The pleasure was such that I could barely stand it. So I retaliated with my tongue and was rewarded with his softening cock getting harder again.

Suddenly he pulled away, turned around, and with a sort of plop I felt him inside me. Oh. He’d pulled out the tampon. I must be really wet.

“Naughty girl!”

“Oh. Then I won’t bother doing that again.”

“But you’re nicest when you’re naughtiest.” He kissed me, despite the semen on my face, and was plunging in and out. Oooh that felt good. He kept doing this and I realized I was lifting my hips to match him. Finally I felt him tense and I did too. Wow. Together.

“Have we messed up the sheets?” I asked.

“There’s a towel. And here’s a couple of Kleenex. I wrapped the tampon in another.”

We made a half-hearted effort to clean up, then pulled up the sheets and lay together. Didn’t bother about PJ’s. Next thing I knew it was daybreak.

August 15, 1965

We slept in – actually decided not to clean up until we’d enjoyed ourselves again first with a cuddle and pet. We dallied over breakfast – there was a threat of rain today – but we were being lazy anyway. Peter had talked of Zandvoort or Scheveningen, but Katwijk was much closer and accessible on our bikes. We set off about 10:30 and found ourselves there well before noon, even though we stopped frequently to simply enjoy the views.

“Peter. I didn’t bring my bathing suit – didn’t even pack one.” I complained when we got to the beach at Katwijk.

“Me neither. Though I didn’t think we’d go in the sea. Too cold! But we can watch how the Dutch enjoy the seaside. And we’re both wearing shorts, so we could paddle if we wanted.”

“Should have put in a towel for our feet.” I said.

“Ta da!” Peter replied, pulling out a small towel. “I borrowed this from our bathroom and put it in my pack.”

Actually we didn’t go in the water, but decided to follow the cycle promenade to Noordwijk. We spent some time people watching along the way, but around 1:30 decided to find a cafe for some lunch and a needed toilet. We both had fish of some sort – me some sort of sole or plaice called zeetongue, and Peter some shrimps – garnalen.

The food was straightforward and honest, but it was seaside food. Definitely not gourmet. We washed it down with Spa Rot – sparkling water – then decided to head back to Leiden to a little laundromat we’d seen. Our last laundry was done in Gorinchem over a week ago.

August 19, 1965

The train from Eindhoven to Maastricht was working its way east and south. Peter was trying to read the Herald-Tribune. There’d been riots in Los Angeles, in a suburb called Watts. I’d never heard of that place before, but then the places the negroes lived weren’t generally considered by news media to be worth mentioning. A century after the Civil War, and the same problems were still around. Indonesia was making noises – well Sukarno was. And Viet Nam was still a place of a nasty little war that the Americans seemed to be getting more and more involved with. I hope they don’t drag Canada into that. There’s supposedly a communist subversion going on, but Chandra – the Indian grad student I’d got to know – said he thought the main issue was unifying the

Vietnamese under one government. It's hard to know from here.

We were on our way to Liege to visit Tante Joke and Om Georges. I haven't seen them since I was 3. Wow. I knew from Mom that they had a daughter Johanna born in early 1938 – so she'd be 27 now, and son Etienne born in late 1939, just after the War started, so he'd be 25. But I knew very little about them. Not even what Georges did for a living, and nothing about how they'd survived in wartime.

“Are we getting near Maastricht?” I asked.

Peter looked at his watch. “Should be there in 5 minutes. Better get our stuff ready so we can move the bikes if we need to change platform.”

The train pulled into the station and we lifted the bikes out of the compartment where we were allowed to have them. It wasn't too difficult as the doors there were wider. Then we found a station agent and in a mixture of Dutch and English and French – it was a Belgian train we would be boarding – we found where we had to go. There would probably be passport formalities.

We'd written to Joke and Georges and told them when we planned to arrive, and had included a recent photo (actually taken to mark our engagement, though Peter now was sporting a short beard), and they were waiting for us. While an older woman, Joke reminded me of Mom, and if I understood her in the welter of French and Flemish and a smattering of English (from Georges), she thought I looked like Mom too.

Anyway, it was clear they'd not understood properly that we had the bikes from Wil, so Joke drove home with

the luggage while Georges walked with us.

“Are you having a good, er... I know only the Flemish or French – huwelijksreis or Lune de Miel?”

“Honeymoon!” I said. “Yes. Excellent. And the bikes Wil lent us have let us see some places that would have not been possible otherwise.”

“That is good. You have not been back since you were an ... infant.”

“That’s right. You speak excellent English Uncle Georges.”

“I have had to learn. My work is as a metallurgist for FN Herstal, the gun manufacturers. We have offices in many places, but with NATO we need to communicate with Britain and Canada and the USA. When Martin married Clara, I spoke only French and the school version of Flemish.”

“Oh. So you aren’t from the Vlaamse area?”

“No. Joke and I are both traitors to our language groups. At home we speak mostly French, but we make sure we get some magazines in Dutch or Flemish. Joke gets her fashion ideas from Libelle. I sometimes get one or other of the Flemish newspapers to keep my skills. But now I tend to read more English, especially the scientific magazines. I particularly like New Scientist from the UK.”

“I like that too.” I said. “You know I’m studying physics. And Peter is doing his graduate work in epidemiology.”

“Excellent. Excellent.”

We were walking up a hill. Glad we weren’t trying to ride. Peter jumped in.

“Tell us about your daughter and son. Anna was too

young when she left to remember them as much as Tom and Eef who she saw more often.”

“Johanna was born about the time when the Anschluss took place. March 12 in fact. And my guess is that Etienne was conceived on the day Chamberlain said “Peace for our time”, that is September 30. He was born July 4, 1939. So they had a difficult early childhood.”

“How did you manage?” I asked.

“At first we were busy preparing to fight the Germans. The invasion, when it came, was so quick that we didn’t have much time to be scared or to run. The Germans took out Fort Eben-Emael to the north on May 10 using special commandos with shaped charges to destroy the gun emplacements. Then they picked off the ring of forts around Liege and the Belgian Army withdrew on May 12.

After that, the Germans quickly took over FN Herstal. They wanted us to keep up production, and they put in Wehrmacht officers in key places to manage the factories. One colleague tried to sabotage a design – or else he made a very stupid mistake in the drawings – and he was summarily shot in front of us. I had two small children, and I am not ashamed to say I kept my head down. I tried not to be helpful to the Nazis, but I did nothing to upset them.

In 1944, I did manage to pass on some production information to a man I knew who I believe was in the resistance. I memorized the figures and told them to him in a café toilet with water running to cover our conversation.

We were liberated in early September, but then the Germans used flying bombs and the V2 rocket to attack

us. Fortunately Joke and I and the children were not hurt by any of that. In fact, the labour riots on the Epiphany holy day in 1961 injured 75 people. Johanna and Etienne were quite near and helped a couple of people who were hurt get to the hospital. I think that was closer to danger than during the War. I suppose we were very lucky.”

As Georges talked, I wondered if Mom had known any of this. Possibly a little, but if she knew all of this, I’m sure she would have told me. Later I asked Georges whether they’d seen Mom and Luc during the War, and he said “no”, adding that they were careful to put nothing in letters, nor say anything on the telephone, though Mom didn’t have a phone at home, and though Joke’s husband as a doctor had one, I’ve no idea if calls could be placed across the front lines.

August 24, 1965

Tuesday

The Sabena jet was airborne. The honeymoon was essentially over, but I hope the feeling of a honeymoon will last. We’d spent the last couple of nights in Brussels, but on our last full day had gone to Ghent to return the bikes. Pity there’s been a bit of rain these last few days. However, in Ghent we had a wonderful lunch with Wil and Joop and gave them a bottle of Advocaat as a thank-you for lending us the bikes. They’d let us do several things we’d not otherwise be able to do.

On the first evening, we’d even made it to what we think was the restaurant where Dad and Mum had their first dinner out together – their first date. Dad had told

me it had been called Moules Maheu and described where it was. We found what we thought was the place, but it had a different name. We asked a couple of people on the street if they knew the name, but got rather blank responses. We tried the restaurant we thought was the one, but it fell far short of what I'd had in mind. Mind you, the original owners would be of retirement age.

Today we checked out of the hotel after breakfast and a last walkabout in Brussels and took the train to Melsbroek. Hmm. Dad was here for a while with 247 Squadron. I'd almost forgotten. Today, as it's near the end of summer, the airport was busy and our airplane is full. We have a window and a middle seat – Peter has been gallant and let me have the window, but there's not been much to see since we climbed into the clouds. I've offered to change seats with Peter, as I intend to sleep a bit, but he said he's thinking the same if he can manage it. We did get a Montreal newspaper from yesterday to read, courtesy of the stewardess. Something to pass the time.

* * *

In that strange late afternoon that seems to go on for too long – about 5 hours too long due to the time lag – we finally got to Ottawa on the Viscount from Montreal. Didn't have to wait long for the steps to be pushed up to the door, and Dad and Michelle were waiting for us.

"Good trip?" Dad asked as I gave him a hug, then hugged Michelle, as always surprised by how small she is. Maybe I'll never quite get used to that.

"Excellent. When we get a chance, I'll tell you all the

details.” I said.

There was a general chatter all at once while we got the luggage and headed to the parked car.

“Robert gave us the keys, and here they are.” Dad said. “We thought we’d take you there now, give you an hour or so to sort yourselves out, then come get you for a light supper, but bring you back for an early night. Does that work? Or do you just want to tumble into bed?”

“We both slept on the plane.” Peter volunteered. “If Anna is up for it, that sounds like a good idea.”

That’s what we did, though we both ended up rather fading as soon as supper was over. Dad took us “home” – our apartment, our home. That was a new feeling, but the curling up together soon after we got in was becoming familiar and even sort of necessary.

“We’re home safe and sound.” I whispered in Peter’s ear.

“Yes. I’m thankful for that. No upsets or thefts or worse.” Peter replied.

“I love you husband.”

“You too, wife.”

August 25, 1965

Peter was still dozing at 9 o’clock. Strange – we should have been awake in the middle of the night given the time change. I’d been up for about an hour. Had my shower and was poking around in the kitchen, trying to decide where to put things. I’d have to thank Michelle – I assume it was her – for having the bed made for us. Or maybe it was Nicole. It would have been a big nui-

sance to have to find the sheets in one of those boxes that were everywhere. We'd packed up before going on honeymoon. Robert and Stephane had given us a practical wedding present – we'd suggested this – of getting the apartment keys and moving our stuff in, but we told them to just leave the boxes and we'd sort them out. Couldn't have them putting my knickers and bras away! Funny, Peter and I mostly used the British slang “knickers” rather than “panties”.

I walked into the living room. There was a pile of stuff – wedding presents! Kind of forgot those while on honeymoon. Hope they weren't too mixed up or we'd have trouble thanking people. Maybe the easiest way was to start a list. I found a notepad I'd taken with me to Europe – where I'd find my regular stuff I'd no idea.

I'd got through most of the presents, and they fortunately had labels most of the time, so I knew who to thank. There were a couple of items without labels, but I remembered who'd given them (and in one case wished they'd left it at home! A hideous vase.) Dad and Michelle had given us a small but nice set of good dishes, and Dad had included a Belgian tablecloth with lace edging. I'd have to be careful to protect that, maybe with one of those awful plastic covers. Still, the lace was likely expensive. The Sinclairs complemented the dishes with a silver cutlery set. And we got a selection of odds and ends of “nice” things. Friends had asked, and I'd made sure we got some bed linen and blankets for a double bed, and we'd got the bed Dad and Michelle didn't need, but tossed the mattress and got a new one. Robert and Stephane had arranged to get it all in and set up.

Hmm. Probably was Nicole who made the bed.

Penny and Joe had given us a toaster. Des and Sharon – I'd told them they needn't bother with a present – gave us a nice tray with place mats. Clearly all home-made. Grandma and Grandad gave us some nice wine glasses.

Of course, we were almost paupers in regards to ordinary, every-day knives and forks and dishes and cups. And we'd need some stuff to cook with. For the moment we had a motley selection of hand-me-downs from the Tremblay and Sinclair houses. It would do for now, but we'd want to acquire better tools as we decided what we used regularly.

"What'cha doin'?" my better half asked.

"Making a list of who gave us what so we can write thank-you notes."

"There should be a box of special cards. I think I arranged to get them printed with the invitations to our wedding. We'll still have to write a note, but the front says "Thank You" and there are appropriate envelopes."

"Probably could have just got some blank cards cheaper, but if we have them, we'd better find them." I said.

I was dressed, but Peter seemed intent on finding the cards and started rummaging around while still in his PJs. I went in the kitchen and found that there was a kettle on the stove so I filled it and looked for tea. Wow. Someone had put milk in the fridge, there were four mugs – unmatched but who cares – and a few small plates and bowls in a cupboard along with some tea bags and instant coffee and sugar. Neither of us used sugar, but I suppose guests might. Spoon? Oh, a few odds and ends in the small drawer beside the stove. So I made

some tea in the mugs – we’d need a teapot, or need to find it if we already had one.

There’d been some profanity emanating from the living room, then a “Found them!” and Peter came in the kitchen grinning with a box.

“Put them on top of the desk and go get dressed. I’m making tea and we’ll see what we can find for breakfast.”

“Oooh. Our first breakfast in our new apartment. In fact our first meal together here.

Oh. You had to make the tea in the mugs. Do we have a teapot?” Peter asked.

“Not sure. But we should get one.”

“Yeah. Mum always gets a bit upset when people use teabags in the cup. When we left Scotland, teabags were almost non-existent there, but rather common here. She eventually compromised to using teabags in the pot, and I think not having to use a strainer for the leaves is actually OK with her. But there’s still something of a cultural objection.”

“Better get showered or it’ll be cold.”

After I heard the shower run, then shut off, I saw a naked figure cross into the bedroom.

“Bad form if we have house-guests.” I yelled out.

“You’re just worried I’ll get waylaid by pretty female house-guests.” came the retort.

We found that there was a box of Cheereo’s so we had some for our breakfast. We’d have to go shopping. Dad had said one of the cars would be at home – his home! – and we could use it. He’d figured out there’d be things we needed to do. We made a list and Peter said he’d do laundry and start the Thank You’s if I went and got

the car and shopped. We collaborated on the shopping list and checked how much money we had between us. I'd have to go to the bank or cash one of the traveller's cheques we had left. At least we'd managed to spend all the Belgian francs bar a few cents. An interesting problem in trying to get to zero with airport shops and restaurants. I think one of the math profs talked about the knapsack problem. Perhaps spending all the change was a variant on that theme.

It felt odd to be doing all the mundane things. But clearly it was what a married couple had to do. Honey-moon's over, Anna!

September 5, 1965

Sunday of the Labour Day weekend.

We were at the cottage. In my mind, Michelle's cottage, but I must get used to saying "the cottage".

Peter and Andrea were out on the Sunfish. It wasn't cold, but not a hot day by any means, and plenty of wind. Dad was off gathering firewood. We could hear him occasionally sawing with the bow saw or chopping with the axe.

I had the pair of field glasses that were kept on the veranda and was watching Peter and Andrea.

"Andrea's doing the sailing. Peter's just a passenger except for helping to keep the boat balanced. The breeze is moving them quite fast. Oh. There's a gust – they nearly went over. Now they're really flying."

Michelle commented "I owe that Sunfish and a fortuitous gust quite a lot."

“How so?” My curiosity was now turned up to full. I’d suspected something for a long time.

“Ooops. Maybe I let that slip out.”

“Must be juicy!” I teased.

“Bits of the story, yes. I’ll leave most of that to your imagination.”

“So ...” I pushed.

“Well. You remember the August long weekend over a year ago. You and Fred went to Quebec – maybe I should be diplomatic about that around Peter.”

“Shouting about it would be embarrassing. But Peter knows Fred and I were pretty close for a while. Anyway, about the Sunfish?”

“Martin was showing me how to sail, and we ... I think the term is gybed. But not on purpose, and so I went in the water. Martin mostly kept dry.”

“Anyway. We decided that was enough for one day and got the boat upright and carefully sailed in, got things more or less put away and came inside to get changed. I had on a t-shirt and a simple pair of shorts, and as you know, I don’t really need a bra, but when I took off my life jacket I was still wet, so the t-shirt was more or less transparent and Martin let out a whistle and a comment about the cottage having nice views.

At that time, my self-esteem was pretty fragile. I’d had a nasty shock with Bryan, the gonorrhoea and the hysterectomy. And I’d told Martin I’d like company, but anything else was out of the question. So I lost my temper and threw a real tantrum. Told him I’d warned him about no sex, and how could he dare make a comment like that. I was so mad I told him he might as well have

a good look at my non-existent tits and my big hysterectomy scar and took everything off and threw it at him.”

“Oh boy. You were mad at him!” I tried to be sympathetic but was struggling not to break out laughing.

“It’s OK to laugh. I do now. But then I thought my status as a woman was gone with the operation and my already tiny bust.

But Martin just said he still saw a very pretty woman wearing nothing but a scowl, and having a somewhat large red scar that would fade in time. Then he asked me how I knew I wasn’t a real woman, then proceeded to help me discover what was possible for me. And that part I’ll leave out.”

“I’ve enough experience to fill in those blanks. But why did you feel you weren’t a woman. Even though I’m female, I thought right away that you were very attractive.”

“Well. The doctors do what they can to save your life, but they don’t tell you how to get on with it. I knew they took out the uterus and ovaries and cervix. I thought they’d taken most of my vagina too. But Martin asked some questions and challenged my good Catholic upbringing so that I was able to use a finger and find out there was at least something left, and Martin showed me a good deal more of the possibilities. The outcome was rather a shock. An enjoyable shock, and in fact a rather new experience, better than I’d had with Bryan. That, of course, gave me quite a bit of angst with my Catholic beliefs, but I’m comfortable now that the Church failed me and not the other way round.”

“Michelle. I’m really glad it worked out. And I can

see why you say the Sunfish and a gust of wind were so important. I'll smile, and I'll laugh with you, but I'm sure you know I'm so glad things turned out OK."

"For me, more than OK. And I think for Andrea too. Shall we make a start on some supper. They'll all be ravenous when they get in."

September 6, 1965

I woke about 7:30. Peter was ... snoring! He was on his back. Well, I could try to turn him on his side. No. I'll let him sleep. Suppose I should look on the bright side and tell myself it was obvious where he was. I didn't have to worry he was somewhere else.

Somehow, I didn't quite feel that I was on the bright side this morning. We'd had a lovely day at the cottage and a great meal "en famille", though there'd been a smattering of rain. It wasn't just that the honeymoon was over. I don't mean the nice feelings and the ... well, bedroom fun. Just that now we had to make sure the rent was paid, the garbage was out. All that stuff that says you aren't on vacation or honeymoon any more.

And tomorrow I'd be back at university for my fourth year. I always like the fresh start, but somehow I felt unsettled. Was it the news of the Indians and Pakistanis at war over Kashmir? That was unhappy and troubling, but no different than so many other conflicts. Albert Schweitzer's passing. He lived a long and productive life, so his death is a passing, not a tragedy.

On the whole, I think it's that a lot has changed in my life. And I'll have to sort out the bureaucratic things

– change of address, new schedule, ... Oh. And I've got a new name. Or have I?

Peter and I had talked about this. I think I'd like to keep Anna Tremblay for my "professional" life, but I'll use Anna Sinclair for everything else. Actually, in Ninove, Julia told me Belgian law requires women to keep their maiden name for legal purposes, and that there are similar laws in other European countries. Hmm. Maybe I'll keep my name for legal documents, but use Sinclair in everyday life.

I eased out of bed and went to the toilet. Was about to shut the bathroom door before sitting on the porcelain throne when I realized we'd hung our clothes on a hook arrangement that fitted over the top of the door. The stuff on the hooks was partly in the way of the door closing. Was not bothering to close the bathroom door another change? I guess some married couples never see each other on the pot. It's not a big deal for me, and Peter seems quite happy to leave the door open. But I can imagine some people – especially women – feeling uncomfortable.

Then I boiled a kettle. Took my Pill while waiting. As I poured water into the teapot – we found we had one in one of the boxes – the snoring stopped abruptly and Peter stirred.

"You up already?" came the sleepy voice.

"Well, making some tea and trying to figure out who I am."

"Since you had only one glass of wine last night, and you didn't seem sloshed when Stephane and Nicole drove us home, I'm thinking that real life is rearing its ugly

head.”

“Yes. Thinking of all the changes since the Spring.”

“You want to go back to living with your Dad and Michelle?” Peter was teasing.

“Only if you want to lose your pussy privileges.” I shot back.

I poured the tea and added milk. Both of us could drink tea black. Well, as long as it wasn’t strong. But we both preferred it with a little milk in the British – I almost said English – fashion. We had a small tray, so I put the mugs on that along with the pack of digestive cookies.

As I came into the bedroom, I saw Peter standing in front of the toilet peeing.

“Don’t miss, or you’ll have to clean up.”

“I only miss if there’s an irresistible distraction.”

“I wonder what that might be.” I said, lifting my nightie so he could see I was naked underneath.

We sat up in bed drinking our tea quietly. I sort of felt we should be talking, but the silence felt ... OK. After a few minutes, Peter said

“So was that show an indication you wanted to fool around?”

“Oh no. Definitely not!” I replied firmly, trying to hide my smirk. Guess I hid it well, because Peter looked disappointed and followed on

“Guess it’s getting to be old hat.”

I answered more seriously

“No. Just I think it’s too important to be called fooling around. It’s pretty important to me. I want it to be fun and also funny, but never ... well, trivialized.”

Peter kissed me lightly on the lips.

“And I agree with you on that.

So should I remove these obstacles?” He was busy trying to lift the bottom of my nightie, but as I was sitting on it, he wasn’t making much progress.

“Actually, I’m in the mood for a full-on tongue lashing, but maybe we should do some clearing and organizing and then have a bath together.”

“Do you think we can wait for that?”

“I can, can you?”

“Actually, yes. Though I almost can’t believe I just said that.

I’ve been thinking we should get our bikes over from your Dad’s place. There’s enough space to store them under the stairs, but I thought I’d fasten a bracket to the wall so they could be locked up. The outside door doesn’t have a lock, and anyone could run off with them otherwise, even though they’re not very valuable.”

“Good idea. Do you have the bracket?”

“Actually two ring bolts and a two-by-four. They’re at your Dad’s. He and I talked about it back in June and put them aside. Do you have a key for the house? They’re staying at the cottage ’till tonight.”

“Yes. We can go as soon as you want.

Oh. Do you think Mr. Carruthers would be upset if you attach something to the wall?” Carruthers was the owner and our landlord.

“We could phone and ask, but there are already some holes where someone put something before. I’ll cover those up with the bracket I make.”

“OK. Let’s go soon. But can I have a nice kiss and

maybe stroke my breasts first?”

“How could I refuse that invitation?”

* * *

We were at Dad’s house before 8:45. The city was really quiet with the Labour Day holiday. We quickly found the materials for the bracket and an electric drill and an extension – something to put on our list of ”to get” items for ourselves. We were now a ”household” in actual as well as statistical terms. We put a note on the kitchen table that we had the drill and would bring it back when next over. Then we pumped the bike tires and locked up. We were back at the apartment by 10, and Peter set to work right away and had the bracket installed by 10:30.

“I think we need to get a longer chain for your lock, Anna. It can be made to work, but it’s awkward. Pity we didn’t bring back the one from Belgium, but it would have been a bit heavy.”

“There’s a magnet on the fridge with a sheet under it for things to get. We can use it for groceries and other items. Also messages to each other. Maybe watch for another magnet, as I can see that we’ll want to have more than one sheet.” I added.

Peter washed up while I made us another cup of tea.

“Want to get ready for tomorrow, or have fun in the tub first?” I asked.

“What’s your preference?”

“It would be nice to have everything we have to do for the upcoming week out the way, as well as any prepara-

tions for Marcia and Bill. Then I can be as wicked with you as I like,” I prompted.

“Well, you’re especially nice when you’re really wicked. What time are Bill and Marcia coming?”

“I suggested 4 to Marcia and said we’d walk over to the canal for a bit, then have supper. I said we’d do salad and dessert, and they’re bringing a quiche which we can have cold or else warm up. They also said they’d bring wine to toast our new place. It won’t be a late night, as everyone has to be at work or school in the morning.”

“Well. 20 minutes for work, and five hours for fun!”

I snorted derisively. But then I worked rather hard to ensure we had, if not five hours, at least quite a lot of time for enjoying ourselves.

September 21, 1965

Dad and I were having dinner together. Peter was going to an evening scientific meeting of epidemiologists and statisticians. Michelle was away at meetings in Toronto with some Ontario government people who were discussing some enhanced maps for natural resources and wildlife management. Andrea was with her Dad and Rachel. So I thought it might be a good chance for Dad and I to catch up.

The day was hot. Stinking hot. The high had been 85. As soon as I got home I opened windows. Peter had fixed up some of the screens, but the bugs were more or less gone thankfully. Then I took a shower and put on shorts and a halter top.

Dad showed up around 6. The news was just coming

on the radio. Seems like the Soviets are trying to get the Indians and Pakistanis to stop fighting and talk. Good luck to them, though one always suspects the Russians are doing it to promote their own agenda. Would the Americans do that? I suspect yes.

"I brought along an electric fan. Figured you'd need it and we have several since we combined households," Dad said as he brought in the welcome device and put it in one of the windows.

"And you even brought an extension cord! Hope you'll let us buy you a new one. The fan really is welcome today."

"Sure. Cords are always useful.

What's for dinner?" he asked.

"I'd intended to try an approximation of boerenkool met worst. Though I should have written down Mum's recipe."

"Did she have one?" I think Dad was making fun of me.

"I don't think she did. I never saw her reading anything when she made those meals from the low countries. Did you, Dad?"

"Never. She had them in her head, I think."

"Well, I actually saw some kale in the market the other day and bought it. It's not very common here. And I saw some speciality sausages at Steinberg's, but I've no idea if they're the right sort. The label said bratwurst.

But it's too hot for all that, so I've made both garden and potato salad and I'll open a tin of salmon. Hope that isn't too lazy."

"It sounds perfect. Besides, you're my daughter, so

it'll be delicious."

"Making sure you get invited again, eh?"

"Of course!" Dad agreed, and we both laughed.

I offered a beer, and he accepted and sat at the table while I put out the salads and opened the fish into a bowl. I rinsed the can well in hot water. In this heat it would make the garbage smell otherwise, and I didn't want raccoons or skunks getting an invitation to mess things up.

"Hope we don't get storms out of this heat." I said.

"Hurricane Betsy did a lot of damage down south."

"Apparently record cost. Over a billion dollars," Dad replied. "Almost as bad as V1's and V2's."

"Yes. We learned on our honeymoon that a lot were directed at Antwerp and Brussels. The English literature talks mostly about London."

"Yes. But not all of those fell in London. When I was staying once with David and Esther Rosenthal I met a fellow who'd been in a searchlight battery in Kent. Actually near a pub my RAF buddy Harry took me to. Anyway, this guy came to visit Esther for some reason, and they spoke some yiddish so I thought he was Jewish, but it turned out he learned yiddish the way I learned French. That is, from the kids he played with in East London, even though he was Catholic.

He said one time in late summer 1944 – on a Sunday apparently – they were on pay parade, or perhaps it was church parade or both. In the field where they had their tents and searchlight, and they heard the bark of a V1. He said everyone looked around and couldn't see it, but it was very loud.

Now Kent has lots of hedgerows, and they are often both sides of the roads. All of a sudden they see the V1 fly by the gate, which was the only opening to the road in the hedge. And it was at about three feet of altitude. He said everyone knew the road curved up to the pub – I remember it was called the Blue Boys and it had been damaged by another V1, but that one was shot down. So they all hit the deck and there was an almighty bang and further up the road there was now a big opening in the hedge. Nobody got hurt, so it became a funny story.”

I’d been putting the salads and salmon on the table – I’d already put out plates and cutlery – and we were serving ourselves as we talked about this. Without talking any more we dug in. Actually said nothing until we’d cleared our plates.

“More?” I asked.

“No. I think that’ll do. In this heat the appetite isn’t really as strong. I should have changed into something closer to what you’re wearing.” Dad was still in the slacks and shirt that he’d likely worn to work.

“At least you lost the tie.” I countered.

“I often wonder why we wear ties to work in the lab. They can be a danger if we’re doing stuff with machinery.”

“Fashions change. We don’t wear ties to the beach any more.”

“Thank God for that. I was at Hastings or Eastbourne – forget which – in 1946 and there were men on the beach in suits and ties with their pant-legs rolled up paddling in the sea. I may even have photos somewhere. Same trip that I went to that pub – the Blue Boys – I mentioned

earlier.”

“Talking of photos. I was thinking I should get some copies of selected ones so I have my own collection.”

“That’s a good idea. I was talking to someone the other day at work whose parents were travelling in the States to visit family. They had all their albums to show the relatives, but the car got stolen and when it was found all wrecked the albums and their other stuff were missing. And they didn’t have the negatives.”

“Oh. That’s awful!” I said. “It actually makes me feel a bit sick to my stomach to think of losing all the pictures from when I was a kid with Mom.”

“Yes. There’s even a very few from the farm in Belgium. You wouldn’t remember it ...”

“Yes I would. I was there this summer, so I have new memories and the photos would be a nice link.”

“Well. We’d better start to put some things together. For Andrea too, even if it’s a bit awkward for Michelle,” Dad said.

“Does she still have a big chip on her shoulder about Bryan?” I asked.

“I’m not sure. Perhaps it comes and goes. I know my own feelings do.”

“You mean regarding Michelle?” I asked, not sure what Dad meant.

“I’m not sure how to put it. My feelings for Michelle get – I think – stronger or at least deeper every day. It’s more that sometimes I feel that by caring and loving Michelle I may be somehow being unfaithful to Mum’s memory. I know that’s silly. But feelings don’t have to make any sense to still be ... well ... unsettling or out of

place.”

“Does Michelle know that you have these thoughts? It might upset her, but on the other hand, she may want you to share your thinking. From what you’ve said, you do love her more each day.”

“We haven’t said a lot, but there’ve been a couple of times when both of us have shared odds and ends. But I should make sure she knows, if only so there’s no silly misunderstandings. I’ve no regrets about marrying her.

Are you still OK with her, with me?”

“More than OK. Like I’ve said before, she isn’t Mum, but I really like her and care about her. And, like you, there are moments when I really miss Mum. When those moments come, unless they’re in the middle of something critical like an exam or driving in traffic, I’d like to take some time to allow the memories to flower and to think things through, even though it can be a bit painful.”

“Do you mind if I tell Michelle how you put that? It’s the way I feel, yet if I’m with Michelle, I get sort of flustered and try to push the memories away.”

“Sure. If you share it with her, she will be aware that I get those moments too. Perhaps they can be a chance for understanding.

Did you want some dessert? I thought of banana and ice cream. Sort of poor man’s banana split.”

“That’ll do fine. Got to watch the waistline. I’m a pound or so up on what I weighed a year ago, but my blood pressure’s more or less back to normal.”

“Oh. Was it up?”

“About the time Sharon was staying with us, Jim told me to come in for a physical. He said losing a spouse

is stressful. That's an understatement! Anyway, the figures showed borderline hypertension. But I guess I started walking a bit more – probably back and forth to Michelle's old house. And now I think Michelle is aware of using as little salt as possible and we try to make our meals so we don't go overboard."

I jumped in with "Regular bedroom fun probably helps too."

Dad snorted and went red in the face, then said "I suppose that too, but perhaps it isn't quite a subject for father and daughter."

"Sorry. I couldn't resist. And you could have retorted with something along the line of "voice of experience", which would be true. But I think it's more the sense of comfort and assurance of the lump in the bed, even if the lump is trying to steal all the bedclothes."

Dad laughed, but didn't say anything, for which I was a bit relieved. I'd said a bit more than I intended, though I wasn't really unhappy to have told him what I did about those sentiments. I got up and prepared the banana and ice cream – chocolate of course – and we ate in silence. I'd put on a kettle and I made tea. As I went about the preparation, I said

"You know I don't think we've talked about your work for the better part of a year with both of us getting married and reorganizing our households."

"Well, I've sort of continued some of the work on the microwave antennas, but that is likely coming to an end, at least for the types of antennas I was studying."

"Does that mean you may start a new line of research?"

“I think so. At least a change in the underlying technology. Right now there’s a lot of work going on to see how to use solid-state devices rather than big vacuum tubes. Those tubes use high voltages and can sometime arc. But the solid state devices don’t yet have the power output. And they both need lots of cooling for high-power transmission.”

“Are you thinking of broadcast or radar applications?”

“My preference would be to work on the general issues rather than specific ones. But there’s really a whole other aspect I should possibly think about.”

“Oh. What’s that?”

“Well, just as Mum got sick – or we knew she was sick – I was approached and asked if I wanted to be a director of a division to do some work on devices that could be tuned quickly. For example, to be able to set up small radio or TV stations without having to plan ahead for a specific frequency. Or, in the military sphere, to quickly tune in different frequencies or jump between them to make interception more difficult. On the transmission side, to jam the other guy’s radar.”

“But did they want you to work on it, or to be the manager?” I asked.

“That’s really what I wondered. I like actually doing hands-on work. On the other hand, being the boss could give you a chance to do something bigger or more important. But in the event, Mum discovered the tumour and I didn’t want to be starting something that could demand all my time and energy when she needed me, and that’s what I told the people who asked.”

“Did they actually set up the division?”

“Sort of. But it’s been a bit of a damp squib, to use the British expression. They brought in some American from the electronics industry, but he threw his weight around. Possibly that’s how things are in the industrial sector. He ended up with a couple of grievances from people who’d been government scientists for a while. Then it turned out that when he’d been there eighteen months, he’d not done any of the meetings and discussions with staff to go over their work. This got him in some hot water with the folk who run staff matters, and he suddenly resigned and went to some new outfit that’s starting up near Chicago. Place called Quincy where they do a lot of high power transmission stuff.”

“Does that mean there’s a vacancy now?”

“One of the staff people has been acting director for several months.”

“That makes for an awkward situation for whoever gets appointed if the acting guy doesn’t get the job,” I commented.

“You’ve a good sense of these things. That’s my view as well.”

“So you’ve not got a plan just yet?” I asked.

“No. Not really. The possibilities seem to be

- more or less stay put, though I’d probably be assigned to that group or a similar kind of group in another area, which would mean some adapting to a new subject;
- consider the directorship, though it really wouldn’t give enough power or resources to do a great deal I fear;
- take a look at the universities. I’ve had some discussions about joining either Ottawa or Carleton in some sort of engineering. But I’ve never taught, and I’m not

sure my work is really classed as research by some of the purists.”

“Do you think the work in the new group would be interesting?”

“Yes, I do. I just don’t want to be flying a desk and trying to settle personality disputes. In fact I’ve a few ideas that I think could be worth testing and could have important practical consequences, even some industrial value.”

“Do you know any of the people in the group?”

“Actually know most of them as acquaintances. We sometimes meet over coffee or lunch or at seminars, so they’re not strangers.”

“Is the job actually open still? I thought they had to advertise them.”

I don’t know where I’d heard that. Dad’s response suggested my information wasn’t too far off base.

“It got posted again last week. Closes at the end of the first week of October.”

“Maybe you should ask some of the people, including the acting guy, if your application would be welcome. They probably won’t say ”no” to your face, but if they are lukewarm, it probably means you should think of something else.”

“I wouldn’t have thought to ask my daughter for career advice, but what you say makes sense. Somehow I think Schneider – the acting Director – is looking towards early retirement in a couple of years, and I don’t think he likes the promoting of ideas and haggling for money that’s needed. He’s done some good work over the years, and I think he’d be good to work with if he didn’t feel someone

had bumped him out of a position he wanted. I suppose it can't hurt to talk to him and some of the others and check the way the wind is blowing."

"Good luck with that, Dad. Let me know how it turns out."

"I will.

What about your own plans?" he countered.

"I'm thinking. Not quite ready to talk about my thoughts yet. Still trying to get the ducks to stop running around randomly and line up. But I'll come and talk to you when I get a bit more organized. Just now the new academic year and the new living arrangements are demanding a lot of attention. Not in a bad way, but still keeping my mind full of other things."

"Hardly surprising. Earlier this year I found I felt out of breath with so much changing. As you say, not in a bad way. But still rather more busy than ideal for getting some chance to work out where the equilibrium point should be."

That was an odd, but surprisingly apt, way of expressing how much I needed thinking time to digest all the changes that had happened. Good ol' Dad. Well, not old, but definitely good.

September 30, 1965

I'd got home about 5:15. It had been a pretty boring day of classes, and I'd been in a bad mood because Peter and I had argued over how much chocolate hail – chocolate hagelslag – to put on the toast. I said it should be sparing, but Peter wanted no bread showing. Stupid ar-

gument. The more minor the issue, the bigger the fight. We could easily resolve it – one person puts on the hagel-slag and the other gets to choose the piece.

Anyway, I started putting some things together for dinner, but Peter didn't come, so everything is waiting to cook.

6:30 passed. I went in the bedroom, almost as if I were going to find him there. Somehow my eyes fell on Zelda, the doll Dad had brought to Belgium for me in 1947. I don't know how I came to name her Zelda. Maybe Mom suggested the name. I'd looked after her. When we came to Canada, we'd packed her carefully in the suitcase. Some dolls are dragged everywhere. Some get left on buses and trains. Zelda was wrapped up in a special cloth. We inspected her every day on the trip. All through my childhood, she was loved and protected, but I didn't really play with her, even though I don't recall having any other doll.

7 p.m. I thought of phoning Dad or the Sinclairs, but Peter could just be having a beer with friends – I hoped male friends.

7:30 I heard someone on the stairs, then a loud knock.

I looked through the peephole and there was a policeman. He was holding his identification up so I could see. Oh no!

I opened the door a crack and said

“Yes”

“Mrs Sinclair.”

“That's me,” I replied after realizing that's who I am to other people.

“I'm afraid that there's been a hit-and-run and your

husband has been hurt. He's been taken to the Civic Hospital."

"Is he going to be all right?" I asked, panicky, as I opened the door wider.

"I don't know. I was sent to inform you and offer you a ride there if you need one. But perhaps you want to let someone know."

"Yes. Thank you for suggesting that. I was about to rush off with you, but I should make sure I take some things and health insurance documents, and let his parents know.

Can you sit down for a moment and I'll get ready?"

I quickly put away the food in the fridge. Wasn't thinking that straight, as I almost put the chicken in the cupboard. Then I phoned the Sinclairs. Robert answered, which was perhaps the best, and I gave him the information. He said he or his parents would likely meet me at the hospital. Indeed they were closer and could be there before me.

Then I went in the bedroom and found the file with our health insurance policy and put it in my purse – it was already in an envelope. Walked back to the kitchen, then backtracked to get some PJs in case Peter needed them.

"I'll just grab my jacket and we can go." I said.

We went out, and the policeman asked

"Did you lock up?"

"Oh. Thank you. No. I'm afraid I'm a bit distracted."

"You're doing better than most. Try to keep calm so you can do what you have to do, no matter what the situation. It's better in the long run than going to pieces

and letting others act for you. By the way, I'm Officer Johnson for future reference. Here's a card."

That was good advice he gave. I got in the cruiser. I took the card and put it in my purse after noting that it had Officer Johnson's name on it. Wonder what the neighbours will think seeing me getting in the police car. Right now I don't care.

As we drove, I asked if there were any information about the accident. Officer Johnson replied

"I only got a second hand report, but it seems a car jumped the sidewalk and hit your husband. The driver got out, looked, and then got back in and drove off. There's apparently at least one witness."

"Where did it happen?"

"Main Street, at the level of the Pretoria Bridge."

"Oh. He must have been walking home from the University. We come that way. And I heard sirens about 5:45."

"Quite close to home. I can tell you that hit-and-run when there are injuries is taken very seriously. We'll do our best to find the culprit."

"I just hope Peter will be all right."

When we got to the hospital, Officer Johnson dropped me at the Emergency entrance and said he would have to go back to his duties. I went inside and found an information desk and identified myself and why I was there.

"Please sit down over there, Mrs. Sinclair. The doctors are with your husband now and are assessing his injuries, but as soon as one of them is free I'll make sure you are informed what they know."

That didn't sound good. But there was not much to do but sit down. As I did, Jim Sinclair came in, looking very worried.

"Have they told you anything yet, Anna?" he omitted any other greeting.

"No. They are with him now and the duty nurse said they'd tell me what they knew as soon as possible."

"Do you know anything about what happened?"

I repeated what Officer Johnson had told me. Then I said

"I should phone Dad."

"Actually I asked Robert and Ellie to phone them and a few other people in case you were too preoccupied."

"I was. But I remembered to bring some pyjamas and the health insurance policy. I'm so grateful to you for insisting we get that set up before we married."

"One never wants to have to make use of it. Oh. Surely they know something by now."

At that moment, a figure emerged from the back in surgical gown and talked to the duty nurse, who pointed our way.

"Mrs. Sinclair – oh, and Dr. Sinclair, I hadn't realized that it was your son in our care – I'm Dr. McCormick. I'm afraid that your husband's condition is serious. It seems that the car that hit him broke his left leg and in falling he broke his right arm and also hit his head. It's the last injury that we are most worried about."

"Is there a skull fracture?" Jim asked, before I could get a word in.

"We're not sure, but we fear at least a serious concussion. He hasn't regained consciousness. There may be a

haemorrhage. We've just sent him down for x-rays, but if there's any sign of bleeding, we'd like your consent to operate right away."

Oh no. This was bad. I asked Jim

"You'd agree?"

"Unfortunately yes."

"The duty nurse has the forms. I'm going back to make sure the orderlies are very careful with your husband."

"Thank you, Dr. McCormick" I managed to get out.

I filled in and signed the forms for consent as well as admission. The nurse was very happy I'd the insurance information, and said that would save some fuss later. I was about to go and sit down again, when Jim said

"Nurse, I'm the patient's father, and also a physician. Can I leave my phone number and take my daughter-in-law home for a while? I'm sure there won't be anything we can do for some time, and my house is quite close."

"Certainly Dr. Sinclair. I knew you looked familiar. So sorry about your son. And your husband Mrs. Sinclair."

We left the address and phone number, and in a bit of a daze I went with Jim out to the parking lot – he was in the one for the doctors, of course. It only took about 5 minutes to their house near Carlingwood. When we got there, Ellie made a big fuss over me. I think I was kind of numb, and she may have been expressing her own upset by keeping active attending to my anxieties. Robert was very angry about the hit-and-run. I'll probably get angry later. Right now I'm not sure how I feel. I'm running on automatic.

“Do you want anything to eat or drink?” Ellie asked.

“A cup of tea please. I should probably eat something. I was waiting to cook supper with Peter. Had everything ready, but he didn’t come in. But I remembered to put the food in the fridge before the policeman took me to the hospital.”

Ellie made some sandwiches, which was about right. I surprised myself by eating more than I expected. Robert had phoned Dad. I would have called, but we wanted to keep the line clear. I did phone the police station and left a message that I was with the Sinclairs. It had been decided I’d stay the night with them, and we’d decide what to do when the situation became clearer. That made sense.

Jim told us he thought that the surgeons would try to drain any bleeding and also try to minimize any brain swelling. Peter probably would not regain consciousness for a while – at the earliest in the morning, but possibly some days hence. It could be comforting for someone to be there when he did wake up, and we should probably arrange shifts so there would always be someone available. On the other hand, we’d be a nuisance and probably waste a lot of energy if several of us were there. We decided that if we were allowed to see him, we’d all go, but only Ellie would stay for tonight, and I would relieve her in the morning at about 6. Robert offered to be my chauffeur.

About 8:30, Dr. McCormick called and asked for me.

“The situation is not quite as bad as we feared, but it is still bad. There was a haemorrhage just under the skull which we drained. We’ve set the fractures. They

were fairly clean breaks fortunately, but he'll be out of action for a while for any sports. We are still concerned about possible brain damage and swelling, and I doubt he'll be conscious for a while."

"Can we see him? Wait with him in case he wakes up?" I asked. My voice sounded small and far away.

"Yes. But he's in a special unit for intensive care. So only one at a time."

"Dr. Sinclair suggested we arrange shifts so there was someone familiar present if he regained consciousness."

"Yes. That will be fine. Talk to the head nurse so they know what is happening. Sorry. I have to run now with another emergency."

I thanked him, but heard the click as I was doing so.

October 1, 1965

I'd been at the hospital by Peter's bed for a couple of hours by 9:30 a.m. Last night Robert and I took Ellie here around 11, then went to the apartment to get me some clothes so I can stay at the Sinclairs. Robert suggested I might want some of my books and notes, since I'd be sitting doing not very much until Peter woke up. The duty nurse suggested we switch over at 7:30 so the nursing shift change would be finished and we wouldn't add confusion. I was just wondering whether to go for a coffee when one of the nurses looked in, checked an intravenous line and some instruments.

"No change I guess?" she asked.

"No. He's been very still. I was hoping he'd be awake by now."

“Hard to predict, but it’s fairly likely he’ll show some indications today, but may not be very coherent. You should make sure you keep OK yourself. Take regular breaks.”

“Can you tell me where to get coffee or tea?”

“Sure.” and she explained where to go to find the cafeteria.

* * *

I took the opportunity while in the cafeteria to use the pay-phone and call Nicole, Dad’s secretary (and also his sister-in-law and my step-aunt and ... oh, complicated!).

“Can I ask a big favour?”

“Sure. What is it?”

“Can you phone the Physics Department Chairman’s secretary at U of O. I don’t know her number, I’m afraid. And let her know what’s happened and could she let my profs know. I think she’ll have access to which courses.”

“Yeah. No problem. And I’ll write down anything I learn and if it seems useful, I’ll drop it off at the Sinclairs’ when Stephane comes to take me home. We have to drive back that way. We’re going to Sears at Carlingwood to see about some home stuff.”

That was a relief. I thought back to her wedding to Stephane, at the cottage on Saturday July 3, 3 weeks before Peter and I got married. A bit different in that they had the ceremony on the porch of the cottage.

Dominion Day had been fine, but the Friday had quite a lot of rain, and some showers around on Saturday, so they used the porch. It was a bit crowded, but we

managed. And the backdrop of the river was special. I thought a bit about that, and about our own wedding. Now here was Peter, unconscious and hurt – hurt seriously. I hope it won't mess up our lives.

As I sat back down beside Peter I guess I scraped the chair a little and Peter suddenly opened his eyes. It wasn't obvious whether he was actually able to see anything, or rather, whether he was aware his eyes were open. However, after a minute or so, he turned his head a bit toward me, so I said

"Hi there. Hope you're back with us." as I pressed the button to call the nurse.

Peter mumbled something I couldn't quite make out except it did have "Anna" in it. Then the nurse was there.

"Hi Peter. You've been in a bit of an accident. Can you squeeze my finger with your left hand? ... That's good. You may find it hard to talk for a bit. I'll get some ice chips that Anna can give to you. Don't try to get up. You've a couple of broken bones and are a bit banged up, so we need to take it easy." Her voice was clear but calm.

She came back with a cup of ice chips and showed me how to put one at a time on Peter's lips and he managed to take them in his mouth and suck on them. We'd learned he'd a broken tooth that would need a cap. I hoped the cold would not be too unpleasant with it.

"Wha' happnd?" he managed to mumble. The nurse squeezed my elbow, and I guessed I should be lean on details.

"We're still working that out." I said.

“Anna wasn’t there, Peter. When we have more information, we’ll let you know.”

“What time is it?”

I let the nurse answer. “Late morning on Friday October 1. You’ve been out of it for a bit. I’ll get one of the doctors. They want to keep an eye on you. But we’re happy you’re awake.”

I stepped outside while there was a minor procession of doctors and nurses who wanted to see how Peter was doing. I went and found a pay phone and let Ellie know Peter was awake. Then I went back to the ward and the nurse said I could go back in, but that Peter had fallen asleep again, but they were pretty certain it was sleep and not coma.

About 2:30 Robert came in to relieve me. Peter had woken once, sort of acknowledged I was there, then fallen asleep again. I told the nurse at the nursing station, and she confirmed that they wanted to know and to record this. I’d wondered if I should press the call button, but she said I did the right thing. Unless something was unusual, I didn’t need to summon them. I relayed all I could remember to Robert and he sat down with his book.

Robert had given me the car keys to the Sinclair’s second car. Saved me taking the bus. I had to adjust the seat – Robert was a good 4 inches taller than me. In fact a couple of inches taller than Peter.

When I got to the Sinclairs’, Ellie and I had a cup of tea. Ellie had been a model of composure, but when I described Peter waking up, she burst into tears. I didn’t say anything. Just passed her the Kleenex. Took one

myself. Wasn't having an outburst, but the tears were flowing. Then we both sniffed and got up and started preparing supper.

October 11, 1965

Thanksgiving Day. Well, here in Canada anyway.

The doctors decided Peter can come "home". We decided that would be his parents' house. He'll go back in his own room, and I'll be in the guest room "camping" for a bit. Just as we were getting used to being man and wife, which I think, if my experience is any guide, means that you've worked out an armistice on how much of the bedclothes each person gets.

The Physics Department folk were really good. One of the Profs. let it be known that Peter was hurt and I was going to have to juggle things to keep up my studies and pretty quickly several students offered to help with notes.

However, after talking with Jim Sinclair and Dad, it became apparent that I should try to keep at least nominally to a regular school schedule. With the Sinclairs and the Tremblays, there were plenty of visitors to keep Peter entertained, and I made sure Peter felt he was part of the decision too.

With his left lower leg and right lower arm in casts as well as the head bandage, Peter won't be taking showers for a while. Actually, the head bandage is mainly so the long scar and stitches aren't going to upset people. It's already healing well, but he won't be winning any prizes for best hairdo for a bit.

Ellie knew what to do. She had waterproof sheets so Peter could have a sponge bath. In a week or so, we'll get some waterproof bags for his casts and some elastic bands and he can sit on a plastic stool in the shower and we'll be able to do a partial wash of his hair.

We got Peter home before lunch. His appetite was good, but he had to be careful about the broken tooth. He'd been "let out" to go to the dentist and a temporary cap had been fitted, but it was just a metal cylinder while the permanent cap was being made. That would go in later this week. For now he had to chew on the left side.

We spent the afternoon reading. Peter reading, me working on homework. It was a bit awkward – I wanted to do something, but couldn't think of anything. And Peter was very quiet. It was a worry that the injuries could include some permanent brain damage. The doctors had warned me he could have a different personality, either from the injury or from the psychological trauma of being hit.

That was another big issue that we hadn't talked about – the accident, if you could call it that. Being a hit and run in a busy part of town had made the news. CFRA made a fuss about it, asking anyone who knew anything to come forward. There were a number of false leads, but they did get a couple of people who called the police in addition to the two witnesses who were walking home much like Peter, but who were not in the path of the car that hit him. Before police went to question a suspect, a local businessman showed up with his lawyer and admitted that he had "lost control of his vehicle and hit a pedestrian on the sidewalk".

Officer Johnson called me. He told me “off the record” that they had fairly good reason to believe the culprit had spent a long lunch in a local bar, finally leaving because he needed to get home for supper. In other words, a drunk driver, though with the delay before he showed up with his lawyer, his level of inebriation would be impossible to establish. On the other hand, leaving the scene was a serious offence.

We’d also heard from his insurer who were “anxious to ensure we were compensated quickly”. Jim Sinclair and Dad both suggested we have our own lawyer, and I’d decided on Max Hurwitz who Jim recommended. I’d talked to him on the phone and he said to refer everything to him and we’d meet when Peter was able to get to his office under his own steam. He told me the insurer would like to get a quick settlement in case there were complications down the road. With head injuries, he recommended keeping the door open as long as possible. I’m not sure that he doesn’t just want to pump up the amounts so he gets more himself, but I can already see that it could be a long time before Peter is back to himself.

Will he ever be the same? Was Dad the same after the mine blew him up – blew me up! In Dad’s case he got a wife and daughter, but it could have been bad. Was bad for his two RAF buddies. I guess all important events change our lives somehow. I just hope Peter and I manage to find a way through together.

Thanksgiving dinner was pleasant but restrained. Afterwards, we watched TV for a bit, and Peter asked to go to bed about 8:30. It was odd sitting with him. He

was there but not “there”. Things didn’t feel the same. Was it me or him? After I helped get him to bed – he needed some help getting on and off the toilet, but was managing toilet paper with his left hand. He said it felt so strange. I tried it myself – a real production, as everything felt backwards or mirror image. I could hardly do it at all.

I watched TV for another half hour, then said my goodnights too. Did manage to thank Jim and Ellie and Robert. They’ve all been so helpful, but in a way I kind of resent the fact that I need to depend on them so much just now. It doesn’t feel right.

October 31, 1965

Peter and I moved back to our apartment yesterday. He’s managing now with a walking cast. The head bandage has been replaced with a simple baseball cap – the stitches are out and his hair is sort of growing back. I gave him a bit of a haircut to even things up. With the cap on, he doesn’t look too bad. The cut on his jaw is hidden by his beard unless you really look closely. The cap on his broken tooth is working well. So physically, he is doing OK. Even managing to scribble legibly with his left hand, though the writing is far from matching his usual cursive.

Still, something isn’t right. We don’t talk and joke like we used to. I try, but he doesn’t respond. Doesn’t seem to want to respond.

Today he was very quiet. Polite to me, but cold. I even suggested we check our sports equipment was working

properly, but he said he “wasn’t in the mood”. Damn it, we’re almost newlyweds! I felt like screaming at him, but I just put my arms round him and said “When you’re ready, let me know. I love you.” but he shrugged me off. I went to the bathroom and cried for five minutes. As Mom would say “Not fair!”. I don’t know what to do.

We made sure the apartment was closed up so we didn’t get trick or treaters. Not like last year, when Jane, Julia and I were Macbeth’s witches, scaring the kiddies on the front porch. Instead, as best I could, I worked on my studies. I want to have a solid start for grad work. I’m starting to wonder if I’m going to be doing that as Mrs. Sinclair or back to Miss Tremblay.

* * *

We went to bed at about 10. Like last night, kind of awkward. Almost as if we were strangers who had showed up late at a hotel in a storm and been told there was one room with one double bed and we had to share. Each of us keeping to our own side.

This couldn’t last. I rolled toward Peter and put my arms round him. Before I could say anything, he elbowed me hard in my stomach – I nearly threw up with the pain and shock. Then he said angrily

“Leave me alone. Can’t you see I have to work this out myself?”

I was sobbing and the tears were flowing fast and hard. I took my pillow, got a spare blanket from the cupboard and went to the living room sofa, shutting the bedroom door behind me.

Had it come to this? Two strangers. My husband – the man I loved and laughed with – seems to have evaporated. That bloody fucking drunkard who hit him. He should get a long spell in jail, but I bet he more or less gets off with a slap on the wrist.

What should I do? I won't put up with Peter hitting me like that. I put the light on and checked my stomach. I'll have a bruise on the left side, a couple of inches below my ribs. How much worse can he get? He could hurt one or both of us seriously.

I turned out the light and tried to sleep. But the thoughts kept going round and round. Would I have to leave Peter? Divorce him? So soon after we were married and had such a special honeymoon. It had seemed so right. The New Year's party at the Chateau and its interesting consequences. Just 10 months ago. Now this. I was crying again. Not sobbing, just weeping silently for the emptiness.

About 11, I decided that I couldn't just lie there and feel sorry for myself. I got up and made a cup of tea, then sat at the table and wrote a letter to Peter. Whether I gave it to him or not didn't matter just now. I wanted to get my feelings in order.

October 31, 1965

Dear Peter

Since your hit-and-run injuries, things between us have been very different than they were before. You were seriously hurt, so some adjustment is inevitable. However, your coldness and sometimes hostility to me

must be addressed.

1) I will NOT allow you to be violent with me, no matter what excuse you may have. Tonight you elbowed me in a way that will result in at least a bruise.

2) The doctors tell me that your head injury could have some permanent consequences. If that is the case, you should remember that I took you on last summer 'for better or for worse'. We are husband and wife. Unless your behaviour makes it dangerous for me to be with you, I'm ready to build a life together. Dad, Mom and I were blown up in 1944. I'm sure it changed all of us, but we became a family. Our own honeymoon changed our view of the world and changed us. Your injuries are one more event, whether it is the physical damage or the realization that we are mortal.

3) I don't know what is going on in your mind, but I know you are worried there may be brain damage. That concerns me too, but we can only deal with it. Perhaps you worry that you won't be able to figure out what has changed. Does the damage mean you can't work out what the damage is? I only know that you cannot and should not try to figure that out on your own, and even if with others you find there is a change, you and I will have to adapt to it.

4) You haven't said anything about this, but I sense that you feel much more vulnerable since being run down. It's as if you thought somehow you should have been able to jump out the way. Some things are beyond us. I cannot MAKE you accept my love, but you can

make it impossible for me to try if you push me away.

Peter, I want you in my life. I want your love and companionship. And I want to give you my love.

Your wife,

Anna

After writing this, I felt that I'd at least done what I could for now. Before I gave it to Peter, I'd talk to Dad. I put away the letter in my briefcase, put my teacup in the sink, lay down on the sofa again and turned out the light.

November 1, 1965

Monday morning of All Saints' Day. I didn't feel very saintly. My first class was not until 10, so I didn't have to be up that early. I'd actually slept on the sofa. Funny how writing that letter got me into a better mental state. I'd made my decisions, and even though it might mean I'd break up my marriage so soon, I knew what I'd expressed was right.

Should I show it to Peter, or just tell him my thoughts? Think about it today. Talk to Dad sometime today before anything else.

I got up and went to the bathroom and showered. Even washed my hair. I had to go in the bedroom for clothes. Peter was still either asleep or pretending, so I didn't turn on the light. I dressed – slacks, blouse, sweater, socks rather than stockings. Then I had some

juice and toast and got my stuff ready to go to the University. There was a forecast of snow flurries, with a maximum temperature just above freezing. Messy! I'd need a coat and sturdy shoes or boots.

As I was about to go out the door, Peter stumped out of the bedroom.

"Anna. I'm sorry. For last night. For ... the rest."

"OK. We'll talk tonight. Maybe you should call your Dad or someone you feel you can talk to."

"I'll think about it. It's a good suggestion. Take care and have a good day."

"You too."

It wasn't what I'd normally think of as a good exchange, but compared to last night it was a definite improvement. I went out and walked briskly towards town, noting as I did so how often I looked over my shoulder in case some car was coming towards me. I also found that if I could, I'd walk on the left side of the road to face the closer vehicles. I hadn't been conscious of this before, but now it seemed second nature.

* * *

After my class, I found a pay phone and called Dad. Nicole answered, of course, and fortunately Dad was working in his office and didn't have any meeting just then.

"Hi there, Annie ... er, Anna."

"Dad, you don't have to fuss about Annie or Anna. It's for other people."

"Thanks for that. But it's probably better that I try."

“Much appreciated.”

“How are you and Peter managing?”

“Not so well. That’s why I called, can you talk for a few minutes.”

“Yeah. I’ve no fixed obligations until after lunch, but have to prepare for a planning session later. Tell me what’s wrong.”

“I don’t really know, but Peter just won’t let me be with him. He says he has to ‘work things out’.”

“I sensed a bit of that the other day when I came over to visit. Do you think it is the head injury?”

“I don’t know if it’s brain damage or just fear that there is brain damage. He’s also feeling vulnerable, I think. He sort of thought he’d be able to avoid being hit. But the outcome is the same – he seems afraid to let me touch him or hug him.”

“I suppose you’ve tried to talk to him.”

“I’ve wanted to. But maybe I’ve been too gentle with him.”

I hesitated, then went on,

“Last night I went to hug him and he elbowed me really hard. I went and slept on the sofa, but couldn’t sleep, so I got up and wrote him a letter – I’ve not given it to him yet – where I’ve written down that I’m willing to build a life with him, but won’t put up with violence or not trying. Do you think I should use that to try to open a conversation.”

“You’re right to insist on him treating you properly.” Dad sounded worried. “You can always come home if you need to, and just call and I’ll come and get you. But the letter might be a way to start. He’s had a big shock.

So have you.”

“Thanks Dad. I’ll keep in touch. Love you.”

“Love you too. Take care.”

* * *

I got home about 5. I was so nervous as I got to the door, I fumbled for about 15 seconds getting the key in the lock. In fact, Peter was stumping across the room to see who was there.

“Hi.” I said.

“Hi.” Peter replied.

“How’d your day go?” I asked.

“I talked to Dad for a few minutes on the phone like you suggested. Then I spent about an hour on the phone with one of the StatsCan people, then talked to one of the people who might supervise my thesis at U of O. You know I’ve been working on ideas to use administrative files to develop epidemiological information. Given my recent experiences, I’ve thought I might look into drunk driving and its consequences.”

“You know, that’s the first time you’ve shown much interest in anything for a while.”

“Hmm. I know. I haven’t been much company, since ... well, you know. I’ve been kind of worried er that”

“Peter. Last night after we ... well after ... I sat down and wrote you a letter about what I think of our situation. Perhaps it could be useful to ... well, focus our conversation. I want us to get back on track. It might

not be exactly the same track, but a track that we can travel on together.”

“Thank you, Anna. That might be a good way to start. I’ve felt so outside of myself, the Peter I was, like that person didn’t exist any more.”

“I was wondering that myself. It’s in the letter. Here, why don’t you read it and we’ll see if we can find Peter again.”

I handed him the letter that I’d taken from my briefcase.

“Do you want some tea?” Peter asked. “And maybe change into your slippers.”

He was right. I was still in my outdoor things. I let him stump off and prepare some tea for us. He brought back some biscuits too – someone had found some chocolate digestives and left them as a get-well present. It would postpone the necessity of making supper.

Peter started reading the letter.

“You’re right. The coldness and hostility can’t continue. Also elbowing you. Oh. No! Is there a bruise?”

I lifted my sweater and blouse.

“Oh, Anna. I’m so sorry. There really is a bruise. Now I feel even worse.”

“Peter. Try to set aside the bad feelings for now. I think we need to first get our everyday life more normal, to find a way to ... well ... just get along for a while. When we are able to deal with everyday life, we can try to figure out the feelings.”

“That makes a lot of sense.” he said, and continued to read, then added,

“You’re also right that I’ve been worried that there

might be brain damage that changed me. But you're right that any big event changes us. I guess that still leaves the possibility that both of us are changed in ways that make it impossible to live together."

"Do you believe that?"

"No, I don't really think so. Perhaps I want exactly what we had before, and can't accept that there can be something equally good but different."

"Peter. The only chance we have is the future. We can have that future together – and it better be a good future for both of us – or we can split and seek separate lives."

"Yes." Peter said quietly. We drank our tea, saying nothing for about five minutes. Then Peter said

"Yesterday, or was it the day before, you suggested we make sure the sports equipment was still working. It's a pity we can't share the bath and, well, you know."

"A little imagination and we could try." I countered.

"OK. But my imagination is a bit rusty." he smiled.

Perhaps we'd had enough words. I got up and took Peter's hand – the one in the cast actually, so he'd have the other to grab onto something if necessary. Then I led him to the bathroom and started running the bath. I put the cover down on the toilet and motioned Peter to sit down. Then I stripped off slowly. I noticed Peter was very attentive, and had to squirm a little as some of his furniture rearranged itself.

Once naked, I motioned him to stand up. He was still in PJs – it took a lot of effort to get clothes over the casts. It was possible, but Peter still had trouble on his own.

I took off the PJ tops, then undid the cord of the bottoms and let them drop. Peter was definitely “interested”.

“I’m going to get in the tub, and you’re going to step your right foot into the tub and half sit on the edge.” I said.

With some giggling, we managed this. There was a plastic mug I’d put in the bathroom a few days before so I could pour water for rinsing hair or whatever. From where I was sitting I was easily able to wash Peter’s “equipment” and rinse him off.

“Be careful. You’ll set me off.”

“Why should I be careful. I like setting you off.”

“Did you take the Pill faithfully?” he said seriously.

“Of course. Shall we try to get out now?”

“You’d better get out first. I’m not sure I can exit gracefully without some help.”

I eased myself out of the tub and dried off a bit then helped Peter to get his leg out of the tub and stand up. We dried off a bit more, then eased into the bedroom.

“These casts are such a nuisance. I can’t” Peter started.

Before he could say more, I pushed him down on the bed and took the head of his cock in my mouth, just for a moment so he gasped, but not long enough to set him off. Then I moved up and kissed him, pressing my tits against his chest. After we kissed for a bit, I straddled him and put him in me. Did that ever feel good. Of course, given the time since we’d last done it and the bath and bed treatment, he didn’t last long. He mumbled some apologies. Silly man. It didn’t matter to me. I left

him in me as I lowered myself to lie on his chest. I felt him grab some of the covers and pull them over us, then put his good arm round me. We lay that way for what seemed a long time.

* * *

It was about 7:30 when we decided we were hungry.

“How about some beans on toast?” was my opening remark.

“That’s the most romantic opening I’ve ever heard.” Peter replied.

I passed him a Kleenex and got one myself and we managed to get ourselves out of bed without making a mess. After a quick wipe in the bathroom, we put on PJs – another struggle with the casts – and I made the promised supper. Well. I opened a can and put bread in the toaster. This supreme effort was amply rewarded with a big grin from Peter. This was the first for some weeks.

“So you’re feeling better?” I asked.

“Much. Sex is a great cure for a bad mood.”

“But if you’re not careful, a bad mood can kill sex.”

“Yes. You can underline and bold-face that. My error. And I think your comments about big events changing us are correct. Also that we have to either accept those changes and make them part of us in a way we can live with, else we will fall apart.”

“I don’t want us to fall apart Peter.”

“Nor do I. I love you Anna. And even if I’ve changed, I hope I can help you be happy.”

“You do.”

“Even if I go off so quickly, like tonight. You didn’t get much of a good time.”

“Sometimes I really want a “good time”. Plenty of noise and such. But sometimes it’s just nice to be able to be together physically. I guess men always get an orgasm, so they don’t appreciate the other aspects.”

“Actually, I’ve noticed that the orgasms are not all the same. And sometimes I enjoy the non-orgasm bit more, which is probably what you’re talking about.”

“Anyway, we seem to have got over one bump. I’m sure it won’t be the last – you were pretty badly hurt and we’ll probably have to deal with lots of things such as the insurance and getting your arm and leg working properly and a hair style to cover the scar on your head. But let’s try to make sure we’re a team when we tackle any of those things.”

“I’ll second that. And I’ll try to talk to you about how I’m feeling.” Peter said.

“I’ll try too. You’re not the only one tossed around. I wasn’t hit directly by a car, but my life feels as though it’s been upside down for the last few weeks.”

We ate our beans on toast. In honour of some obscure heritage, we followed it with a couple of cups of tea, then retired to bed where we sat with our backs to the headboard wall reading the newspaper for a bit. Then we cuddled as best as one can with some plaster casts to get in the way.

“What do you think is really going on in Vietnam, Peter.” I asked.

“Well, it’s starting to get pretty big. The Americans

have a lot of men there. I think they want Canada and others to join in.”

“Do you think we should?” I asked.

“No. Do you?”

“No. I don’t think the North are necessarily as Communist as much as nationalists – I think it was Chandra who mentioned that, and I think he’s reading some of the Indian news reports – though no doubt there’s plenty of atrocities on both sides. But I can’t see what good having Canadian soldiers there would do. We might have some chance to do some good diplomatically or on a humanitarian basis if we put the right people forward, but that’s far from what the Americans are doing. They seem to have a peculiar ability to bet on the wrong people. Look at Cuba before Fidel Castro.”

“What do you think about Rhodesia?”

“I hate the South African apartheid policy, and I suspect that’s what the white Rhodesians want.”

“Unfortunately, the blacks haven’t shown much ability for good government. Look at the mess in Congo. And there’s probably a bunch of other places that are pretty rotten too.”

It was kind of good that we were having a conversation about things outside our own little world. We certainly weren’t back to “normal”, though we hadn’t really had a chance to establish a normal since we’d only been married a little while. But we weren’t totally preoccupied with hospitals and worries about death and injury and drunk drivers and insurance. And we were talking to each other like husband and wife. Not “like” – we were husband and wife. Perhaps I’d not quite appreciated

before how that worked.

November 9, 1965

Tuesday evening.

Yesterday we had the Federal election. Pearson's Liberals got the most seats. Even though Dad knows him from the War time, I voted NDP for a bit of a change from him and Diefenbaker. They've had a good run. Time for someone else. Of course, no chance here for the New Democrats. Jean-Thomas Richard has been the MP for Ottawa-East since June 1945. Practically all my life.

I went out to vote after I came home from class. Peter decided he wouldn't bother. One: Richard was going to win anyway. Two: It was raining cats and dogs. Possibly even hippos and giraffes. His phrase. He's feeling a lot brighter, which is good.

Then tonight on the news we hear that 30 million people are in the dark due to a power failure across the whole Northeast. Toronto and New York have subways and elevators stuck, and a number of radio and TV stations are off the air. Ottawa has been OK. Sounds like in other places they'll be having a long wait for the lights to come back on. We phoned Dad and he said Aunt Penny was in the dark and Joe was organizing candles and lamps in the church and camp stoves on the porch to cook food that might go bad as refrigerators warmed up.

November 11, 1965

Thursday.

What a difference a year makes. Last year I'd gone to the Remembrance ceremony with Dad, Michelle and Andrea, and we'd run into Michelle's ex-husband Bryan and his girlfriend Rachel – now his wife – and her two boys. Hmm. I remember something was going on with Andrea and the boys that Dad helped sort out without getting Michelle involved and upset. It must have worked out, and Andrea didn't say anything much afterwards. In fact, it seemed like the boys were treating her as a sister who they'd stand up for and protect. She said Ralph had punched a boy in the nose who'd made some remark like "nice tits" about her. Actually she's pretty small in that way, much like her Mom. Not flat, just petite. Me. I'm not huge either, but I have a good handful each side, and the Flemish streak is there in both bust and hips. I'll have to watch my weight as I get older or old Mr. Rubens will want me cavorting in the countryside in my birthday suit for one of his paintings. The Rubens Rear-End as Peter calls it. He pointed this out to me as we were walking along a railway platform in Holland behind a group of girls from a high school. They weren't fat either, but there is a pattern.

Peter wanted to go to the Remembrance ceremony, but we were worried about him having to stand. Jim said he could arrange the loan of a wheel chair. Then last week Officer Johnson dropped in on his way home to see how we were doing. When Peter said we were going to the ceremony but using a wheelchair so he didn't have to stump all the way in the walking cast, Officer Johnson said he'd look into it, then phoned later to give us the name and phone number of one of the managers at the

Lord Elgin. Mr. Olmstead suggested Peter and I be dropped off at the Elgin with the chair and we also could wait there after the ceremony. I thought we might even have lunch in Murray's and be picked up later.

So it all worked out. Dad, Michelle and Andrea and Jim, Ellie and Robert all came to the Elgin after Dad had dropped us off earlier there. Then we wheeled Peter up the hill and found a place – near the Langevin Building as last year. It was pretty cold – around freezing, but no rain or snow. I noticed both Jim and Dad had their medals and caps, but once again didn't stand with the other veterans.

When McRae's "In Flanders Fields" was recited, I realized that this day was another sort of return to Flanders for me. And we'd been to Ypres or Ieper as it is now when we were visiting Wil and Joop in Ghent. Today I could see there were many reminders of sacrifice, pain and triumph. The many faces, medals, wreaths, and sentiments were a general wave washing over my particular history and the stories and experiences in my own family.

I wondered in passing why Peter wanted so much to be there. After some thought – I didn't want to ask him directly – I realized it was wanting to be back in society. Anyway, he was in very good spirits over lunch.

"Thanks for taking the effort to get me here, Anna. I think it's important to remember the sacrifices people made for us."

"Our parents included."

"Luc especially. And your uncle Jan in the First War. And, as you say, our parents, who put up with a lot."

“What are you having?” I asked, looking at the menu.

“I’d sort of like some soup, but also a sandwich.”

“Let’s order some chicken noodle soup and a club sandwich and share.” I suggested.

“Sure. I’m still a bit in the habit of ordering for myself, but sharing is really nice.”

“Isn’t it what we signed up for when we married?”

“I think so. Do you actually remember all the documents and the vows.”

“Er. Well ... No. I think there was so much going on that the precise words and such all went by in a blur. Do you think we should get them to be sure we know what we agreed?” This was embarrassing to admit, but it was the truth.

“Bit late for that isn’t it?”

“Yes. Though lawyers would have a field day. Do you remember the vows at all?”

“No. But I have the excuse of a bang on the head.”

“You’re going to get a lot of mileage out of that, aren’t you? Blame it for every failing.”

“Of course. Especially when I can’t remember how nice you are in bed, so I have to remind myself.”

“Well, you can obviously remind me at the same time. Hmm. Maybe we’d better whisper. The people at the next table seem to be trying to listen.”

“You mean properly and legally married persons can scandalize the righteous citizens of Ottawa?”

“I’d hate to get thrown out before we get our lunch. I’m kind of hungry after standing outside during the ceremony.”

We both smiled in a way we had to suddenly suppress when the waitress came to take our order.

Dad came to pick us up at 2. We'd made sure there was plenty of time for the crowd to clear. We even had about 20 minutes to sit in the lobby. Didn't talk much, but sat close on a sofa. Mr. Olmstead was walking by and asked how we'd managed and we thanked him enthusiastically, even though he'd done no more than a small favour of letting us set down and pick up in front of the hotel.

November 13, 1965

Saturday

It wasn't as cold as earlier in the week, but rain threatened. Peter and I slept in. Well, that's actually not true. We woke up about 7:30, I showered then gave Peter a thorough sponge bath. When I decided to give his sports equipment a careful inspection, he insisted on reciprocity.

"Bring your pussy round where I can see it."

"Why?"

"It's only fair. Besides, it seems to be all wet and slippery." He had slipped his hand between my legs as I bent over, about to lollypop his penis, which was getting hard. Ooh, he slipped in a finger.

"Now I've got you. I'll just pull gently using my finger as a hook."

"You might get a pink finger. My period's just finishing. Here's the Kleenex."

I didn't struggle, except in a pretend way. The "usual" happened over the next few minutes. Funny. It's now "usual", and really nice that it is, especially after the awkwardness a couple of weeks ago. And the few minutes won't be all that long. We could, I'm sure, make it into a longer event, but we seem to know how to enjoy each other, neither in a hurry nor making a production of it. As I slid off Peter – with the cast we still found it easier with me on top – I put a Kleenex between my legs and passed one to Peter. No sense having to do extra laundry work. My, we were getting "established", but it didn't seem silly.

"Do you want anything?" I asked.

"Cup of tea in bed, maybe." Peter replied.

I made tea and brought it back to the bed with some oatmeal cookies. Store bought Dad's Cookies. Kind of blah, but edible, and I'd been too busy lately to bake. I also brought a glass of water and took my Pill.

"Good that you're keeping up on the Pill." Peter said.

"You know that I had my 8-month check with Dr. Howard while you were in hospital. For the record, things were OK, but she thinks it's important to monitor carefully. Now, is the Pill good in particular or in general?"

"I guess in particular – I can't imagine how difficult the last few weeks would have been if we had an infant to deal with."

"Yes. I had that thought too. And I want to complete my studies, at least to a point where we're not scrambling to maintain a decent life, before we have kids."

"Is it selfish to think of never having kids? I mean, with the Bomb and stuff, pollution, population explosion

and all that. Should we think of that?”

“I’d had that thought too, but figured it wouldn’t be politic to voice it. In some way I guess that having kids seemed a natural part of life, but the Pill really does make one think that it really isn’t necessary to link having a married life with having kids. Of course, it was possible before with condoms and such ...”

“But much more of a nuisance! I love it that we can just ... do it. No having to grope for the rubber. And I can stay inside, you know, after.”

“Yeah. I often like that too.”

“Not all the time?”

“Sometimes after a really “wow” orgasm and lots of sloppy wetness, I don’t want to drip all over. But most times like now or when we got ... sorted out ... a couple of weeks ago, it’s more like a kind of private embrace. Special between us, without necessarily being about sighs and groans. And not “making love” either really. Just a kind of “hello again”.”

“My cock saying hello to your pussy?”

“If you want to put it that way. Do you mind if I don’t come every time?”

“No. Perhaps sometimes I don’t need to either. Just a quick poke to let you know I’m here!”

“Looks like you want it again.”

“Can we try a gentle poke with me on top?”

With a bit of shifting about, Peter got between my legs and slipped inside.

“This always feels so right.” Peter said.

“Being inside, or the connubial conversation while so engaged?” I teased.

“Both. If you’re not careful, you’ll make me give you a noisy orgasm.” he said, thrusting suddenly, which was kind of interesting.

“You know, Marcia said she nearly fell out of bed when Bill talked to her while they were doing it. Said she always assumed there was some sort of no-talking rule.”

“Why so?” Peter asked.

“I think trashy novels and films where the violins play and things fade to the next scene. She knew she was being silly, but that didn’t mean it was less real to her.”

“Talking slows things down. Makes it last.”

“Indeed. Now what makes you assume you can give me a noisy orgasm?”

“Personal history. Do you want me to demonstrate?”

“What if you don’t succeed?”

“Guess you’ll be the one missing out.”

“Hmm. True. Well, you’d better give it your best shot. But don’t get all upset if I just have a really, really good time instead of being so noisy the neighbours either call the police or clamour to get in to learn how it’s done.”

In fact, I wasn’t very noisy, but quietly whispered in Peter’s ear when things were really nice. Since he’d already gone off once, he lasted a while, and we even stopped a couple of times to talk about what we’d really like for breakfast – we had none of the required ingredients in the house, of course – and what we’d do today, which was catching up on study before we went to Dad and Michelle for supper.

* * *

Grandad Robert and Grandma Miriam came to get us around 4 for supper. They were up for the weekend – actually they’d driven up on the afternoon of Remembrance Day and were going home tomorrow.

“Good to see you’re on the mend.” Robert said to Peter as I was gathering my contribution to the meal – some scalloped potatoes.

“I hope so. It’s been quite a disruption, and a lot of stress for Anna having to put up with me.”

“We saw a lot of trouble in the War. A lot of women had to deal with men who were terribly damaged both physically and mentally.” Miriam noted.

“I have times when I worry about changes that the bang on the head may have done. But Anna has been very pragmatic – pointing out that every big experience in life changes us, and it’s how we deal with it that counts.”

“Both Martin and Clara contributed to that, I think.” Miriam said. “But I do hope that you are finding some peace of mind as your body heals.”

“Yes. Though right now both the arm and leg are starting to get itchy. The doctors say to try to avoid doing so, but I find I need a knitting needle from time to time to scratch a little. It’s still a couple of weeks until the casts can come off.”

Grandma added “When my arm was broken by the falling brick in 1944, I found that the itching – and maybe also the smell of unwashed skin – that got to be most annoying. I think the memory of the pain right after the

injury fades pretty fast.”

Grandad took the casserole and Grandma played mother hen with Peter, though he was now reasonably able to get around, albeit in a slow and clumsy way. Also noisy – the walking cast clumped heavily with each step. Their car was right outside and the journey across the Pretoria Bridge and down O’Connor and later Bank didn’t take long.

Inside the house there was quite a lot of chatter. Andrea had invited her friend Susan Grafton, so we were 8 around the table. There was roast beef to go with my scalloped potatoes, and several vegetables. There was beer and pop and some red wine to drink. I had a tiny red wine for the toasts at the beginning of the meal, then switched to 7-up. Peter chose beer, as did Dad and Grandpa, but Michelle and Grandma chose the wine. I noticed Dad didn’t offer wine to the girls as he had one time with Andrea. Well, Susan’s mother wasn’t there to give her consent.

Grandma had made a pecan pie for dessert. Her American background sometimes brought these wonderful little benefits.

Michelle said “Miriam, this pie has a lot in common with our Québécois tarte au sucre, but the pecans cut down the sweetness and make it more interesting. I find I can’t usually eat tarte au sucre because it’s too sweet. I found the English treacle tarte OK with its breadcrumbs and custard because they cut the sweetness too.”

“Not everyone makes it like I do.” Grandma replied. “A lot of people make them too sweet in my opinion.”

“Yes. A lot of things are just sweet and nothing else.”

Michelle commented.

“Do you think you could try making treacle tart sometime Mom?” Andrea asked.

“We’ll have to see if we can find a recipe somewhere. In fact, I’ll make a deal with you. If you can find a recipe or recipes, we’ll make one and give Martin a treat.”

“Good luck to you.” Grandma said. “I tried once, but I think I got the custard wrong.”

Peter chimed in.

“You might phone my Mom, Andrea. She did it a couple of times, but I think she had someone send the “treacle” from the UK. And the “treacle” is actually Tate and Lyle’s Golden Syrup. And don’t ask me why, but the brand seems to be absolutely critical, as are the bread-crumbs, which must be from bread that is 3 days old and just the right level of dryness.”

“And, of course, the custard must be Bird’s, and made so there is a skin on it that adds lumps.” Dad added.

“Lumps?” Susan asked.

“I think it was just the way the school cooks made it for desserts at lunchtime. I got used to it that way, so now anything else seems wrong.” Dad explained. “And it isn’t truly custard, but a cornstarch and milk sauce with a little sugar and colouring. I think Bird invented it for his wife who couldn’t eat eggs, and the original and possibly present colouring was turmeric.”

“Oooh. How awful.” Susan turned up her nose.

“I’d have said that too,” Michelle joined in, “But I tried it when we were on our honeymoon and it really was rather nice.”

“I suspect a lot of honeymoons got ruined last night.”

Grandpa Robert changed the subject. "It looks like the Yarmouth Castle took over 80 people down with it and many burned or otherwise injured. They were on their way from Miami to Nassau in the Bahamas."

"Apparently there was no alarm." Peter added. "The fire must have taken hold very quickly, or else the crew was negligent."

"I heard one radio report that said one of the first lifeboats to one of the ships that saw the fire and came to help was full of crew. That doesn't sound good." I said.

"It's sort of like 'Lord Jim'." Susan said. The Peter O'Toole film had been at the Elgin a month or so ago, and Peter and I had been to see it. Not bad, if a bit sad.

"Yes. There'll likely be a lot of finger pointing." Dad replied.

November 20, 1965

Saturday

Marcia and Bill had invited us to dinner at Bill's apartment. Peter was now able to take the bus, but there'd been about 3" of snow, so we called a cab – very early in case they were busy. But of course it came and we were at Bill's very early and obviously interrupted some bedroom activities, or at least the aftermath.

"We figured the taxi would take a long time to come. I'm really sorry. We probably messed up some ... er ... personal time." I said.

"Well, at least you missed me moaning and groaning." Marcia quipped. Bill looked embarrassed. Peter simply

said

"I'm glad you're able to enjoy each other. It's something Anna and I find very important to keeping things balanced in life."

"Thanks for that, Peter. I definitely agree," Bill said.

"Me too!" said Marcia.

"Your room-mate away for the weekend, Bill?" I asked.

"No. She's right here." Marcia jumped in.

"Really!" I was taken aback.

"Bill's room-mate got a job in North Bay in the middle of October. Just as Bill was going to advertise for someone, Mom found a couple of condoms in my purse. Bill had invited me to his folks' cottage to close it up, but it turned out to be a little too cold for getting naked, so I'd left the "necessaries" where I'd put them. So there was much upset and righteousness. So I asked Bill if he thought it was time to move in together."

"It's not that we're not planning to get married." Bill joined in. "Just that we hadn't had time to sort out how we wanted to do things."

"Must have been awkward moving out." Peter said.

"Not as bad as I feared." Marcia said. "My Aunt Judy, who's single but not at all spinsterish – she's my Mom's sister – happened to be visiting the day after the uproar and told Mom to be careful not to break off communications. Certainly I don't want to be unable to talk to my parents and my sister Beth. Anyway, that evening, Aunt Judy was still there when I told Mom and Dad that I was going to move in with Bill, and that we hoped that they would remain family, especially as we were intending to get married once we could get things

organized.

Everything was still pretty frosty, but the next weekend we rented a van and got my stuff moved.”

“How much of the closet did she leave you, Bill?” I joked.

“Not much. Might be a plot to keep me naked.” Bill replied.

“Now I hadn’t thought of that, but it’s not such a bad idea.” Marcia hammed.

“So we’re all into domesticity?” I suggested.

“Getting there. Neither of us has much experience.” Marcia said.

“Nor did we.” I replied.

“And we’re sort of having to re-learn with my ... er ... accident.” Peter commented.

“You mean with the casts and such.” Bill said.

“And just the whole upset and change. It’s put us a bit upside-down.”

“You’d probably have learned that we’d moved in together sooner, but we knew you had lots to deal with.” Marcia said. “Have you been able to maintain your studies, Anna?”

“For a week or so, things were pretty difficult, but other students shared notes, and my profs were really accommodating. And once Peter was stable, I found I spent a lot of time working on studies, because we couldn’t really go out, and family and friends were pretty good at helping with the practical issues of food and shopping and laundry.” I replied.

“Oh. By the way. About our living together.” Marcia added. “Could you be a bit discreet about it? The

school authorities might take it as setting a bad example. In fact, I think it's a firing matter in Catholic schools. I don't know if there'd be repercussions for us. We're hoping we'll be all legal before anyone at either of the schools finds out. And for now, I've not officially changed address from home – I mean, my parents' home."

"No sweat." I said.

We were having drinks and nuts before dinner. Bill made me a gin and tonic. I'd not had one before that I could remember. Nice. Not something to drink a lot of, but a small one now and then would be a pleasure. Peter had a beer. Marcia joined me in a G and T, as she called it. Bill chose a scotch, which would have been my choice if I hadn't accepted the offer of the gin.

As we finished our drinks, Marcia said "Let's move to the table. Afraid it's a kitchen table, but we do have 4 chairs."

We'd brought a bottle of Mateus to go with dinner. Rosé goes with most things, fortunately. Marcia and Bill collaborated on getting a casserole out of the oven. Turned out to be a very nice lasagna, which they served with a salad and some garlic bread that also came out the oven.

"This is really good. Bill's going to get fat on your cooking Marcia."

"Er. Actually, Bill's the cook. Though I did do a lot of the chopping and preparation, as well as the salad. And I made the rice pudding we're having for dessert. I remembered you and Jane mentioning the one your friend Chandra brought and I looked up how Indians make it. Hope it's worked."

As things turned out, it was a pretty good try. I'd certainly be happy with it any day if I made it as well. So we had a really good meal, then settled back to listen to some records and gab about odds and ends. Bill and Marcia wanted to know more about Belgium and Holland, and we were happy to oblige. Fortunately I'd brought an album I'd prepared – one of the things I'd done with Peter once he'd started to become nice to me again. It sure was a relief.

"We're trying to think of where to go on honeymoon ourselves." Bill said. "The idea of a bike holiday in Europe might be nice."

"You do need to be aware of the traffic and where to go." I said. "Peter and I planned each trip, and broke each into stages so we each knew the next stopping point where we could meet up if we got separated by a traffic light."

We also had a sort of panic in Antwerp when I went in a sewing store – the one where I got you the stuffed zebra kit – and Peter into a grocery to buy some chocolate and we got mixed up. Took nearly half an hour to find each other. Peter had the train tickets back to Ghent, too. After that we always agreed where we'd meet and also a fall-back procedure like 'Go back to hotel if we haven't made a connection by 4 p.m.' "

"That sounds sensible. I guess one doesn't think about it when planning a honeymoon." Bill said.

"It kind of shook me up." Peter said. "I was really worried about Anna and that she might get into a bad situation."

"I think it kind of underlined to us how much we'd

become part of each other. And how much we needed to keep working to maintain our being a team,” I added.

“Wow. The serious stuff. Not all bed-spring bouncing.” Marcia could still be Marcia!

November 27, 1965

Saturday

We were going to the Sinclairs to watch the Grey Cup game on TV. Neither of us are big fans, but we both enjoy watching a good game, and it’s fun as a family event. There was dinner after. We took the dessert, but we cheated and bought an apple pie at the bakery and took along some ice cream.

Glad we weren’t actually at the game. It was really windy. The punts didn’t make it across the line of scrimmage. Well they did, then they blew back. Wow. The coaches actually agreed a special rule that the ball was dead where it fell in that case. Sort of like the fair catch in US football. Ottawa wasn’t in the game. It was Hamilton vs. Winnipeg, playing in Toronto and Hamilton won, though it wasn’t a runaway score.

Peter and Robert paid attention to the game. Jim and I watched when it was exciting. Ellie and I had books. I noticed Ellie only looked up when there was a lot of noise. Of course we ate chips and popcorn and drank some beer, but I’d guess we were a lot more tame than many houses. But it did strike me that a big proportion of Canadians would be watching.

I rather liked the fact that the football provided a good distraction. The troubles of the last couple of months

were a topic that I wanted to give a holiday – just let life go by for an afternoon and evening. And that’s what happened. A comfortable traditional family event, with the TV keeping serious conversation at bay.

December 6, 1965

Monday.

Peter had an appointment at the Civic to remove the casts. They’d then X-ray and decide if they needed to be put back. I had some classes – in fact, the last ones for a couple of courses this term – so we worked out that Dad would pick Peter up and take him to the Civic, and I’d go to my classes, then come on the bus to get him around 1 and we’d take a taxi home. When I got to the hospital, he was actually just getting out, as there’d been some sort of emergency and he’d had a bit of a wait for the X-rays to be checked.

“Hey. No casts.” I said.

“Yeah, but things are far from normal. I can hardly move my arm – it feels even less useful than when I had the cast on. And walking feels super-strange.”

“Let’s get you home.”

There was a direct phone for a taxi by the exit door and we didn’t have to wait long. It was cool – just below freezing – and there’d been a dusting of snow yesterday, but things were mostly cleared up.

It was nearly two o’clock by the time we got into the apartment.

“Lunch?” I asked.

“Yeah. I’m hungry.”

“Beans on toast?” I proposed. Not very imaginative nor very Canadian, but both Peter and I had parents who’d lived in the UK. Also it was a reminder of the day we’d started to sort ourselves out after Peter’s depression.

“Lovely. I’ll put the kettle on while you start the beans.”

Actually, Peter also got the bread out too. I noticed he was very tentative when he used his right hand to open the tap to fill the kettle and when he reached into the bread bag to get some slices out.

“Is it sore? You seem to be very ... unsure.”

“No. It just doesn’t feel like it belongs to me. Same with the left leg. You’ve probably noticed I’m being very careful.”

“Did the doctors say anything?”

“Said it would help to move both in warm water. Try to extend the range of motion. See? I can only move my right hand about half as far either way as my left.” He held his hands out flat, and then pointed the fingers down and then up. “They said I could gently push to extend the range, as long as there was no pain. I think it’s sort of that the nerves and muscles have forgotten how.”

“Good job you’ve been keeping that special muscle working.”

“Yes. I sort of wonder how people who haven’t had it for a while manage.”

“One girl I know said if a man doesn’t use it, it will happen in the night automatically. I wasn’t sure I believed her.”

“You mean nocturnal emissions? It happens, especially if you’re not getting any, or not ... er ... masturbating. Dad says he thinks most of the religious stuff about the dangers of masturbating is a lot of hooey that just means the sheets get dirty.”

“You’re lucky to have a Dad who is so progressive. We both are fortunate in our Dads.”

The toast popped up at this point and we served up. Peter poured the tea, deliberately using his right hand but keeping the left close in case he couldn’t manage it.

“Ooh. That was nearly too heavy.” he said.

“I’m guessing it will come back.”

“Yes. But to go back to our progressive Dads, do you think Luc would have been so understanding?”

“Don’t know. I suspect not. When we were in Ninove, I got the sense that François wasn’t comfortable that Julia had gone to England on her own, even though it was before she and Max got married.”

“Yes.” Peter almost whispered, then was quiet for a bit. We ate in silence, but I felt something wasn’t quite right.

“Something bothering you – something the doctors said?” I asked.

“No. Nothing like that. I was sort of thinking about Julia going away to England, and suddenly I thought about you doing grad work, and ...”

“You mean that I might go away to continue my studies?”

“I guess so. We talked a bit about this before we got married, but maybe we wanted to be together so much that we kind of minimized the issue.”

“Maybe. But isn’t it like Mom and Dad – she came all the way to Canada with him. And dragged me along too ... away from my friendly cows.”

Peter laughed.

“Yes she did. And I’m glad of it, or we wouldn’t have met and got married.”

“You don’t believe in Destiny?” I mocked.

“Yes I do, but I think Destiny needs a good deal of help. To return to the monster in the room, have you thought about grad school?”

“Actually yes – in between worrying that I’d be going as a widow, or having to drop out to look after you. The accident – if you can call it that – was like a big punch in the stomach for me, and I know a lot more than that for you.”

“And ...?”

“I don’t want us apart. So I’ll have to find something at U of O or Carleton.”

“You could consider Queen’s or McGill or Université de Montréal if there were something there that worked for you. It would mean being apart during the week, but not impossible for weekends.”

“I’d prefer not, and I suspect that I can find something local. Maybe there’s a project with NRC or Dad’s outfit where I can be associated with either a local or out-of-town university but stay living here.”

“Better start digging. By the way, I think I mentioned that I’ve started to see if I can work on alcohol-related injuries and deaths. My own experience makes that kind of important, and I suspect there’s a lot more trouble than officially recognized. I was already starting to look

into administrative records and the new computer data tapes that are starting to be collected.”

“That sounds like it could be both interesting and worthwhile, though it could be hard to get good data.”

“Dealing with imperfect data might be one of the things that will be an important part of the work, and more general than the specifics of the data I look at.”

“Well, you clear the dishes and I’ll go make up the bed and then we’d both better settle down to some work. I think later this week I’ll see if I can talk to some of the profs. about ideas for grad. school. Hmm. Shouldn’t have eaten beans today.”

“Why not?”

“I’ll probably get my period tomorrow. Gas on top of the bloaty feeling might make me really crabby.”

“I’ll try to be kind. I owe you from a few weeks ago.”

It was good that Peter saw it that way. His depression had really frightened me.

December 9, 1965

Thursday

I’d made an appointment to see Prof. Hotchkiss at 10. He was one of the profs. I’d worked for on the semiconductor laser project, and I wanted to talk to him about grad school. He was already waiting in his office with the door open when I arrived at about 5 minutes to 10.

“Come in Anna. Take your coat off and find a seat.”

“Thanks Professor Hotchkiss.”

After I’d sat down, he asked,

“Now I think you wanted to talk to me about graduate work. Tell me what you are thinking.”

“Well, I’d like to continue my studies. I really enjoy digging into a subject, and I’ve enjoyed working with you and the rest of the semiconductor laser group. So I’m starting to consider career possibilities in research.”

“You’ve some family connection there, in that your father is a research scientist.”

“Yes. He’s been a good guide and we’ve been able to discuss both his work and mine in the last couple of years.”

“And your husband has started a Ph. D. in statistics as I recall. How is he by the way?”

“Getting better. The casts came off Monday. He’s still a way to go to be back to normal, and I think he worries that the bang on the head could have caused some personality or other changes. I think that worrying about that is causing at least as much change, but he seems to be finding his way much better in the last few weeks.”

“It was a pretty serious accident, if drunken driving ever is “accidental”.”

“He’s thinking of adapting his work with administrative records to consider the epidemiology of alcohol in road accidents.”

“He’s plenty of personal motivation for that, I’m sure. But let’s turn to what you want to do.”

“Well, I think if I’m to become a researcher or an academic, I need to do a Ph. D. Some people do a Master’s first, but I’m not sure that’s necessary, is it?”

“No. It’s more common now to go straight to the

doctorate, and take a Master's if something doesn't work out. A lot of people just can't get that thesis done."

"Dad says he thinks the way to proceed is what he calls "write the thesis first". He doesn't mean that quite literally, but he does mean prepare all the sections and fill in as much as possible. He told me of someone who spent a whole lot of time on just one part of their project and ended up with 200 pages on what was only a few percent of the project, then couldn't figure out what to drop. I think the person failed to get a degree."

"It happens. And what he suggests is a good way to map the scope of the different sections. So I'd agree with the spirit of his suggestion, though each person has their own best working style.

Now I'm also going to say something that I suspect some of my colleagues would not like to hear. However, I will warn you that some supervisors treat students as cheap labour and keep telling them they need more work on X, Y or Z. It's worth asking how long students have taken with a particular prof."

"I guess there's also the question of money."

"Yes. Some profs have grants, and some have contracts with outside institutions or companies. Our group has some commercial money, as there's interest in semiconductor lasers in communications and computers and a bunch of other things. But I must caution that sometimes he who pays the piper calls the tune, so commercial money is often rather limited in what it can be used for. It doesn't always allow for that rather wonderful "follow your nose" type of research."

"Dad also cautioned that I shouldn't choose a topic

that is too specific. He said some topics more or less required you to get a success in some way or other. He suggested choosing a project where the outcome would be OK even if it wouldn't result in some big advance."

"That's good advice too."

"I guess another matter that's bothering me is that I should change schools so I get a wider experience. In fact, I think some universities won't let you stay for the doctorate."

"I don't think there's a specific prohibition here, though I believe that Alberta, for example, makes students move on after the baccalaureate. I don't know if that includes their sub-campus at Calgary, but in any case Calgary will become a new university next year. However, it is generally a good idea."

"Pity. I'm kind of comfortable here."

"It may be that we can get a project going with NRC in the Physics Group. Gerhard Herzberg's spectroscopy and related interests overlap a lot with laser development."

"In my reading in the library about lasers, it seemed there was a lot of concern about the power in, heating, power out, beam type, and so on. If there's to be true commercialization, surely there has to be standardization. Won't that mean better and more consistent measurement?"

"Yes. Of course. Oh. Very good, Anna. A project to investigate measurement methods and their standardization would be a great Ph. D. project, and it would mean lots of modest tasks. Moreover, failures would still be worthwhile writing up, since the goal is to find consis-

tent and reliable measurements. Is that what you were thinking?”

Actually the idea had just come to me. I decided to be honest.

“It just this minute struck me that measurements on lasers would be a good topic. Only when you said it did I realize it also fitted Dad’s suggestion to have a topic that lets me do a lot of smaller things rather than one big one. But the idea interests me, and I would guess that I’d not get stuck on some obstacle in the research. Do you think it would give me a good background for either a career in industry or university?”

“Yes. If you took on that subject – and you’d only be able to do a small bit anyway – you would be exposed to a wider range of issues than with a very narrow topic. I’d expect a thesis with a title like “Some aspects of standardizing measurements concerning optical lasers.” That would let you move in different directions if somebody published and scooped part of your work, or adapt the research if the equipment or money were not available.”

“How should I proceed? I’ve not really looked into what I have to do.”

“Why don’t you write a one page outline of the general idea as a letter to prospective supervisors. I’d be one candidate, but I think it would be good if we got a connection with NRC, as they may have interests in providing standardization of the measurement. There are also some folk at the US National Bureau of Standards, and even if they are not directly involved with supervising, it rarely hurts to share ideas.”

“You don’t think someone might steal the ideas. I was reading how Gordon Gould has been fighting in court to get the patent on lasers,” I said.

“I’m a bad one to ask. My view is that if he’d made a lot of noise about his idea, he’d probably be acknowledged as at least a co-inventor or co-discoverer. But I suspect the big issues are ego and money. And in any case, the topic we’ve been talking about has lots of aspects. We might as well find out which are being worked on and avoid having a lot of duplication of work, though in fact finding collaborators to replicate work is rather important in reliable measurement. But that might be part of the project too, so more reason to send the ideas to a number of likely people.

Of course, the topic is unlikely to be one that will lead to a major breakthrough. After all, it’s working on standardizing and organizing existing ideas.”

“I don’t think I’m very concerned about that. I think I need a project that is somehow a reliable pathway to a degree. So, how soon should I have the letter ready?”

“You’ve exams in the next week or so, but maybe you can have it ready for the start of next term. If you have a chance to include a reference or two, that would add a bit of punch. If you find any names you think we should send it to, then include them as an addendum. I’ll start thinking of a few as well, and I’ll write a cover letter for local people who might co-supervise, and one for out-of-town people who might collaborate. Hmm. I’m getting enthusiastic myself. I’m glad you dropped by.”

“What about formal application for grad. school?”

“Like most profs., I’m rather ignorant of the details,

but I'll ask the departmental secretary. I know the University has been talking about centralizing all the formalities, but we're not there yet. And I know you're well ahead of the deadline. So go and get some good marks on those courses, and if I don't see you beforehand, have a good Christmas and help that husband of yours get well."

"Thanks, Professor Hotchkiss. And a Merry Christmas to you as well."

I left the building with my head swimming with ideas. It was cold but no snow – well, at most a trace. It wasn't yet 11, and I thought of going home, but for some reason I wanted to take a bit of time to think things through – well I wasn't ready to sit and study, though I did plan to share lunch with Peter, who was working from home most of the time.

Tools for the measurement of the properties of lasers would be a project with plenty of options and give me a good grounding in a subject that promised a lot of growth, both scientifically and commercially. I slowly made my way down to Rideau Street and went in the Woolworths to their little coffee shop. I ordered a hot chocolate. Hadn't had one for a while. As I sipped it, I worked out the bones of my letter to potential supervisors and collaborators. And I tried to remember some of the papers I'd read last summer. I had set up some index cards for the papers and had them in a box at home. Should go to the library in the Vanier Building and review one or two. Wow. Serendipity seems to have done me a favour and given me a topic.

December 11, 1965

Saturday.

It was quite cold, but at least no snow. Nicole and Stephane had invited everyone for a buffet supper in their “new” house. A house-warming and early Christmas celebration – or late Sinter Klaas for the Dutch and Flemish. Actually the house was a fairly small fixer-upper in Vanier, not far from Montreal Road on Ste Cecile Street. Nicole had warned us that Ste Cecile was in two separate parts, and told us which part to come to.

Peter and I took the bus, which was fairly easy since there was a route down Main Street that wandered around through Sandy Hill then to Vanier and finally out near the Montfort Hospital. We found the house easily, a simple one-and-a-half storey.

“Come in. Come in.” Nicole welcomed us. There were boots and shoes everywhere near the door – we’d brought our slippers fortunately.

“Where do coats go?” I asked Nicole.

“Upstairs on the bed in the left hand room.” she replied. I took them up. Peter was still a bit awkward with both leg and arm, though improving every day. As I went through I saw Bernard and Charlotte, who were parents to Michelle and Nicole. There was Dad with Andrea. Michelle must be somewhere. So must Stephane. When I came back down, I discovered the tiny kitchen where Michelle was holding the fort.

“They’ve put you to work.” I said.

“By prior agreement. And I offered.” she replied. “Can you carry that tray down to the basement? We’re

setting the buffet up there, then people can come back up here or use the card tables and folding chairs. Dad and Mom have a stock of those fortunately, so Nicole could borrow them.”

I took the tray downstairs and found Stephane arranging things. There were even a couple of dishes with small alcohol burners. Neat!

“Where did you get the two big tables for the buffet?” I asked.

“Take a peek under the tablecloth.” Stephane replied.

I looked and saw two saw horses with a piece of plywood on top.

“Great idea. How long have you been in here now?”

“Just since the end of September. Just when Peter was in hospital unfortunately, or you’d have seen it sooner, I’d guess.”

“Did you have to do much to get it habitable?” I asked. I’d heard from Dad that they’d got it at a good price, and that it was not in great shape at the beginning.

“Mostly cleaning. It was occupied by a woman and her two adult sons. They had the two bedrooms upstairs, and she had the room on the main floor that we’ve set up as a living room, and the rather small room you come into from the front door we’ll use as a dining room eventually. It’s closer to the kitchen, which is pretty small as you’ve probably seen. The structure of the house is very good, but the lady must have been a chain smoker and on the telephone to her friends for hours at a time. We found a brown spot on the ceiling above the telephone wire. It took three washings with TSP to get it more or less out. And we found the water would run brown when

we washed the other walls. But you see there's quite a lot of space down here and a high ceiling compared to most basements. I think we can put a family room down here along with a second bathroom combined with a laundry – just a shower rather than a tub, but space for the washer and drier, and I'm thinking a sink like in a kitchen as a compromise between a vanity and a washtub. I'd like to leave the rest of the space mostly open so we can use it in different ways.”

“Did you get a good price?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“Good enough. Nicole had been living at home and saving. And I've been working now for nearly 10 years in the auto parts shop ever since I came from New Brunswick and I'd saved a bit of money. On top of the house, my boss – M. Raymond – is nearing retirement, and he's offered me a chance to buy him out over time. I think I'll do that. But we got the house without needing a mortgage – just. We won't be able to spend much on the house for a while, but we can do stuff for ourselves. With no rent to pay, just the taxes, we'll have more cash to spend too. And as I said, the house is very solid, just superficially not very tidy.”

“Good luck to you both. It seems like a reasonable house with plenty of options to make it how you want it. And I hope the business angle works out, too.”

I went back to the kitchen and ferried more things downstairs. More people had arrived, and most were strangers to me. I found myself a soft drink and circulated. Had a nice chat – in French – with Charlotte. She wanted to know how the Belgians dealt with bilin-

gualism. Pity I had to tell her they often didn't, but I was able to point out that some people overcame the pettiness, and gave Joke and Georges as an example. But I had to caution that there was a lot of silly nastiness where someone from one language group went out of their way to annoy someone from the other. Always a pity that people would do this rather than finding ways to be able to communicate and live well.

Peter was talking to some guys who turned out to be Stephane's co-workers at the parts shop. I also met M. Raymond. He told me that the guys Peter was talking to were good workers, but didn't think how to grow or improve the business. They'd likely always work for a wage, but Stephane would probably do well with the business.

December 13, 1965

Monday

I had an exam in the morning, then at 4 p.m. Peter and I were meeting Max Hurwitz to discuss an offer from the insurance company for Mr. Stillwell, the guy who'd hit Peter. He had already been charged with "leaving the scene" and careless driving etc. and would be going to court soon.

Max's office was downtown in one of the office blocks that had gone up in the last few years. Rather bleak architecture. The developers were pushing for taller buildings, but the City was trying to hold to the Peace Tower being visible above them. It wasn't very cold, just slightly below freezing and raining! What a mess. We had to be

very careful with Peter so he didn't fall and break or re-break bones.

"How are you doing, both of you?" Max asked by way of greeting as we sat down.

"The arm and leg are getting stronger, but still not quite right. I'm not so sure about the head bang. I worry about possible brain damage and personality changes. But it's like the Ogden Nash poem about not seeing your face because you're behind it. I can't tell if I've changed, and I worry others will be too polite to say." Peter was being loquacious.

"And Anna?" Max asked.

"I seem to be doing OK now. My studies took a bit of a bump for a week or so, but I think I've done all right."

"Well, I'm mainly concerned that we get proper compensation for Peter's injuries and the disruption you've both had. Unlike the USA, we won't see massive amounts of money, but we can push for a decent sum. How are you finding getting around?"

"I can't walk that far yet." Peter said.

"Shouldn't you have a car?" Max asked. I could sense where this was going.

"It would help." Peter answered.

"With your permission, I'm going to suggest that we ask first for payment for any and all direct expenses. I think I already told you to keep any receipts, including taxis and such. Then I'm going to suggest that you need a car to simplify your transportation needs. We'll probably have to haggle about that, but I think they'll likely accept something modest like the price of a new Volkswagen bug or low-end Chevy. If you can afford that, I

suggest you buy soon so we have a figure. But of course, buy what you would buy for yourselves, as if there were no settlement due.”

“We were already talking about that.” I said.

“Good. The courts won’t like it if you buy a Cadillac or a Rolls, of course. But I’m pretty sure you’ll get something reliable but sensible.

Then I’m going to suggest a 1 year and 5 year review with doctors nominated by both the insurance company and by us. They won’t like that. It means they can’t close the file. But you can’t afford to find out later that Peter has developed a costly handicap. I’d push for a 10 year review as well, but that might be difficult, though I’ll put it in the first claim to set the tone for negotiations.”

“What if we buy a car and then they don’t pay up?” I asked.

“It’s a bit of a dice game. But I think you can be relatively sure there will be some payment. However, as I said, it would look bad if you bought something extravagant. The insurance companies sometimes send out private investigators to show that people are not as injured as they claim. However, in your case, buying a modest car because you get tired when walking is not unreasonable. You are not claiming to be unable to walk, just not able to walk a long way. It’s much easier for them if you say you can’t walk and they show a picture of you doing so. But we have plenty of evidence that your bones were broken, so getting tired quickly is understandable. In fact, it will cost them more to hire investigators than accept a reasonable claim that reflects your reality.”

“What about if Anna doesn’t do as well in her courses as she did last year?” Peter asked.

“That’s more difficult to establish, of course, but I plan to put in a claim for several thousand for that, arguing that it could affect lifetime earnings, though I suspect it will be negotiated down to a few hundred.”

“Do we need to sign anything now?” I asked.

“I’ll get you to authorize me to negotiate on your behalf, but with the proviso that you have to review any settlement offered.”

The rest of the conversation more or less repeated the ideas above, with a few more details about the process. We signed the authorization to negotiate, then we were out in about another 15 minutes and took the bus home. We thought of taking a taxi, but they’d become scarce and we saw a bus coming almost right away. It was behind schedule, very late, and rather crowded. Peter fortunately had a walking stick, and was given a seat, but I had to stand. Still, the bus got us home fairly quickly, and thankfully without incident.

December 15, 1965

Wednesday

I had my last exam this afternoon. Peter and I would have gone out for dinner to celebrate, but Bill and Marcia had decided to get married this Friday, with only a week’s notice. It was her birthday too – 22. They’d decided to have a mini-honeymoon – two nights in a hotel in Montreal – and save a bigger one for the summer.

So Peter was at an impromptu stag party for Bill,

and Marcia had gone to her parents' house to work on a wedding dress. Her mother had done a 180 degree turn on her frostiness once there was a wedding to plan.

For wedding presents, Peter and I decided to give them a kind of travel kit. For Marcia a purse like Dad made for Michelle that fastened to a belt if you wanted. For Bill a backpack with extra straps and some small but decent tools for bicycle or similar repair. They'd better take that honeymoon they had talked about!

It also turned out that Michelle was going to Charlotte's to do some Christmas baking. Andrea would go along, and Nicole was joining them. So I suggested that I have dinner with Dad. There'd been about an inch of snow, but I walked over, enjoying the "just below freezing" temperature that felt almost warm with the fuzzy layer of snow.

"I've got fish sticks, potatoes and peas. Hope that's OK." Dad said after I'd taken my coat and boots off.

"A trip down memory lane," I answered. This had been one of our comfort meals after Mom died.

"Want a beer?" Dad asked.

"Sure."

We dished up and sat at the kitchen table.

"I think I've got a plan for a Ph.D." I said.

"Great. Tell me about it."

I probably bored Dad a bit, but he didn't show it. Just the opposite. Made a number of approving noises, and even a couple of small suggestions of where to send my outline. As I wound down my spiel – indeed, as I ran out of steam – he asked,

"You and Peter are planning to find a way to be able

to stay together while you study?”

Oooh. Right to the awkward issue.

“That’s the intention. It doesn’t seem a good idea to be married and apart. And there should be enough opportunities here. I think the worst case would be to be formally attached to Queen’s or McGill and work with someone at NRC.”

“I agree. That should be possible. And it’s more than likely there’s someone at Ottawa or Carleton who can serve as supervisor.”

“Did you never think of that sort of thing when you were getting married to Mom?”

“Of course. In fact, the whole issue was bringing you and Mom with me to Canada.”

“Oh. Yes. Stupid me.”

“Not stupid. Just that it’s not easy to put yourself in another person’s shoes, especially concerning emotions.”

“I grew up with the two of you as a pair. There was never a time I can really remember when you and Mom weren’t a unit – a real union and a real pair. But when you came back to Flanders in ’47, were you thinking about asking Mom to come back with you?”

“No. Why would I? We’d been thrown – some might say blown – together in 1944. It was three years later. Life and the world had moved on. I’d nearly got tied up with an upper-class English girl, and had a fortunate escape when I realized she had no interest in and no respect for what I did as a career. Namely my scientific work.

I wanted to see Clara again. We’d had a nice correspondence and the short experience I had with her was

... I don't know quite how to say it ... transforming. No, 'transforming' is too strong. But certainly the short time we had together changed my view of things. Made me see the other side of problems and issues.

When I came back to Belgium, I wanted to see how things had turned out, and I wanted a bit of a holiday. So did she – I don't think she'd had any holiday at all since the start of the War in 1939. And we found we were comfortable together. Seemed to fit, despite the incredible differences in our backgrounds."

"You must have realized that very quickly, because you had a lot to do to arrange to get us to Canada in about a month." My curiosity got the better of me, but Dad caught me out.

"How long did it take you to realize Peter was the person you wanted to share life with?"

"Touché Dad. To be honest, I was pretty sure by New Year's morning."

"Mom and I were in Paris when we realized we wanted to make our lives together. I'd arrived on Sunday evening in Ninove, we'd spent a day in Brussels and then gone to find David's grave – Penny's first husband – in Uden, so it was only Thursday when we got to Paris, and somehow by Friday morning we were talking about how we could arrange to get married and come to Canada."

"Do we make up our minds that quickly in this family?"

"In a sense, yes. But I'd had three years of writing letters back and forth with Clara. And you've known Peter since you were both kids. There's a bit more than a day or so of understandings. But the decisions are, I

think, often made quickly. I think Michelle and I knew very fast that we wanted to be together, but there were a lot of external factors, not least you and Andrea.”

“Do you feel differently about Michelle than you did about Mom?” I wasn’t sure I should have asked that. Oops. But Dad didn’t seem to bat an eyelid and answered right away.

“Tough question. They each came along at different stages of my life. If I asked you about Fred and Peter, there would be less difference in your ... I guess context. But to try to answer you: I don’t think the intensity or quality of the feelings is different. But the texture and colour of those feelings is particular to each of them. Michelle actually expressed it that way when asking me if I felt differently about her and Mom.

There’s a sort of classic line in stories and movies where a man has two women in his life, and one says ‘Do you love her more than me?’. I suspect that question has no sensible answer in any situation where there is genuine feeling. Love is about intensity rather than amount. It’s like volts rather than watts in electricity.”

“Good analogy, Dad.”

“To change the subject, do you feel you found what you were looking for in Belgium last summer?”

Oh. Oh. This could be touchy territory. A minefield, and we had personal and painful experience of mines. I replied.

“The most important thing I learned was how lucky I was that you came back to Flanders in 1947. No. That’s wrong. I already knew that. It just got underlined in double thick black lines and put in bold and italic.”

“Thanks for that, Anna.”

“Well, you know the sentiment is real. You’re my one and only Dad, even if Luc had a bit of a role in my appearance on the planet. But he didn’t do very much to make me who I am.

I also think – but it’s more on an intellectual than emotional level – that I got a sense of my physical origins and the circumstances that brought Luc to Ninove. It took Peter and I a lot less time than we – at least I – expected to gain that understanding. But we were lucky to meet the Joos couple in Kapellen. We don’t have full proof that we share a background ...”

“From what Peter told me when we were talking, I think it’s pretty certain what they told you is correct. I’m glad you found that out. It will tie up some loose ends, even if you don’t have all the details.”

“Yes. And it was good to meet Joke and Georges in Lieges, and their family. And I think Julia and Max will become ongoing contacts. Julia trained in England, and I have a feeling she and Max will look for opportunities wherever they arise. She said that she thought the dairy industry here in Eastern Ontario had too many small operations, and well-organized bigger operations with better machinery and selection of animals could be more profitable. We’ll see. Of course, I’m now going to have to become a better correspondent and make sure I write.”

“Do you think you’ll manage to keep in touch?”

“With some people for sure, like Julia and Max. Others we may not have much in common with. Surely it was the same for you?”

“Yes. I sometimes wish I’d tried harder to keep in touch with people. There are a few I’d like to catch up with, but we’ve lost the addresses and people – including me – have moved. Some of my RAF buddies. I know one came to Canada – Calgary apparently – but I’ve not got contact information.”

“Maybe the phone book?” I suggested.

“Yes. Michelle suggested that too. Though to be honest, I’m a bit embarrassed, and therefore hesitant to look up the number in case I’d then feel I had to call.”

“Perhaps your friend feels the same way. He may be glad if you called him.”

“Yes. I’ll think about it. Though we weren’t so much friends as colleagues and comrades. Possibly very few shared interests when you get right down to it.”

I wanted to change the subject and ask Dad about his job.

“You know, when we last had dinner together, you were thinking about your work and such. Did anything come of that?”

“Oh. Well, I guess all the upset with Peter kind of pushed that out of our conversations.

Anyway, I more or less followed your suggestion and had some discreet conversations with the people in the new unit looking at rapidly retunable transmitters and receivers. The job of director had been posted, but around the first of October the posting was withdrawn, as it seems there’s some opinion higher up that the experience with the first director – the one who was parachuted in from the States and had a lot of friction with the existing staff – was one to be avoided. And there’s also some

thinking that there should be a unit that is a bit different from the type we currently have where each consists of a small group of scientists doing related work. There is a view that we might do better with about a half dozen scientists along with a couple of people with industrial experience who help to build some collaborations with industry, and possibly even a sort of marketing person. I was invited to a session of the existing workers plus a few others to propose some ideas.”

“Did you express any opinions yourself?”

“Actually, yes. I mentioned that I’d seen one very successful academic department where the head liked the administration and the promotion aspects of the job, but was happy to work with his scientists so that – within reason – they got the resources they needed for their research. I said I thought that model was one that could work well. But I said that I knew that finding such a leader was rare, and that another model could be a scientific director and a separate manager. The scientific director would represent the team and its work, while day-to-day management would be in the hands of the administrator. Though I pointed out that in this latter model, it would be important to avoid making the administrator subject to the whim of the scientific director.”

“I’d guess trying to write that into job descriptions would be difficult,” I volunteered.

“Yes. I actually said something to that effect. But all successful groups are really the product of good-faith teamwork. You can’t write that human dynamic into rules.”

“So where do things stand now?”

“I think there’ll be some development in the Spring. Several groups have been invited to propose projects that fit the general thrust of the discussions. We’re allowed to talk outside our current administrative units, and also to communicate with industry. But it’s still at the “letter of interest” level, with no promise anything will go ahead. However, I’m fairly certain that something will come of it. Possibly even outside the Research Center if the industry folk grab any of the ideas.”

“Interesting times. Hope it works out for you, personally, Dad.”

“Yes. I’m at a point in my career where I should be consolidating my progress. At least I feel that way. But I don’t want to run around trying to show how great I am and so forth. There’s plenty of researchers who, if their own voice is to be believed, deserve Nobel prizes in at least three categories.”

“That isn’t you, Dad.”

“No. I want my work to be respectable and respected, but I don’t need accolades. Unfortunately, sometimes good work without fanfare is taken as boring or second rate. Then you find you get fewer opportunities and less resources to carry on doing good work. But I also don’t think I want to be doing management all day.”

Hmm. Plenty to think about. I’d felt Dad was “established”, yet here he was worried – no, not worried, but concerned – about his career.

We drifted into small-talk and watched TV and chatted until about 9 p.m. Michelle and Andrea came in. I was just starting to put on my coat, and Michelle hadn’t

taken her's off, so she offered me a lift home. I made a feeble protest that I'd walk before accepting gratefully. Somehow I was tired.

Peter was already home when I got there.

"Pretty tame stag party, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Actually very nice. We went to a little restaurant on Elgin and had steaks and beer. Just 8 of us. A few silly toasts and jokes in poor taste, but yes, I suppose a bit tame. Still, I don't get the point of getting the groom drunk and doing something embarrassing to him. It's not really a sign of support or friendship."

"Yes. I never understood that tradition, either. By the way, I don't think I ever learned much about your stag party."

"Robert arranged it, and your Dad suggested the cottage as it was summer. We had a barbeque and swam and somehow there were a couple of boats – the Sunfish and a neighbour's Kolibri."

"That Sunfish is pretty important in our family."

"How so?"

I related a somewhat sanitized version of the story of how Dad and Michelle got together. Peter thought it was hilarious, but he also said

"I'm laughing my head off, but truthfully I'm really, really glad they found each other."

"Thanks for that. I'd be mad if you were just laughing at them."

"No, no. Never at them. At the situation, yes. But not at them."

While we'd been talking, we'd been getting ready for bed. I said,

“Good. Let’s brush our teeth and forget our PJs for a while.”

“I’m glad I don’t need a sailboat and a gusty day.” Peter responded. I was glad too!

December 17, 1965

Friday afternoon

Marcia and Bill were getting married at City Hall. I was Matron of Honour. Bill had a long-standing friend who was Best Man. The ceremony was around 5, and didn’t take very long. They’d both had to work today, but managed with colleagues to leave a bit early to rush to City Hall. Marcia had a simple, knee-length silk suit. It looked good on her. Her robust Phys. Ed. figure was shown off in a very appealing way. In a fluffy dress, she’d be awkward and possibly ridiculous. As it was, she looked very mature. A different perspective on Marcia. With her, I’d chosen the linen suit I got from Mum’s clothes. We both probably looked 10 years older than we were.

There were just her parents and sister, as well as Bill’s grandmother at the ceremony besides Peter and I and Walter, who was the Best Man.

The reception was at her parents’ house at 6. We had to put on coats and boots – there was a sprinkling of snow. We managed with 3 cars. More people were at the house. I knew a few of them – Jane and Roland for instance, and Dad and Michelle and Andrea came a little later.

I found myself near Bill's grandmother, a Ms. McLaughlin. I got her a drink – she asked for rye and ginger ale – and some of the small sandwiches, and sat down with her.

“Call me Betty, and I'll call you Anna.” she said.

“I'm afraid I don't know much about Bill's background, even though we've socialized with Bill and Marcia quite a bit.” I said to open the conversation.

“You may not know that Bill's parent's died in a car accident when he was 6. He's my daughter's son, and I couldn't see letting him get lost in some government system, so I took him and got guardianship.”

“That must have been hard.” I said.

“Less than you might imagine. He was a good boy. That doesn't mean he didn't get into scrapes and troubles. But no malice or meanness, just high spirits. And I guess I talked to him more as an equal than a child.

Strange. When you have children, you tend to talk down to them. But grandkids you can somehow treat more as ... well, not equals, but independent people in their own right.”

“That's interesting. It sort of mirrors what I found with my Dad after my Mum died.”

“I'm sorry you lost her. Was it long ago?”

“No. Under two years. And they were very much a strong couple.”

“How's he doing now?”

“Very well. That's him over there in the grey suit with the tiny woman. That's Michelle – they got married just this year, and she'd had her own share of troubles, but I think they're finding a good life together. And I've now

a step-sister. That's Andrea over there."

"Glad to hear it. I felt I shouldn't ... well, complicate things, and didn't remarry after my Bill died. Bill is named after him. Though I do have a friend, a gentleman friend, and we've given each other support and company over the years. But we each have our own houses. Though I'll admit sometimes we don't go home every night." She laughed.

"Is your friend here?"

"No. Marcia and Bill did invite Rory, but he's a bit old-fashioned. And it's quite a journey from Belleville to here. But I think this winter I'm going to stir the pot and tell him he'd better come to Florida with me and we'll share a place for a month."

"That could strain the friendship." I said.

"Possibly. But I think it will strengthen it. Might even get him to the altar. About time the old reprobate made an honest woman out of me." she laughed.

I liked Betty. It was clear where Bill got his equilibrium and good sense.

December 18, 1965

Saturday

Andrea had asked if I'd go shopping with her, and we found ourselves wandering the stores on Sparks and Rideau. She tried on some different clothes, discussed some possible small gifts, and bought a few items, but I sensed that shopping wasn't the real reason we were here. Around noon I suggested some lunch – my treat – and we found a small hole in the wall in the Market.

“Anything particular you’d like?” I asked.

“Can I have the club sandwich?” Andrea replied.

“Sure. Go ahead.”

When the waitress came, Andrea ordered the club sandwich and a hot chocolate. I got a hot beef open-faced sandwich and a pot of tea.

As we finished our sandwiches, Andrea looked flustered, then said,

“Anna. Can I ask you something awkward, and not have you tell Mum or Martin?”

“As long as nobody will get hurt if I keep quiet, whatever you ask stops with me.”

“No. It’s nothing like that. More trying to get my own feelings in order.”

“Boy trouble?” I probed.

“I suppose. Though I don’t think trouble.

You may have heard that I’ve gone out a couple of times with Joseph. A boy from school.” Actually I hadn’t heard, but then I’d been preoccupied, and truthfully, I’d be surprised if Andrea didn’t have outings with school friends.

“Anyway, I’m trying to figure out whether it’s appropriate to let him kiss me, or even if I should kiss him.”

Ah. The big questions. I didn’t need to take time to formulate a response.

“Andrea, it’s a matter of what you both are comfortable with. But I think the more serious question is how to deal with where kissing might lead.”

Andrea blushed, but after a couple of seconds said,

“I think that’s really why I wanted to talk to you. I’m know you and Fred went to Quebec together. And Mum

tried to keep it secret, but I learned that New Year's was ... I'm not sure how to say it ..."

"Interesting!" I volunteered.

Andrea laughed.

"Thanks. We'll say "interesting". Anyway, I'm pretty sure you ... er ..."

"Yes. We enjoyed ourselves, and I suspect you are wondering about the risks."

"Whew! Thanks. That's it."

"Well, I'll ask for the same discretion from you, but I'm willing to talk about it. But let's find somewhere more private."

I phoned home from a pay phone and Peter answered.

"Are you going to be there for a while?" I asked him.

"Actually, I was going over to the office to gather up stuff I might need to work on during the holidays. Is that a problem?"

"No. Andrea and I thought we'd come back to the apartment for a girls' chat. Didn't want to bore you or disturb you if you were working."

We signed off with the usual pleasantries after making our plans to get to a party one of Peter's colleagues was throwing. We wouldn't need dinner. Hooray! I was a very lazy housewife in that regard.

When we got to the apartment, I put on the kettle and made some tea. There were some biscuits – actually home-made, but by Ellie, not me – and we sat at the kitchen table.

"So you're wondering about sex and the possible consequences."

"Yeah. I guess that's it." She went quiet.

“Anything in particular?” I prompted.

“Well. Mum had all that trouble with gonorrhoea from Dad. And by putting together bits of conversations, I gather Sharon in Brockville got pregnant and sick. It makes me scared. On the other hand, everyone seems to say how wonderful sex is. And even at home, Mum sometimes comes downstairs in a good mood and kind of glowing. It’s got me wondering.”

“It’s good you’re asking. You’re not yet 16, but you are old enough to get in lots of trouble. I’m pretty sure an awful lot of girls try sex out of curiosity or because boys – or older men – pressure them. And they try to convince themselves it’s special and fantastic, but really they’re not getting what they should out of it.”

“What should you get out of it?”

“That’s a REALLY good question. Good going, Andrea. More girls – more women in fact – should ask themselves that.”

“I wanted to ask Mum, but I get all awkward. Like I told you once before. It’s easier with you. And as I also said before, I think it would be easier with Martin than Mum.”

“Dad’s pretty good to talk too. Non-judgemental would be how he’d describe it. Actually it’s an act. He does make judgements, but he keeps them to himself. A good practise. Worth copying because it lets you learn about things. If you flap out your own opinion, people clam up.”

“Can I ask your view about sex?”

“Oh. I love it.” I enthused. “Oops. Maybe that gives the wrong impression. Or maybe the right one.

Actually, I like it a lot, but I've been really lucky to be with someone – two someones actually – who wants to make it nice for both of us. And if you both want to make it nice, I think it sort of has to work out. And of course, if you're thinking of each other, you take care that there are no untoward consequences."

"Like disease and babies."

"Yeah. Though maybe some couples want a baby, in which case that's hardly an untoward consequence. Be awful to name a baby that."

"What?" Andrea looked confused.

"“Untoward consequence”. Wouldn't that be a horrible name for a kid?"

Andrea laughed. Then asked "But how do you stop the untoward consequences? I've heard kids talk of sheaths or rubbers."

"Yeah. Condoms. They're like long balloons. Rolled up. You roll it down the guy's penis and it catches the sperm and also stops germs from venereal disease. At least it's supposed to."

"Can you buy them?"

"Yes. At the pharmacy, but they're supposed to be only for "prevention of disease", and they keep them under the counter. Don't tell Michelle, but Dad got some when we had "The Talk" after Mum died. He had started a friendship with a Scottish woman who had just come to McMaster, and he worried he might need them, and I'd been asking how he and Mum – my Mum – avoided pregnancy, and he was pretty honest. And he realized that I was wondering about sex and stuff, so he showed me where they were kept."

“Wow. Pretty modern.”

“Truthfully, if Mum had been alive, I probably wouldn’t have had the conversation, and he wouldn’t have dared show me. Michelle actually stumbled across them in a drawer in the house. I had to tell her I’d “cleaned out some drawers” so you wouldn’t find them accidentally.”

“Yes. I can’t see Mum being so tolerant as Martin was.”

“I was turning 20. You’ve a few years yet. In your place, I don’t think I’d push too hard for a bit. Maybe wait until 18 at least, and make sure you have your own views worked out. And in the meantime, try to see if your Mum will talk to you about her feelings and experiences.”

“I still don’t know how to start.”

“Sometimes it’s awkward. But you can make it clear you are trying to formulate your own set of values and code of conduct. I’m sure kids at school talk of necking and petting. I know they did in my time. And I found that pretty silly. If you’re going to have sex, do it properly in a nice, comfortable, safe place, with someone you really trust to treat you right. But I’m kind of a radical that way.”

“Doesn’t sound so radical to me. In fact, I’ve always thought that fooling around in the back of a car like some kids do is just getting all excited and not being able to ... well, do it.”

“You know, Andrea, I don’t think you are going to have too much trouble. But maybe you can tell your Mum how you think about necking, just as you have with me. It could help her to be able to talk to you. After all, you’re not starting by putting her on the spot

with a personal question. She can talk about what other kids are doing. And if she feels comfortable, she can share some of her own experiences. I know she has told me some things about herself and how she and Dad – Martin – found they liked being together. It was very funny actually, but also very personal, so she might take a while to get round to it.”

“It must have something to do with the Sunfish. The pair of them refer to the boat sometimes and grin at each other.”

“You’re pretty good at picking up on the details. Yes. The Sunfish figures in her story, but I’d better let her tell you. I can say it’s a very nice story, very positive and heart-warming, but also kind of embarrassing for her. And Dad too. They have to tell it themselves so they can let you laugh with them, or they may feel their feelings and such have been intruded upon.”

“Thanks for talking to me Anna. When I’m ready, I’ll give Joseph a nice kiss, but I’m going to tell him that I won’t be necking in the back of a car or in the movies. And I’ll try to get Mum talking to me.”

“Yeah. I think you’ll both benefit if you can talk to each other. She’s a lovely woman. I really am fond of her. And she’s good for Dad, too.”

It was about 2:30 now. I heard Peter at the door, and was surprised to hear Dad’s voice, too.

“Hi there Anna.” Peter said, kissing me. “Hello Andrea. Want to come car shopping?”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“Martin phoned, and asked if we needed a ride to shop for a car, and I arranged that he pick me up from the

office then come get you and Andrea. That is, if Andrea wants.”

“Sure. It’ll be fun.” Andrea chimed in.

So off we went. Peter and I had already discussed things a bit. We’d tossed around the idea of a VW Beetle. They were fairly reasonable in price, but I didn’t like the fact there wasn’t much in front if you hit something or went in the ditch. And I’d heard some people complaining they were cold in winter. But the clincher was that they were 2-doors. I liked having a 4 door or a station wagon.

Dad drove us to Belisle’s on Montreal Road. We wanted to look at a Chevy Nova. There was a bit of snow – about an inch had come down – but the roads weren’t bad.

Turned out Mr. Belisle was in the showroom and he’d heard about Peter in the news. So we got the boss showing us cars. Given the snow, it was good that there was one in the showroom. We all got in to make sure there was comfortable room for four. It didn’t feel much different from Dad’s car. Standard 3-speed transmission on the steering column. Straight 6 engine. I think Peter was thinking it might be nice to have a V-8, but we didn’t need to roar around. On the other hand, when the question of air conditioning was raised, we decided that would be helpful if we could afford it. When Dad and I went to Washington in September 1964, it sure would have made things more comfortable.

Belisle said “I can give you a good price on a Nova with air conditioning, especially if there’s one on the lot you like.”

“What colours do you have?” I asked.

“Let me check my inventory to be sure, but there’s definitely this showroom one” (it was white) “and I know there’s a blue one outside, and possibly a couple of others.”

When he came back, it turned out there was a black one, a red one and the blue he’d mentioned.

“I think we should go for blue.” I said.

“Of course.” Dad, Peter and Andrea said together. Belisle looked startled.

“It’s her nickname.” Dad partly explained, without the full story.

“Let’s have a look at it if we may, and perhaps a test drive of one of them.” Peter put us back on track.

We trooped out to the blue one and Peter and I got in. Dad and Andrea had decided to stay inside. Belisle started it up, then invited one of us to drive.

“You drive, Anna.” Peter said. “My foot is still not 100 percent.”

The car went fine. We went a little way along St. Laurent Blvd, turned down Donald Street and came back across through some smaller streets to Montreal Road.

When I’d parked it on the lot, Belisle, who was in the back, said

“Do you like it?”

“Yes. It’s fine. But we now need to find out how much it will cost.”

“Let me get out my pad and see if I can make it attractive.”

We trotted back into the showroom and Belisle scribbled on a pad. Then he said

“With what that one has on it, the list price with tax

is about \$2700. But it's a quiet time, so I can offer about \$2400, and if you'll let me have a photo of you picking it up for us to put up on our wall, I'll drop it to \$2200."

"You mean as a sort of advertisement?" I queried.

"Yes. But not in the papers or anything. Just here. People have heard of your case. We're a community business. We want to be known as such."

"Anyway. You need to talk about this among yourselves. Why not call me Monday if you are interested. We could have it ready for pickup on Christmas Eve. Or possibly the day before, but you need insurance and we need to get the license."

That was a bit of a surprise, not pushing for a decision right now. But not being pushy made me feel a lot more comfortable dealing with him. We said our goodbyes and Dad drove us home. We'd decided to forgo dinner given the party we were going to later. However, we did stop with Dad at the supermarket for a few goodies, and the liquor store for some wine. There was one on Montreal Road near the Eastview hotel. It was busy – party time.

Driving along, Dad asked

"What did you think?"

"I was going to ask you." I said.

Dad answered, "It seems like a fair deal. Belisle was very shrewd to suggest that you wait until Monday. Most sales people want you to rush, but I think he knows he has a sale. It's only a question of whether it really is a good price, though my feeling is that it's pretty good."

"I thought it was fine, too." Peter said. "But I wonder if we should do more looking. Though I have been

watching ads, and the price is certainly not out of line. People say you should bargain, though.”

“In this case, you may be getting better than you could negotiate elsewhere.” Dad said. “You were dealing with the boss, and it looks like he feels he can be seen to be a local good-guy selling to you at a fair price. But we could look through the papers again. I’ve got the Saturday Citizen at the house.”

“Do we need to change for the party?” I asked.

Peter said he thought not, so we decided to go to Dad’s place and check the paper, then go to the party from there.

As the family dinner was being prepared – Andrea and Dad did most of the work, with Michelle directing – Peter and I looked through the paper. Dad also made a phone call to Stephane, since he was in the parts business and had some knowledge. The upshot was that we decided we should take the deal, which apparently was a good one from all the information we had. Hey. We would have a car. Of course, we had to arrange insurance. Dad looked up his policy and we wrote down the name and number of the broker. Peter also phoned home and got Jim to call back with the name of his broker so we’d have a chance to compare.

The dinner we didn’t have was boneless pork chops with a mushroom sauce. Potatoes and carrots and peas. The vegetables from frozen. Not as nice as fresh, but a good meal. I was almost drooling by the time we left for the party. And there was lots of chatter and plans for Christmas. Wow. I’d not had much time to think about that ...

* * *

We took a taxi home about 10. The party was OK, but it was obvious that Peter ran out of steam more quickly than he used to, especially standing around, which caused his leg to get uncomfortable and ache. Still some healing to do. But it had been an interesting day. Not over yet, as it turned out.

“Want to sit in the tub?” Peter asked.

“Only that?” I countered.

“No. Silly. I thought you might want the usual consequences.”

“As long as they’re not “untoward”.” I went on to explain, without much detail, how I came to be thinking that way. That is, that Andrea had noted that necking could have untoward consequences.

“Been religious with the Pill?” Peter asked.

“It’s about the only way I’m devout.” I responded.

By this time, Peter was naked, and I wasn’t far behind. He went in the bathroom and I heard the water running.

“Peter. You left your clothes in a mess on the floor.”

“Sorry. Just too anxious to have you with me in the tub.” Guess I couldn’t get too mad at him if he said that. I picked up his clothes and lay them over a chair neatly. Did the same to mine – they were in a pile on the floor too, but that doesn’t count as messy because they’re mine. If I really could convince myself of that, I’d be able to sell ice on Baffin Island.

When I got in the bathroom, Peter was already sitting in the tub, doing the joint extensions the doctors suggested.

“Front or back?” I asked. Normally I’d be in front, and Peter would make a fuss of washing my tits. I always pointed out that I could manage that quite nicely myself, though in fact it was more fun when he did it.

“Do you really want the back?” he asked, as I got in behind him.

“Sure. Have to have some equality of opportunity.”

“Meaning ...?”

Almost before he could finish the word, I had my hands on his sports equipment. One hand under his balls, the other massaging the tip. Wow, he was already oozing. Must have been thinking about it.

“Anna. Careful. Not so much, you’ll set me off.”

“Oh. Poor Peter. Wouldn’t that be tragic?” I clowned, as I used both hands to hold him very firmly and rub all over his helmet.

“No. But then you wouldn’t.... Oh. I’m going to lose it. ...”

There was a sudden squirt that arced up about 18 inches and splashed in the water. I rubbed gently as a few more squirts came.

“Did that feel goooooood?” I cooed.

“Very. But now you might miss out.”

“I’ll take that chance. Maybe you’ll lick me and we’ll see where it leads.”

“OK. How long do you want to spend here?”

“Oh. Not so long. I might lose interest. Or you might. And we need to wash off a bit first. But we’ll want to avoid your contribution to the bathwater.”

Despite Peter’s concern, once he kissed my pussy he started to get hard, and after he’d made me squeal a

little, he came inside me and lasted quite a long time in a sort of slow, cuddly, friendly way that felt really nice. I'd meant to ask him about plans and presents and decorating for Christmas, but

December 19, 1965

Sunday

We woke quite late. I guess yesterday had been more tiring than we thought. Too much sex and all that! No way would I admit that. We had a lazy start to the day, but by 10 were dressed and had eaten some cereal. Over a second cup of tea, we talked about Christmas. I started off

"You know, we haven't decided what we're doing for Christmas. You know, not even where we're going to have Christmas dinner. Nobody's said anything specific."

"I meant to tell you. Mum asked if we're going to come to them. Robert's asked his new girlfriend Cathy."

"Don't see why not. I'll give Michelle a call and let her know that's what we're thinking. Of course, we should do something ourselves. Maybe Boxing Day. What do you think?"

"We've not much space. But we could do something like an "at home" where we have snacks and drinks from 1 to 4:30."

"That was sort of what I was thinking. And I hope you won't be annoyed if I don't do a lot of cooking and stuff. I think I'd rather just buy some stuff, except maybe for a few easy things that aren't in the shops."

“Like?”

“Maybe some cheese straws – I know your Mum has a recipe and they’re so nice. Of course, we’d probably eat them all before the guests came.”

“Sure. Then you’ll be fatso.”

“I’m not fatso. I weighed myself the other day and I’m only a pound heavier than when we married.”

“Probably weighed yourself naked now and clothed before. Hence fatso. Here. I’ll show you.”

He put his arms round me and squeezed my bum cheeks. Pulled me in against him and kissed me.

“Hmm. Fatso. Definitely nice fatso.”

“Am not!”

“Actually you’re not. But it was a good ruse for a grab and kiss.”

Awful man! But very nice awful man.

“So we’d better phone some people. I’ll call Michelle now and I’ll give Marcia a call on Monday when they’re back. Then you can call your folks and we’ll make a plan.” I took out a notepad from one of the kitchen drawers and drew a crude calendar and started pencilling in the days and times.

“Peter. What do you think of having some baked beans and garlic bread as the main food for the At Home. It’s what we did last year for Boxing Day and it wouldn’t be such a bad idea for a “tradition”. We’d not need so many other things. Maybe some cut up vegetables, the cheese straws, and some cookies and fruitcake. And drinks, of course.”

“We could keep the drinks pretty simple. There’s an old tub at home we could put bottles of beer and pop

in, and maybe a bottle of wine. I'd prefer to not have a lot of liquor – you know rum and whiskey, because then you need table or counter space for preparing the mixed drinks.”

“Good thinking. But we need some guests!”

I called Michelle – actually Dad answered, but once he realized it was social planning, he put Michelle on the line. They were having Charlotte and Bernard and Nicole and Stephane for Christmas dinner. Andrea would be with Bryan and Rachel. If Michelle was disappointed we were going to Jim and Ellie, she didn't let on. I'm pretty sure she's OK with us going to the Sinclairs. Actually might be easier for her to have just a half dozen. We agreed we'd come over for Christmas Eve, and join them for midnight service. And Boxing Day chez nous got a hearty yes. Andrea would come to that, but be away Christmas Eve.

I tried Jane, in case she and Roland could come. Turned out they could come for a while, and I made sure they realized we were having an At Home, so they would be welcome even if they had to leave early. With Bill and Marcia married, they were starting to make plans too, but Roland still had some accounting exams in the Spring of the New Year, so they were long-range wedding forecasts rather than imminent events. Given the other calls Peter and I needed to make, we couldn't gossip as I'd have liked to.

It took only a minute to get a positive response from Stephane and Nicole. Then I turned the phone over to Peter. The Sinclairs were invited before I could return from the bathroom, where I'd taken a brief call of nature.

A couple of Peter's work buddies were glad of an invite. They were far from home, both geographically and socially, I think. Jacob was an American grad student from Chicago. He was Jewish, so Christmas probably would not be a big deal, but Peter said that he'd chosen to study in Canada in case his draft deferral got cancelled. Peter thought there might already be some trouble for him, as he was reluctant to chance a trip home. Apparently quite a number of American boys were coming to Canada because they didn't want to go to Vietnam. I couldn't blame them. It seemed the Americans were backing the wrong horse and supporting a government that was corrupt and undemocratic. Perhaps the so-called Communists were worse. I doubt anyone here in Canada could get the true picture.

Adam came from Vancouver, and it was too costly for him to go back for the holiday. Same applied to Fred of course. Actually, I'd had a letter from him. He and Martina, his Czech-Canadian girlfriend, are going to get married next summer. But they're staying in Vancouver for Christmas because it's just too much effort and money to travel home.

There were surely others we should invite. I set up a sheet so we could add names. Maybe Officer Johnson? Our neighbours downstairs?

It was close to noon now. Having Christmas planned was such a relief, and ...

Oh no, we still had to think of presents and decorating our apartment. On top of which we had to decide about the car from Belisle's. Though I hadn't said anything, Peter, who was browsing yesterday's paper, sensed my

sudden panic.

“What’s up Blue? You look upset.”

“I just got an awful feeling we’ve too much to do. There’s presents, decorating the apartment, deciding on the car, as well as the actual work of preparing for Boxing Day, which is next Sunday. With other busy days between.”

“Come here and stand in front of me.”

“Why?”

“It’s important. I can see something’s wrong and I want to check.”

Puzzled, I walked over and stood beside the table where he had the newspaper.

“Turn around slowly.” He said. I did.

“And?” I asked.

“I think you’ll have to lift your skirt.”

“What!”

“Well, it seem’s that your knickers are in a twist, but I can’t see any visual evidence of it.”

I picked up the paper and swatted him with it. He was clearly in a playful mood. Later!

“You deserve 50 lashes with a wet noodle.” I said.

“Really. Well, for your information, I arranged to get two 5 by 7 prints made of that nice picture of us by your Mum’s farmhouse, and if you look in the corner over there, that Frieman’s bag has two quite nice frames. I figured both sets of parents could have one.”

“Oh. Good idea.”

“And I bought Rubber Soul a couple of days ago. I haven’t opened it yet, so we could give it to Andrea and get another for ourselves?”

“Was that going to be a surprise for me?”

“Well, yes. Hope you don’t mind the suggestion. I’ll have to think of something else for you.”

“You don’t, really. I was going to say that perhaps our best present to each other is just us. After what’s happened, just having you here with me is enough.” I could feel my eyes getting watery.

Peter took my hand.

“OK. How about we just fill a small stocking for each other? Silly stuff. No item more than a dollar and total no more than 5 dollars.”

“That sounds nice. And sort of fun. Yes.”

“But I thought we might also think of a TV from us to us. Or from “Santa” if you prefer.”

“That would be nice. Might get in the way of studies though.”

“Did TV stop your studies at home. Oops. This is home. I should say “when you lived with your Dad” or something like that.”

“Oh. Don’t fuss over that. I have the same problem with finding a way to refer to my folks house, your folks house and our apartment – our home – here.”

I suddenly thought of other presents we might need.

“Peter, what about Robert and possibly Cathy. And there’s Aunt Penny’s crew. Oh. We should maybe invite them for Boxing Day, though they probably can’t come because it’s Sunday and Joe will have to preach.”

“I saw some tin boxes, canisters with lids. They can be used for tea or rice or such. I thought maybe we could bake some cookies and fill them. It’s a present that can go to anyone. Though I’ve a book for Robert

that I bought a while ago. Graham Greene's "The Comedians".

"Tins of cookies. Or even cheese straws. I like that idea. But we'll have to get the stuff for baking them, and we've only one old cookie sheet. Pity we don't already have a car." I noted.

"Mum said she's planning on baking Tuesday. Maybe you could work together. She has a big Mixmaster and we've not checked whether the oven here gives the right temperature."

"You don't think she'd mind?" I know some women are very protective of their kitchen.

"You can always ask, and I think we could borrow the car early and go to the supermarket – offer to get stuff for her too as part of our contribution to the Christmas dinner."

I phoned Ellie, and we agreed Peter and I would get there on Tuesday morning fairly early, take the car and shop – Carlingwood was close and had a supermarket on each side of the road. I told Peter to look up the ads in the paper so we could plan our purchases in advance.

"What about the canisters?"

"I think I saw them in Frieman's, but I'd guess Towers or such would be better. Maybe Sears, since they're at Carlingwood. In any case, we have a few days."

"What about the car we were looking at?" I asked.

"Sure be nice. Do you like it? Max seemed to think we should have one."

"Yes. Let's. And maybe they can have it ready by Wednesday or Thursday so we could use it for shopping."

"Then I'll call Belisle first thing in the morning. Do

you have enough money in your account. I feel bad that it'll be your money from your Mum until we get an insurance settlement."

"I'm not worried. Though next time we see Max we should perhaps ask about having wills. Dad mentioned that to me in passing one day."

"Our families are terribly practical. But better that than the alternative. Too many people lead messy lives."

"And you weren't messy last night?" I asked.

"That was entirely your fault. And much I appreciate it," he smiled.

"By the way, we'd better talk to Jack and Diane downstairs to tell them we're getting a car. They don't have one, but they may have guests, and we may need to shuffle cars sometimes."

Hmm. That was one of the nuisances of apartments in older buildings. Still, there was space. We'd just need to keep on good terms.

"Peter. How shall we decorate the place?"

"A tree would really use up a lot of space. Do you want to get a wreath or two?"

"Just some branches will do. Maybe the tree lot will sell us some cheaply. I asked Dad and Michelle if they had used all their decorations, and Michelle put some in a box for us. It's over in the corner there."

"Oh. That's what that is. I'd meant to ask or look, but was afraid it might be a present or something I wasn't to peek at."

We decided to put a wreath on our "front" door. We took a walk in the early afternoon and found the tree lot next to St. Paul's was in operation, despite Sunday. Fel-

low said he more or less had to be there or trees would be stolen. For 50 cents we got a bunch of branches that had broken off as well as some sprigs we could use. We made a couple of wreaths by taking these and curving them round and tying them, then added a couple of coloured glass balls and some tinsel. Besides the door, made one for the middle of our main wall. We don't have a fireplace, just some radiators. Ran some tinsel and some coloured streamers and added a few more decorations and some sprigs of evergreen along their length. Not fancy, but it still looked festive. And we both made an effort to clear away so that we'd not have to do so much later. Without my asking, Peter broke out our vacuum cleaner – an old one that still more or less worked. He did a passable job with it. I was about to tell him to be more assiduous, then decided that his initiative deserved to be rewarded by my silence.

Later in the afternoon, I got to work on my one-page project outline. Turned out I had photostats of two of the main papers on lasers that I'd want to refer to, and my notes on my cards were enough so I could reference two more. Peter took a look at my draft. It was about 3 handwritten pages, but he figured that typed it would be not too much over one, and I could probably edit a few things down without losing anything of the message. In fact, he made a couple of suggestions for tightening the wording that removed a line or two.

So I typed it up – I'd have to do so again after review, but I wanted Dad to take a look.

It was dark when I finished. The early evening darkness was a little dampening of the spirits, but Peter put

a glass of sherry beside me as I finished typing.

“To us! Many more days like this.” he said.

“Yes. To us.”

Suddenly I smelled cooking. A stew?

“Peter. Have you been cooking?”

“Yes. You were so engrossed with your proposal, I didn’t want to disturb you. I’ve made a stew. Lots in fact. We’ll be able to keep it in the fridge for a couple of days and have it again later in the week. Save cooking.”

“I’ll owe you a return match when you get involved in your work.”

“I think I’m just paying off some favours from when I was hurt. You were a rock. I don’t know what I’d have done without you. Especially when I got you know.”

I got up, brought my sherry and sat beside him on the sofa.

“Yeah. I know. But isn’t that called marriage?”

December 21, 1965

Tuesday

“There we are. All done.” Ellie said, putting the last baking tray of cheese straws on a wire rack. We’d made a great many, but I knew they would disappear very fast.

“Shall I put on the kettle?” I asked. I wanted a cup of tea and to try at least one of the straws.

“Of course. We have to make sure the cheese straws are OK.” Well, we were agreed on that!

We both laughed. Ellie prepared a tray, adding some sugar cookies. I put the water in the teapot and put it

on the tray. I picked up the tray and followed Ellie into the living room.

Somehow we said nothing until we'd poured the tea and sat down. I bit into a cheese straw. Perfect!

"A triumph Ellie. They're marvellous."

"You did all the work. I just kept an eye on you."

"They weren't difficult. I'll be able to do them myself, I think."

"Of course you will. I had a Scottish neighbour who taught me the same way. Her "lessons" kept me sane when I was on my own with the boys during the War. We didn't have a lot of ingredients to cook with, but conversation and tea helped me through. And taught me a lot about the British in the process."

"Did you find it very different from Holland? I was too young to notice, and Mum didn't really make a big deal about the differences between Belgium and here."

"Well, Scotland was different in many ways from Holland. And Canada different again – possibly more so. And the War added other changes, with shortages, men away. And I had two small boys to keep me occupied."

There were a couple of times I felt like laying down and never getting up. Somehow realizing I couldn't let Jim and the boys down kept me going. And there were many worse off than myself. Here in Canada, of course, there weren't the shortages of things, though I missed some of the particular products from Holland or Scotland. Your Mum helped me find substitutes and get my feet under me. I sort of fell with my nose in the butter."

Hmm. I remember Mum saying a Flemish version of that expression. Ellie continued.

“I almost think you had a harder time with Peter’s injuries than I did getting used to Canada.”

“Possibly. There were a few weeks there I wasn’t sure how things would turn out, and in fact none of the outcomes that I could think of were very good. We were very lucky to find a way through.”

December 22, 1965

Wednesday

Belisle said they’d have the car ready by lunchtime, and we planned to do a bit more shopping in it at Westgate and Carlingwood at least. We could give Ellie a ride in it if she joined us for shopping. And we could bring back my part of the baking from yesterday.

However, in the morning I went out to Rideau Street to shop for stocking presents. Also took a look at TVs in Freiman’s and made a few notes. Probably get a modest black and white set. The big colour ones were so heavy – and a bit pricey too.

Mainly I wanted to go to Giant Tiger and Woolworths to look for some stocking items. Both shops were close by to the Market. Also I had to get the stockings! Told Peter I’d arrange for those. Found them for well under a buck. But what to put in them.

- an orange or two – we’d bought a box of mandarins, so no problem
- chocolate – found some of that in GT, in fact some chocolate coins
- a pen sized flashlight - I got one for myself too

- a magnet key box to hide a car key under the bumper
- a couple of trashy spy novels - Woolies had a table of remaindered paperbacks
- a pair of work gloves – why not?
- some dates and some figs. I'd get these at the supermarket and put them in Peter's stocking, but they were really to share.

It was easy from Rideau to take the number 2 bus to Belisle. Peter actually got on two stops down Rideau. Had to make sure he couldn't peek in my bags, but I'd been smart enough to take one of our backpacks so I wouldn't have my hands so full.

"Fancy meeting you here." he said, giving me a kiss. People were looking. I put my left hand up on the grab bar of the seat that was in front of me. They could see my ring if they wanted to know he had a license to kiss me any time he wanted.

"You mustn't look in any bags." I warned him.

"I can wait 'till Saturday." he said, then added "At least for that."

I pretended I didn't hear that.

"I looked at some TVs in Freiman's. The colour ones are pretty expensive and very big and heavy. I think we should consider a 14" or 19" black and white. What they call a portable, though I doubt you'd want to carry it around."

"I'd more or less come to the same conclusion looking at ads in the paper. I'll take another look tonight and

make a list of possibilities, then we can see how they compare.” Peter agreed.

“By the way,” he whispered “I went to the bank. Got out lots of money. Shall I give you some?”

“Not here on the bus. But great minds think alike. I went to the bank too. Got a hundred dollars, in case we see something we want. And I made sure my chequing account can cover the car.”

“Oh well. We’ll be set for money until after New Year’s.”

The bus didn’t take long to get across the Cumming’s Bridge and along Montreal Road. The car was ready. We posed for pictures with M. Belisle and then took off in our new jalopy. Except that it was rather more than that. Peter let me drive. His foot still tired quickly, but was getting stronger. He said he’d try from his folks’ house to Carlingwood as a starter, then see how things went.

As we drove down St. Laurent to the Queensway, I realized we had no lunch plans.

“What do you want to do about lunch?” I asked.

“Let’s pick up Mum and go to Westgate first. We can treat her to lunch across the road in the Lucky Key.”

That turned out to be a good suggestion, as they had a small selection of lunch combination plates. The usual sweet and sour chicken balls (no lame jokes please!), chow mein and such. But honest enough and right for the occasion. There wasn’t much we wanted at Westgate, though we did pick up a few things from the supermarket. Staples mainly as the forecast was for slushy weather, but a few extras for the holidays as well. Things we hadn’t

needed for baking, but which were going to be needed for our At Home. Potato chips, dates, figs, nuts, etc. And the ham hock and dried beans. Pop! We needed stuff for people to drink. Oh. And better go to the liquor store for wine, and the Beer Store for beer.

December 23, 1965

Thursday

A messy day. Rain AND snow. For the next few days a similar forecast with the temperature straddling the freezing point. Well, neither Peter nor I needed to go out today at least. We'd fortunately seen a forecast of this weather and made sure we got in food yesterday at Westgate and also on the way home when we remembered extra items we wanted. It was useful to have the new car to get everything.

The week had been busy! Monday we had settled the car deal. Agreed to a photo, which gave us what appeared to be, and hopefully was, an exceptional price, and also arranged for snow tires and rims – Dad's suggestion. Also phoned for insurance. Made several calls, including the two different brokers used by both Dad and the Sinclairs as well as one other from the Yellow Pages. Turned out Dad's guy was best by a small margin, and we arranged the insurance with him. He also talked us into a small tenants' policy on our things. We hadn't thought we had much, but with Mum's ring that was now a brooch, my engagement and wedding rings, and a few other items, things could add up. And we were gradually acquiring things, for example, a new TV when

we could get round to it. Peter suggested we might look now but wait until after Christmas for that and see if there were any specials. Good thinking.

There'd been shopping and baking Tuesday. Then shopping, car pickup and more shopping yesterday. Maybe a feet-up day today.

Or not. Peter said

"Why don't we get everything more or less ready today for Sunday? Then we can enjoy Christmas."

"OK. What shall we do first?"

"Well. I thought we could start the beans and they could be set outside the window. It's not going to be that warm according to the weather forecast. And not that cold either."

"OK. That's not a bad idea, but we normally should soak the beans overnight. And we could fill the stockings as long as we're good about not peeking. And prepare and wrap the presents." I said.

"Nevertheless, I'll start soaking the beans now. We could boil them up this evening and see if the oven will go on very low so we can bake them overnight."

"While you do that, I'll fill your stocking in the bedroom. Then I'll come and chop stuff if you set it out while you fill my stocking." Peter said.

"We won't need onions and bacon cut up until later. Better to put the photos in the frames while I do your stocking."

We worked away like this. There were other presents to prepare. I also felt somehow I wanted something special for both Dad and for Michelle. But what? Mainly something to say how much I loved them both. Sort of

surprised as I realized how much affection I now felt for Michelle. Andrea too.

“Peter. Somehow I want to let Michelle and Andrea know I really care about them. More than the presents will do.”

“Why don’t you simply tell them that in a card. We have a bunch of cards, and actually we’ve got to write some.”

“Oh. Damn! ... Sorry. I guess with everything going on, I’d pushed that into the back of my mind.”

“Me too. Let’s make a list and write them today.”

“A lot of writing – we have the same story for almost everyone.”

“Ah. But you remember I went to the office yesterday.”

“To get some books and papers to work on over the holiday.” I said.

“And these.”

He pulled out a pack of sheets of paper. They were printed in the purple ink of a spirit duplicator. We use it for assignments and tests for students, and it’s pretty easy to use. Peter continued, “I typed up a simple factual history of our year. We can add personal messages. I printed about 60, which should be more than enough or we’ll go bankrupt on postage.”

“Why so many?”

“The spirit duplicator makes some muddy copies, especially after 40 have gone through, but sometimes earlier if the alcohol isn’t evenly spread. There should be 40 to 50 decent ones. I figure’d we’ll need that many. Want to read it? But no complaints about typos – with

my hand the typing wasn't easy."

"Fair enough. And unless there's something scandalously wrong, I'm going to be really glad you did this."

I took the top sheet of the pile and read it. It had our apartment address and phone number at the top, then continued

\hspace{2in} Ottawa, December 1965

Dear Friends and Family,

This is our first Christmas as a married couple, and we wanted to tell you what has happened in our lives. We've known each other since we were children, actually since Peter and his family came to Ottawa in 1953, but there was a gap of nearly four years until last Christmas' "At Home" with our family. We went to the New Year's party together at the Chateau Laurier, somehow were like gasoline and matches. We married at the end of the year and took a very nice honeymoon in Belgium and Holland.

For information, Peter's mother was Dutch, while Anna's mother was Flemish, so we share more than one language and cultural background, although neither of us are very good with Dutch/Flemish, we did improve during our honeymoon. Peter's birth father, Luc, was killed by German soldiers in late August 1914 while retreating from that part of Belgium near Ninove. We learned a lot more about his background. Unfortunately he was the only member of his family to survive the Great War. His brother died trying to cross into England over the Dodendraad (Death Wire), and his parents and sister died together of the Flu. During our honeymoon we fortuitously met Jan and Grietje

in Kapellen. Anna spotted their name on the market permit. They have a small-holding near Brasschaat (north of Antwerp) and Jan is almost certainly the son of Luc's aunt. Luc's uncle died of the flu at the same time, and his aunt could not look after him. He was in an orphanage until he became an agricultural worker. He was the hired hand at the farm of Anna's mother. Clara's parents died at the beginning of WW2, and she ended up marrying

At the beginning of September 1944, Anna's Dad, Martin Tremblay, was in an RAF truck passing the farm when a mine blew up. It killed the other two RAF men in the truck, and Martin was slightly wounded. Clara was thrown into the ditch and Anna ended up in a small tree. That important tree has since died but we took a picture of its successor. Martin returned to Belgium in 1945 to visit Clara, with whom he'd maintained a correspondence. They decided to marry. Martin was originally from Ottawa, and finishing his undergraduate work at Oxford in preparation to do a doctorate at Toronto. So Anna came to Canada via Oxford late in 1947.

Unfortunately Clara passed away in early 1964. 1965 has been happier. At the end of January, Martin and Michelle married in a joint celebration with Des (Anna's cousin) and Sharon in Brockville. Andrea, Michelle's daughter, is Anna's new sister.

Peter's parents met in Scotland when they were both completing their nursing training. Jim Sinclair was the Medical Officer for Martin's father and after correspondence between Jim and Martin, the Sinclairs came to Canada in the early 1950s.

Peter is working on a doctorate in epidemiology while Anna is completing her undergraduate degree in physics before starting graduate work. We had a bit of a setback at the end of September when Peter was hit by a car that jumped the sidewalk. His injuries were quite serious, but the car

and bandages are now off and we are moving forward. The driver left the scene, which is a serious offence. We are letting our lawyer look after the insurance settlement.

In the last week we have acquired our first car. A blue Chevy. Some of you may know that Anna's nickname is Blue. The story is too long to include here. This last week has also included the wedding of our friends Marcia and Bill. A lot of people getting together this week.

With the accident, we haven't made plans for 1966, but we hope to see many of you and hear news from the rest of you.

Our best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Anna and Peter Sinclair

"Hey. That's really good. It lets everyone know the background, because some will know one side and some the other. I'm sure if I tried I could think of changes and additions, but there's only one that I'm going to be insistent on."

"What?" Peter looked worried.

"A big kiss." I said, which made him smile and give me one.

"Did you make a list of people to send it to? And cards?"

"Mentally. I should write it down." Peter replied.

"Don't fuss. I'll start one. Why don't you make us some tea and bring some cookies and we'll work on it while the beans soak?"

That's pretty well what we did. I listed people in

the UK, with some question marks for the Scottish folk Peter would add. I put in Jane Strong and also David and Esther, though I wasn't very close to them. There were all the Belgian folk, including Jan and Grietje. I listed Julia and Max separately from Max' parents.

"If we've sheets left over, what do you think of including one for family members?" I called out.

"Would they need it?" Peter replied as he brought a tray. He was almost not limping now. We were sitting at our kitchen – well, our only – table.

"Probably not. But sometimes you forget who's been informed and who hasn't."

"True. Well, if there's any left over, let's drop one in. Put the list there, and we'll strike through the names as we write them. Don't want to both write cards to the same person. If you like, just put the name on the envelope and we'll sort out addressing them together later."

We set to writing. Peter set down three sheets of paper on the floor by the wall marked UK, Belgium/NL and Canada. I was about to ask about the USA, but Grandpa and Grandma were back here now, and there wasn't really anyone I'd be sending cards to in the States.

On my list I had Andrea and Michelle. While Michelle would get a framed picture with Dad, I wanted to write them separate cards.

Dear Michelle,

We've not known each other that long, and you've been married to Dad less than a year. However, I wanted to tell you that I'm really glad you came into my life. You are important and precious to me, and the

sentiment is sincere when I sign this

Love, Anna

I hadn't noticed Peter get up and walk round behind my chair.

"Well put." he said, and kissed my cheek, then went back to his own chair after dropping a fourth sheet "By Hand" near the others. Oh. Good idea. A number of our cards would go with presents.

Dear Andrea,

You've been 'Sis' for less than a year. I've never had a sister before, but I wanted to say how much I've enjoyed being together and how much I value you in my life.

Love, Anna

Most of the cards I wrote – and it looked like Peter was writing – had a very short message. I wrote a bit more to Julia and Max and to Jane. In fact, we'd got a print of one of our wedding photos for Jane with me in The Dress. I knew where the print was, so I got up and included it.

"Warm up the tea?" I said while I was up.

"Sure." Peter mumbled, busy in his writing.

Later on we spent almost an hour getting addresses and stamps on the cards. Peter had had the foresight to get stamps and airmail stickers. If we'd planned ahead, we could have sent unsealed cards for a lot less by sea mail. But those couldn't have enclosures. And suppos-

edly only a 5 word greeting, or something like that. As if the ink were made of uranium and might sink the boat.

It was starting to get dark as we finished and collected the envelopes together.

“Peter. There’s a collection box on Main that would get picked up sometime after 5. Why don’t I go post all those that are not to be hand delivered.”

“Sure. Let’s do that.”

“You OK to come along given the mess out.”

“It’s only a couple of blocks. Is there anything we need at the corner store?”

“Maybe some milk. We’re almost out. We forgot that yesterday.”

We went through the cards one more time to make sure they were all addressed and had the right stamps. Then did the December Dance of getting coats and boots on and tumbled out the door. We met our neighbours from downstairs as they came in.

“Good we met.” said Diane. “We can come for a little while on Boxing Day, but have to go to my Aunt’s for dinner.”

“No problem.” I said “We deliberately chose to do an “At Home” so people could drop in for a little while if they had other things on.”

“Great. We’ll look forward to it.” Jack jumped in. I realized we knew almost nothing about them. Well. We’d been pretty occupied this Fall. Let’s hope for a slightly boring time in 1966.

December 25, 1965

There were six of us for dinner at the Sinclairs'. In the British fashion, we were eating in the middle of the day. Actually 2 pm.

We'd been with Dad and Michelle last night. Just the 4 of us. Given all the eating that would go on over the holidays, we had a light meal of tourtiere and salad, though we did enjoy a nice piece of Christmas cake with a glass of Advocaat after. Well, we weren't going to just have ordinary egg nog, were we?

They had a quite large wrapped box for us. We already knew that there were casserole dishes inside. We gave them ours, but we decided not to open presents before Christmas morning.

Actually, since we were just four, I was able to show Dad my graduate research suggestion, which I'd got typed up. He thought it looked pretty good, and especially liked how I'd brought in references, but still kept it down to 1 page.

Peter didn't drink any alcohol except for a tiny drop of advocaat, as he was driving us to church for the midnight service. There was nothing obviously different about the carols and prayers to distinguish this year from last, but it felt more comforting and calming, perhaps because of all that had happened, both good and bad in our lives. I was glad we were there, and that we were with Dad and Michelle. I wasn't quite sure if or how I should react to my feelings, so decided to just let the sounds and sights wash over me.

As Peter drove us home after dropping off Dad and

Michelle, he said, "I'm glad we went. I'm not very religious, and I don't think you are, but it gave me a good feeling to be there."

"Yes. I was thinking the same thing during the service. It was good to be there, and good to be there together."

"Love you, Blue."

"I love you too, Peter."

These thoughts were in my mind as we set off for Christmas dinner with my in-laws. We arrived about one o'clock. Cathy was already there, and she came forward very positively.

"Hi. I'm Cathy."

"I'm Anna, and of course this is Peter."

"It's the first time we've met. Welcome to the Sinclair household if others haven't done so." Peter said.

"Robert and your Mother and Father have been very welcoming." Cathy said.

She was a bit different from what I'd expected. Short hair. No makeup. Rather solid, almost masculine appearance. But a nice smile and lively disposition.

Jim arranged drinks and we toasted Merry Christmas. Then we opened presents. We knew we were getting a dutch oven, but Ellie had also included some cookie sheets, a pie pan and a loaf pan. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and a hug.

We'd got her some Dutch salt licorice in addition to the photo for both parents. I didn't like it – the salt licorice that is. Nor did Peter, but "drop" was a special treat for her, and she popped one in her mouth right away. She offered them round, but only Cathy took one, despite warnings. She didn't spit it out, but it was clearly

not what she expected.

Over dinner we learned that Cathy was a prison warden at the local gaol. That was a bit of a surprise, and I guess she was a bit older than the rest of us. Robert was finishing a degree in history, like me in his final year. He was six months older than I. Possibly he'd taken a year off somehow during his schooling.

"Are you going to try for graduate school, Robert?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. I'd like to, but I need to decide if I really want to become an academic. Otherwise, I think I'd like to become an archivist. I'm looking into what training is required to get into that field."

"How did you and Robert meet?" Peter asked Cathy.

"Well, I could cause an uproar round the table by saying we met through my work, but actually Eric and my friend Marian were both at Nates for a quick lunch and there was only a table for two left so they decided to share it. Marian suggested we double date one night, and we all seem to get along well. ... And Robert and I in particular."

The conversation unrolled about work and whether one enjoyed it or not and what were the reasons for liking or not liking a job. The food was, as always with Ellie cooking, really good. Rather than a turkey, she had decided to bake a salmon. Different, but very nice. And fewer leftovers.

For dessert, there was the lemon chiffon pudding. Totally different from anything we get in restaurants, and nothing at all resembling lemon meringue pie. Once again I told myself to get the recipe. Ellie had told me

it was just gelatin, lemons, eggs and a little sugar. Must try to make it sometime.

As we were driving home – Peter was driving again. Good! – I said,

“That was such a pleasant change from traditional Christmas dinner.”

“Meaning?”

“Well. The traditional turkey with stuffing, then the pudding and brandy sauce. One usually feels that there might be a nasty explosion from eating too much. This was really pleasant. There was plenty, but it didn’t result in feeling all stuffed and uncomfortable.”

“Yeah. Mum’s pretty good about making it nice. She’ll do a turkey for New Year’s or maybe Epiphany, but no stuffing. And Christmas Pudding will likely be on the menu for one of the Sunday dinners. It’s really too much on top of turkey and stuffing.”

“Yes. I agree. Now. What did you think of Cathy?” I said.

“A bit unexpected. Hard to make her out. Dad and Mum have been kind of prodding Robert about his lack of girlfriends.”

“He’s not a bad looking guy. Have there never been any girls?”

“None in particular. Occasional girls who came with a group, but I don’t think he ever asked one out individually. I’d been starting to wonder if he’s not interested. You know, ... er ...”

“Homosexual? What people cruelly call queer.”

“It had occurred to me. He’s always palled around with his friend Eric. Thick as thieves. I’m kind of glad

he showed up with Cathy.”

I wanted to say something, but with a struggle managed to keep silent. I’d read that men who liked to ... er... interact with men sometimes provided themselves a cover story by marrying or otherwise taking up with a woman. For instance something stuck in my head about Cole Porter and his marriage to Linda Lee Thomas. I suppose women who liked women could do the same. Though some seemed to be able to live more or less openly. Michelle’s high school friend Barbara shares a house with Joanne, who seems to be much more than a roommate, and who has that same masculine quality as Cathy.

December 26, 1965

Sunday. Boxing Day.

The weather had cleared up – and got colder! Still, a lot less messy.

We got up quite early, but stayed in our PJs. I was wearing ones that were sort of like mens’ ones. Jacket and pants. They were warmer. Peter joked they were contraceptive ones because unlike mens’ PJs there was no slit to allow the fun parts to get together.

Ha. Ha. When he said that I whipped the pants down and flashed my pussy, then dived into the bathroom and locked the door. Well, only till I’d finished peeing.

When I came out, Peter rushed in. Guess he was “in need”. I put the oven on very low and got the beans in from the outside ledge. Oooh that felt cold.

“What shall we do first?” Peter asked as he came out of the bathroom.

“Suggest we stay in PJs until we’ve done all the getting ready that we can. Then we can take a shower ...”

“Oooh. And have some fun if we’ve time.”

“That too, assuming you’re “up” for it.” I hammed.

“By the way, I meant to suggest to you that we put our wallets and anything else valuable in your document box.” Peter said.

“OK. Seems a little untrusting of our friends, though.”

“I know. But we do have some people coming we don’t know very well, like Diane and Jack. It would be really awkward if something does go missing and we have suspicions. Better to simply put stuff away.”

“Yes. Makes sense. Let’s do it now.”

We got our wallets. Documents like passports were already in the box, as was the brooch I’d had made of Mum’s engagement ring. I got the key out of my top drawer where we kept it in a little cardboard box. There was another key taped securely under the bottom drawer. Following an idea I got from Dad, who had a document box when he was a student at Oxford, we had the box itself secured to a radiator pipe inside the closet with a bicycle cable lock that used a combination. No sense having the whole box disappear.

“What do you want for breakfast?” Peter asked.

“Usually I’d say ‘NOT turkey!’, but since we had salmon, I’ve not got my usual Boxing Day breakfast message.” I replied.

“OK. How about some porridge with raisins?”

“If you make it. I’ll defer to your eminent Scottish

heritage.”

“All right.” Peter said, starting to get out the pan.

While he made breakfast, I cleared up the bathroom. We’d have to touch up after a shower, but I could set out the guest soap and some small towels, make sure there were extra rolls of toilet paper. I cleaned the toilet, just in case, and got out the wash rag and did the sink, the toilet tank and seat, and anything else that could use a wipe. Hmm. Entertaining was work!

Peter called “Porridge”. Fortunately he had prepared tea as well.

I poured some milk on my porridge and left it for a moment. I liked to have it get a bit firm, so I sipped my tea for a while before spooning some porridge into my mouth. It was nice. Comforting.

We didn’t say much over breakfast. Perhaps we didn’t need to. The silence was companionable, not strained. We flirted a bit with our eyes over the top of our mugs of tea. Sort of interesting.

“Can you stir the beans?” I asked. “But be careful not to burn your arms on the side of the oven. Last year I think Aunt Penny and Michelle wrapped damp tea towels round their arms as well as wearing the oven gloves.”

“I checked that the shelf will slide out safely and still support the bean pot.” Peter replied, and proceeded to do this. There was a wave of warmth as he opened the oven. He’d set out a plate for the wooden spoon and used it to hold the top of the pot while he stirred carefully. The smell was going to drive us crazy until we could have some.

While he did this, I set up our TV tables, which were really all we had bar the kitchen counter and the kitchen table to put things on, except possibly for the stove top. If we were cooking it would be hot. But today we could put the beans there, of course.

We'd bought some paper plates. Quite solid ones in a medium size, about 7 1/2 inches. And plenty of plastic forks and a few spoons. Didn't want to have to wash up. Besides, we don't have more than 6 of anything! I'd also got a big pack of square napkins. I used one TV table. They're a bit wobbly, but I put out a couple of piles of paper plates, three modest towers of paper cups, and then took paper cups and filled two with plastic forks and one with plastic spoons.

Peter and I had both saved some rocks from when we were kids. Should have thrown them out years ago. Glad we didn't. I washed and dried them in the bathroom as Peter was busy in the kitchen clearing and washing breakfast things. They worked great to keep the napkins tidy. The TV table was pretty full, but I only intended it for a pickup station for plates and utensils and napkins.

Somewhere or other we'd acquired some big plastic bowls. They were actually cheap and nasty, but they were about a foot across and would do nicely for chips and popcorn. I figured 2 more of our 4 TV tables.

Popcorn! And chip dip!

"Peter. We were talking of popcorn and chip dip. But ..."

"The dip package is in the cupboard. It's an onion dip. I didn't get any chives, but I don't think it'll matter. I'll get the cream cheese out of the fridge and let it warm up

a bit. May need to add a bit of milk so it isn't so stiff. I'll start making some popcorn now. In fact I'll do two batches so there's enough to refill the bowl and we'll put the extra in a grocery bag."

As he talked, he got out the big dutch oven Ellie and Jim had given us for Christmas – it wasn't a surprise because they are eminently practical and asked what we needed – and put it on the stove and put in a pat of butter and a half cup of kernels from a package I hadn't noticed in the cupboard.

Pretty soon we had a pot of popcorn and a nice smell in the apartment. Peter filled a grocery bag except for the unpopped kernels which he put in the garbage. Oh. I'd have to take that out before guests arrived. It wasn't full yet. And I'd better put some garbage containers around. I found our waste baskets and lined them with grocery bags and set them out in the living room. I'd also a fairly good sized cardboard box I'd picked up at the supermarket for garbage and taped down the flaps and wrote GARBAGE on each flap. That one for the kitchen, along with our regular bin that went under the sink.

By this time there were more pops coming from the pot. I sneaked a handful from the bag.

"No samples!" Peter commanded.

"I'm the housewife, and I have to make sure it's OK." I replied.

I took the cream cheese to the table and put it in a bowl with the contents of the dip mix. Added a bit of milk and smushed it around with a fork. Took a while, but I got it smooth, then put the contents in a smaller

bowl and put it in the fridge.

Then I took out the two loaves of Italian bread from the fridge and cut them almost all the way through. We'd made up some garlic butter on Thursday, but it was pretty hard.

"I think you can just put a small pat between each set of slices. It will melt when we put the bread in the oven." Peter suggested. That's what I did, wrapping each loaf in foil after I'd added the garlic butter. As there was a bit left, I put the bowl on the stove. It could get soft there and we could add more if needed.

Then I cleaned some celery and cut it into reasonable lengths and put it in water. Scraped and cut some carrots too and put them in salted water with a dash of lemon from a bottle of lemon juice.

"We've still the cheese straws and the cookies to put out." I said.

"I'll help you do that at the last moment. We want them to keep fresh."

"I'm planning to put them on the remaining TV table on dinner plates." I said.

"Fair enough." Peter replied. "Also I'll have to wait until I'm dressed to get some snow in the tub I brought over."

This was an old oval wash tub of galvanized steel. Pretty heavy.

"Why don't we use the bucket and bring up a couple of buckets full of snow. I don't want you struggling with that tub. We had quite a time getting it up here empty." I said.

"OK. It's a pity we don't have ice, though."

“Somehow we acquired 4 ice trays, but our fridge has a tiny freezer.” I noted. “Why don’t we fill them and put them out on the window ledge. It’s cold enough.”

I did this, getting very cold fingers in the process.

“I guess we won’t have tea or coffee for people.” I said.

“Can’t do everything in a modest apartment. You know. This is the first time we’ll be entertaining.”

“Hey yes. And we would decide to invite our whole world.”

“It’ll be fine, Anna. Remember not to get your knickers in a twist.”

“I can’t, anyway.”

“Why not?”

“Hmm. Maybe that head injury is affecting you – don’t you recall I showed you earlier I’m not wearing any knickers.”

“Got me there!”

* * *

Late in the afternoon, everyone but Dad, Michelle and Andrea had gone. It had been a roaring success. Both sets of parents came with offerings of cookies, cake and nibbles, which turned out to be helpful, since we ran out of cheese straws and some of the cookies. There were still some beans left. That was good, because Peter and I had been so busy with greeting and meeting that we hadn’t had any. I was a bit hungry.

“Do you think it’s OK for the host and hostess to have some beans now?” I asked nobody in particular.

“You’d better. They’re good.” Dad said as he compressed some of the garbage. Michelle was helping him gather it all up. There wasn’t too much, but it was nice to have help getting tidied.

I put some beans on paper plates for Peter and I. There were just 2 pieces of garlic bread left. I added some celery and carrot sticks to each plate, finishing up the carrots and leaving only a couple of celery sticks. Good!

Peter and I sat down at the table with our plates. Andrea handed us two paper cups.

“Wine?” she asked.

“Thanks. Does that finish the bottle.” I asked her.

“The white wine, yes. There’s about a quarter bottle of red left. But I think you told me once you prefer the white.”

“I do.”

“Why don’t I pour my white into your cup – we’re not driving anywhere tonight and I think this is your first alcohol today – and I’ll have some red.” Peter volunteered. Andrea reached for the bottle of red as he poured his wine into my cup.

“Do you want anything? Dad. Michelle.”

“Do you mind if I make some tea?” Michelle said.

“Of course, not. It’ll give us time for a bit of a visit. We’ve not had much chance to actually chat recently, despite Christmas Eve. And this is our first time entertaining.”

“You did a great job with a small space and limited equipment.” Michelle countered.

“Thanks. It went much better than I’d expected.”

“The beans are always a good choice. And you set

things out in an efficient way so there wasn't much fuss."

"When Jane and Roland asked what they could get us for a wedding present, I asked for a bean pot. I was already thinking of getting one anyway, and I knew that I wanted one and that it was something affordable for them as a gift."

"And you'll always remember who gave it." Michelle said.

"Do you think you missed out on what Marcia calls 'keen loot' by saying no presents?" I asked Michelle.

"No. We had essentially two households to merge. You got some of the leftovers, as did Des and Sharon."

"Yes. Some, like those bowls up there, are pretty useful and will get kept. Others will be replaced with more practical items or ones that better suit our tastes. That's why we were glad you asked us what we wanted for Christmas. The Pyrex casserole dishes are going to get lots of use."

Michelle said "And we did get a lot of presents actually. Mostly consumables like bottles of booze and such. Also some memento type things like a couple of photo albums with copies of old photos and space for more and some little practical things for our honeymoon. And some English money tucked in a card. By the way, Anna, I forgot to tell you how much I appreciated your card. It made my Christmas."

"Yeah. It was really nice what you said for me too." Andrea joined in.

"Well. The feelings are genuine ..." I started.

"Did I miss something?" Dad jumped in.

"I think the phone rang – Penny called – and I guess

I forgot to show you. Ask me when we get home and I'll show you. Anna put some very nice sentiments in the card with the present from Peter and her.

Oh, Anna. When you asked about "keen loot" and I said we had to merge two households, I should have mentioned your Mum's sewing machine. I've got one, and I don't think we need two. Do you want it?"

"Yes. I'd sort of meant to ask, but things got busy. I'd love to have it, though lately I've not had much time to think of using a sewing machine. Still, I'll eventually want one available, and having the one Mum used would be nice."

"We'll sort that out and have it ready next time you come over." Dad said.

January 1, 1966

Saturday

I woke up a bit disoriented because the bed and room were strange. Then I realized we were in the spare bedroom at Grandma and Grandpa's in Brockville. We'd come down for New Years. Dad and Michelle were supposed to come too, but both had a bad cold or flu. Sure hope we don't get it, but we haven't been with them since last Sunday, and they only got sick yesterday morning.

Andrea was a casualty of this, as she really wanted to come to see Joan. However, she was – despite putting on a brave face – also under the weather, though possibly less seriously than Dad and Michelle.

Having our own car made it easier for Peter and I to come. We were kind of wanting to show it off anyway.

Despite the flu casualties, we had a very nice party with Joe and Penny and all the crew. We all welcomed the New Year, but were back at the duplex by 1. Peter and I had a little “anniversary” celebration of our own in bed, but I had to make sure I wasn’t noisy.

I eased out of bed so as to avoid waking Peter and went to the bathroom. Gave my face a wash so I felt a little more awake. What time was it? I crept back into the bedroom and noticed the alarm clock said 7:30. Quietly I made sure it wasn’t set. No sense waking everyone up.

Gently I slid back into bed. A hand slipped up under my nighty and gave one of my tits a squeeze.

“Ah. It’s you and not some strange woman.” Peter said.

“What would you do if it was a strange woman?” I asked.

“At the risk of an early demise, I’ll suggest I’d make sure she wasn’t strange.”

“Men!”

“Do you think a strange woman would let me do this?” Peter said, now caressing the breast he’d squeezed.

“Unfortunately, yes. It feels nice.”

“Hmm. Honest answer. I was all prepared for a good debate, and now I can’t think what to say.”

“Don’t say anything, and give me a kiss” I said, rolling toward him.

He gave me a little kiss and we kind of rolled into each others arms and cuddled.

“A lot’s happened in one year.” I said.

“Sure has. I’m so glad we found each other.” Peter replied, almost with a tone of worry. But then I felt the

same way. That I'd feel empty without him. Like life would be really dull, grey and tasteless if he weren't in my life. I'd better tell him.

"Peter. Life wouldn't be right for me without you part of it. When we're together like this, I'm afraid sometimes to let go in case you ... well ... disappear."

"Yeah. I feel that way too sometimes."

"Not just for my tits and pussy?"

"As lovely and enjoyable as they are – no, not just for them. I ... well, I'm not sure how to express what I feel, how strongly I feel. But I'll work on it."

I thought of saying something, then kissed him instead. We smooched a bit and enjoyed a bit of grab and squeeze for a few minutes.

"Should we get up and make breakfast for the others?" I suggested.

"Hmm. Yes. But maybe not actually make it in case they aren't hungry. But get things ready so it's just a matter of cooking the eggs and such."

We rolled out of the bed, each on our own side and went in the bathroom together. I took a quick shower while Peter was on the throne and he did the same as I dried off. We were out in less than ten minutes and dressed quickly. I'd already talked to Grandma about doing breakfast and knew where most things were, so set Peter to laying the table, including places for Des and Sharon. It was now about 8:30. I wondered whether I should phone down to their part of the duplex, or should go down and knock, when I heard a quiet knock on the kitchen door – there was an inside staircase that joined both units at the back, but the front stairs were open.

I opened the door, and there was Sharon with a tin which turned out to have some home-made sticky buns. Peter was in our bedroom for some reason. I think he'd forgotten his watch.

"I heard you in the kitchen." she said, "Des is in the shower. Are Grandma and Grandpa up yet."

"I don't think so."

As I said this, Grandpa called out "Morning. Anyone need the bathroom before I shave?"

"No. We've had our showers." I replied. Then to Sharon "That's our answer. You might as well take a seat and chat while I get the coffee and tea on. Will Des want bacon and eggs?"

"I think so. Me too today."

"Any reason today in particular?"

"Oops. Don't tell anyone else, but I'm 3 months gone, and up to now had a bit of the morning bleuchiness."

"Is that an official word? I like it!"

Sharon laughed. "No. More describes how I feel sometimes. But I think I'm past it."

"I hope this works out well for you, Sharon."

"I've a good feeling about this baby. Des told me he wants children, and he's been excited. I'll tell Mum Baker soon, and later the others, when I start to show. But just for now, I want to keep it to ourselves. Not sure why."

At that moment Peter returned from our room, so I set him to cooking some bacon. Conversation moved to "what did you do over Christmas" and we went back and forth over the events in each household. The bacon was being drained on some paper when Grandma came in,

followed by Grandpa.

“Ready for some breakfast?” I asked before they could even say “Good morning”.

“Yes, of course.” Grandma said.

“Coffee first, if there is some.” Grandpa added.

“In the pot. Mugs are there. Cream and sugar on the table. And the kettle’s just boiled for tea, which is what I’m having. Can you fill the teapot, Peter?”

Peter didn’t reply, but warmed the teapot, added a couple of teabags – it was a big pot – and filled it with boiling water. Then he said, “How do folks want their first 1966 eggs?”

“Scrambled for me. And good morning everyone.” Des came in from downstairs.

“I’ll let Peter or Des do scrambled. I know Grandma would like a poached egg.” Sharon said. “And I’m prepared to make it in the deep frypan. Anyone else for poached?”

We ended up splitting on gender lines, with the ladies having poached and the men scrambled. Sharon sent Des downstairs to make the scrambled eggs so there wouldn’t be too much contention at the stove. Grandpa was given the toaster on the sideboard in the dining-room which was adjacent to the kitchen and where we’d need to eat since we were too many for the small kitchen. Peter joined Grandpa once he’d got out the jam and peanut butter and the condiments. Grandma and I took the two chairs at the small kitchen table, which had a window that looked out over the snow-covered back garden.

“This is a nice view, Grandma.”

“Yes, isn’t it. And Sharon’s work in the garden has

made it rather special. It was gorgeous in the Fall. It looks nice now, too, but that's the snow and sunshine."

It was clear, but not cold. In fact, it would be above freezing today.

"The garden is such a joy to me." Sharon added, her smile a clear indication that it was special to her.

"Grandma, are you gardening at all?" I asked.

"Oh. I sometimes give Sharon a hand, but I'll guess I slow her down more than help."

"But we have such great chats. I've learned so much about the world and things that happened. Like how Grandpa and Martin had to build a bomb shelter in the garden."

"Oh. That awful Anderson shelter. How uncomfortable it was."

"But fortunately never needed." I said.

"Well. We had to use it when there was an air raid, but no bombs fell near enough that its protection saved us. And there wasn't much that you could do later about the V2's."

"Did any of them fall near you? Last summer Peter and I learned how much damage and how many deaths they caused near Antwerp."

"Well. One broke my arm. See the scar here." Grandma pointed to just above her wrist.

"Oh. I knew your arm was broken by a falling brick, but not how." I said. What a shock! "When did that happen?"

"Boxing Day 1944. 21 years ago last week. Seems longer in some ways."

She was quiet a moment. I wanted to prompt, and

guessed Sharon did too, but we both waited, and she continued.

“I went into town – London that is – for a party we decided to have to celebrate a course I’d taken at the North London Polytechnic about substitute ingredients in recipes. All pretty awful actually from today’s perspective. Anyway, I was going to take the Tube from King’s Cross which is on the Northern Line so direct to Morden and home, so I was walking down the Caledonian Road sometime after 9 pm when a V2 hit in Mackenzie Road. It killed 68 people, most of them in a pub where there were only 2 survivors. Apparently 86 injured, and I suspect I wasn’t counted, because I was quite far away. However, the blast dislodged some bricks on an already damaged building that was more or less derelict. Got my arm. A few inches over and no Miriam. Took me a long time to get the strength back enough even to write. I’m sure Peter’s having the same trouble from my conversations with him.”

“Wow. I never knew that, Grandma.”

“It wasn’t long after you, your Mum and Martin were blown up. And Robert nearly ended up on the double-decker bus that went down a big hole in the road near Morden. But that was earlier in the War.”

“Eggs are ready.” Sharon said, then went to the door and loudly yelled down to Des. “Bring those eggs up, honey. We’re ready here.”

I couldn’t help noting how different she was from the unhappy young woman we’d taken in less than a couple of years before. Was it the same person, or one transformed by being part of a family that showed her respect

and love.

* * *

We left Brockville about 2:30, wanting to get home before dark. Peter had driven down. There wasn't much gear shifting, so he didn't have to use the left leg much except at the start and at the end of the journey. Things were looking up. I was driving back.

"That was a nice visit. I'm glad we came." I said.

"Yeah. I thought it was nice too. A bit of a chance to see a different side of people."

"Dad never told me the full story about Grandma being hit by falling bricks. I don't think he was keeping it secret or anything, just sort of overlooked it."

"Probably didn't realize that you hadn't heard about it. My folks have done that with either Robert or I. The story has been told – we just weren't there. But they probably thought that somehow you were and had heard the story."

"Guess that's right. I should probably tell Dad what I learned this weekend and see if he remembers anything else."

"I should probably do the same with my folks. I'd be surprised if they hadn't forgotten to tell me something."

"Your Mum told me her neighbour in Scotland used to show her how to cook things, but the real purpose – no, more the real function – of the sessions was to allow her to learn about and fit into Scotland. She said it helped her keep going."

“Oh. I remember that lady, but not her name. I didn’t realize how much Mum valued those times. They were pretty mundane. Lots of cups of tea, but of course that was very British, and they didn’t have much else other than cups of tea to offer, and even those would be limited with respect to sugar. Milk too.”

“In Flanders, even tea.” I added.

“Yeah. But people need each others’ support. And the tea gave them a way to be together.”

January 13, 1966

Thursday

It was fairly cold, not much above zero. Well, being a physicist I should say about -18 C. And a bit of snow. About an inch expected. That is, less than 3 cm. I’d had a bit of time and did some of the library work I make a bit of pocket money from. Always nice for a few luxuries. I came up to the Physics office and put the material I’d organized in the mail slot reserved for that purpose and wandered along to the coffee space to have my lunch and see if there was any gossip. Chandra was there. I’d not seen him for a while. And another grad student I didn’t know. Chandra introduced him as Bill something. I didn’t catch the last name. But he said he had to run to do something or other.

“I am hoping Peter is much better.” Chandra said.

“Yes. Much. Almost back to normal, though some scars. And I notice he is very watchful when we are out on the sidewalk.”

“We cannot help such things when we have been hurt.”

“How about you? I haven’t talked to you except to say hello for some time.”

“Well. I have been busy preparing my thesis. And perhaps you didn’t know, but Suneeta and I got married.” Chandra said.

“No. I didn’t know. Congratulations.”

My surprise was real. I’d rather expected them to wait and go back to India for a big wedding. Chandra explained.

“I have a cousin in Vancouver. He’s about 10 years older than me and has been there for about 6 years and is doing well running his own specialty grocery business. There is quite a large Indian community there. Mostly Sikhs, but some regular Hindus as well.

I wrote to him and asked him about Suneeta and me. He said that no matter what we did, there would be family upset since Suneeta and I are not from the same part of India, and parents have not been involved in selecting the bride and groom.

But he said he thought we would be better to marry each other since we then would have shared the experience of studying in Canada.”

“So did you get married in Vancouver?” I asked.

“Sort of. Oh. That is definitely being a Canadian expression. We got married here at City Hall with two Indian friends as witnesses, then we had what you call honeymoon in Vancouver, where my cousin arranged a small Hindu ceremony and a good photographer so the families will have photos. There is still some annoyance, but we think it will be forgotten in a while.”

“And so you’re both going to finish your studies?”

“We both most definitely are wanting that. Annie. I mean Anna. Perhaps I may ask you something delicate.”

“Well. If I can help I will.”

“It is that in India it is usual that one marries and then there are children. But Suneeta wants to complete at least a master’s degree first. We have learned how to get some birth control, but Suneeta would like to try to get the Pill. We are wanting to know how that is arranged.”

“Oh. You need a prescription from a doctor. Let me write down the name and phone number of my doctor. I think Suneeta will find her helpful.” I dug in my purse and found my address book. Chandra was already getting out a piece of paper for me.

“Suneeta will be most happy that it is a woman doctor.” Chandra said.

To change the subject I asked “Did you like Vancouver?”

“Oh. Very much. And we saw Fred and his fiancé Martina. We were there for two weeks and there was a small physics workshop at UBC just before Christmas that I went to as well.”

“I hadn’t heard about any conference there. Was it good?”

“Fred had told me about it. It was set up by graduate students to share ideas and get some practice presenting their work. It was being a very helpful experience for me. Also there was much talk about where were good universities and who was a good professor for supervising.”

“So lots of gossip.”

“Yes. I suppose we were gossiping. But it was very helpful, and also sometimes being very humorous.”

“Physics humour?”

“Oh yes. Most certainly. And stories of pranks.”

“Really? Now I’m curious.”

“Well, there was this graduate student from the University of Alberta at Calgary. He said two professors – he said their names were Prescott and Anger – shared the teaching of the first year physics course that most science students had to take.

They decided to introduce the idea of the Black Box. Have you heard about that?”

“I’ve seen it mentioned, but I don’t think we’ve had it in class. What field of physics is it?”

“It can fit any field. The idea is that you take any system and characterize its inputs and outputs and develop the laws of how it works without necessarily having the mechanism. It was introduced sometime during the Second World War, but around 1960 the mathematician Norbert Wiener used the idea for systems theory.”

“It sounds a bit advanced for first year physics.”

“I thought so too. The grad student – I don’t recall his name – said they probably wanted to have students learn the formulas without having to understand all the details.

Anyway, soon after the profs started talking about this, the new Science Building was being finished. According to the grad student, the building was already partly in use, but the tower was about to get its outside stone. Before the stone sheets were put on the building, it was covered in black tar paper, I suppose to water-

proof it. But it was a large cube and black. And one night someone painted ‘The big black box’ in letters several feet high on the side of it at the top.”

“Good prank.”

“There was another. The two profs had used a picture of a box with three strings as an example of a black box. They said that in studying this ‘system’, a physicist would measure the force to pull on the string and the work available in letting it retract again. So the rules such as the elasticity and the conservation of energy and such could be studied without knowing the internal workings.”

“So where does this lead?” I asked. The story was getting long.

“Well, it seems some students – there were rumours that they were not from the Physics department, but rather bright students from another department – built a box about 3 feet on a side, painted black, with three strings.”

“And these strings did the things like the profs described?”

“No. They were very much not doing the right things. One string was just a long roll and kept coming out. Another was attached to an elastic, but had a thread holding it. When the string was pulled, the thread came to a razor blade, so when the string was released, it disappeared inside the box.”

“Oh clever. Not quite following the rules. What about the third string?”

“When that string was pulled there was a big crash of breaking glass. They took the box apart and found that

the string was attached to a sliding piece of wood that had a brick on top of it. And at the bottom of the box had been a sheet of glass on some blocks of wood.”

“Nice prank. And at least it showed they were thinking.”

“Yes. And neither prank was being nasty to anyone.” Chandra added.

“I don’t think we have as much fun around here.” I concluded.

“Oh. It is becoming time for my tutorial. See you Anna. Say hello to Peter.”

“Yes. And hi to Suneeta from me.”

January 18, 1966

Tuesday

Classes back to normal. Whatever that means, of course. It was my last term. And winter was behaving itself more or less as usual too. Not too cold and just a little snow. Of course, that made the entrance-ways a little messy with melted snow and salt.

My last semester, at least as an undergrad. My marks last term, despite the upset with Peter’s injuries, were good. In fact, I was top of the class. I learned that from what journalists call “an anonymous source”. Prof. Hotchkiss, naturally. He was really pleased with my outline, and had already sent it around to several people, including Herzberg, who had asked if I might come for an informal visit to his group mid-February. Hotchkiss told me he would be awfully surprised if something suitable for me couldn’t be worked out so I could do my

Ph.D. and get a modest stipend while doing so. Though he did caution it might be a bit of a dog's dinner of several parts. Somehow, that didn't really worry me at all. I had Mum's insurance money to fall back on in an emergency, and several sources of support might in some ways be safer than just one.

I was musing on these ideas while sitting in a little cafe in the Market. I'd decided to take a walk after Hotchkiss button-holed me and told me all the above, and wandered down across Rideau. I could also pick up something extra to go with supper – Peter's turn so I didn't have to think too hard.

As I was sipping my hot chocolate I heard chairs scrape as someone sat down behind me. Two women's voices. One was Cathy. Oh. I could see her back in a mirror at the end of the room, and another woman was facing the same mirror I was looking in. Could be her friend Marian. I forgot what Marian did for work.

"It's nice to get an afternoon off and be able to share it, Marian." I heard Cathy say.

"Lovely. We don't get enough time together. Pity my afternoon off is unpaid. Mr. Resnick has cut us all back to 4 days a week until March when he thinks things may pick up. Of course, I had a lot of overtime before Christmas."

"But you blew a lot on those nice dresses." Cathy said.

"I wanted you to have one, but you wouldn't." Marian sounded disappointed.

"You know I like pants better. Hooray for Yves St. Laurent."

“Except he isn’t very kind to figures like yours. His stuff is all for those beanpole models, not real women.”

“Thanks for that. I don’t have a very feminine figure, but you still seem to like me. I noticed Robert’s brother and his wife looking quizzical over Christmas dinner. Probably don’t think much of this rather masculine prison warden lady.”

Oh.Oh. If she recognized me now, it would be really awkward, especially if I kept quiet and she thought I was eavesdropping. Well, I actually liked her, and I liked Robert too. Better to not let it get worse. I said, turning round,

“Actually I enjoyed meeting and talking with you. May I join you?”

Cathy turned bright red, and both she and Marian looked flustered. I continued,

“It took me a while to realize it was you, Cathy. It wouldn’t be good to be thought eavesdropping, especially if we end up being family. Perhaps you can do the introductions.”

“Marian Jones, Anna Sinclair. Or is it another name. I’d better not make things worse.”

“Sinclair’s fine. I use that with family, but Tremblay for my studies, at least for now so my marks don’t get mixed up and lost. And what could you make worse? It’s just a minute of mixup, and now we can share a few minutes before I have to go back for another class.”

“Well ... er ... I thought you heard what we were saying and ... might ... er ... misunderstand.”

“I probably don’t have a lot of worldly experience, but I know people have to find friends and support. I also

know Robert's family has wondered why there have been no girlfriends up until now, and he pals around a lot with Eric."

"Yes. My family has been asking awkward questions about Cathy." Marian volunteered.

"We go back a long way. Elementary school." Cathy said.

"It's always seemed that boys weren't ... very interesting." Marian added.

"My stepmother has two friends who've lived together for a long time. They are nice people, and I really wish them the best. But I know they find society makes it awkward for them."

"Even more so for men, probably." Cathy added.

"Will you take your friendship with Robert forward?" I asked Cathy.

"Possibly. We've considered finding a big house or a duplex and living in it as two couples – married couples. And truthfully, I like Robert. And Eric. I think we both do."

"Yeah. They're both nice guys." Marian said.

"I've yet to meet Eric, but Robert is very sweet. He brought this engagement ring that belonged to his great grandmother back from Scotland and insisted Peter give it to me last year. They had an argument with Peter saying Robert should take some money for his share. I think they eventually agreed on an amount lower than Peter wanted and more than Robert did."

"Yes. He's a good soul. I know I'll be able to live with him and care about him, even if it's not quite the usual kind of marriage."

“You’ll have my best wishes, anyway.”

“I’m glad you spoke up, Anna.”

“Me too.” Marian added.

“Glad we met. I mean that. Maybe we can get together some weekend.”

I had to get back, so I finished up my drink and said my goodbyes. I’d meant what I said, but they’d have a tough road ahead, no matter what they ended up doing. Given the time, I didn’t get anything extra for supper. Well, I did get something to talk about with Peter.

* * *

Peter had made baked macaroni and a salad. My last class today was quite late, so I came in about 6:30.

“There you are. I was about to send out the cavalry to find you” he said. I could sense the undercurrent from our upset in the Fall. Being a bit late would always give the other some unease.

“The class ran the full time, then some of us were working out some time to meet to work on our team lab project. And the snow made the sidewalk a bit slippery, so the walk was a bit slower too.”

“Want a beer or a glass or sherry before I dish up?”

“Can we split a beer? I’ve some homework to do tonight and I’ve not eaten since noon.”

“Sure.” Peter said, opening the fridge and taking out a bottle. He opened it and poured about half in a glass.

“Cheers!” he said.

“Cheers!” I echoed.

“How was your day?” Peter asked.

“Not bad. Lunch was interesting.”

I related what had happened in the café. Peter responded,

“Well, it sort of confirms what we were conjecturing. I just hope it works out for them and they can find some happiness. But I’ve got to admit, I have a kind of uncomfortable feeling thinking about them ... er ... you know, in bed.”

“Probably best to not think about that, and treat them as they are trying to present themselves as two normal couples.” I said.

“If any couple is normal. Do you think we are?”

“Oh. I hadn’t given that any thought. I guess I think of “normal” as being like my parents or yours.”

“But even as their kids, we probably don’t know half of the reality.”

“I just hope Robert, Eric, Cathy and Marian don’t get treated badly. So many homosexuals suffer abuse or violence, just for being who they are. I don’t get the feeling it’s a choice for them, do you?”

“No. More like skin colour. And look at what that’s doing now in the South, or in Rhodesia or in South Africa.” Peter said.

“But in Africa, look at the last couple of weeks. Coups in Upper Volta, the Central African Republic and in Nigeria, with lots of bloodshed. And over the last few years, the mess in the Belgian Congo. I sometimes wonder if there isn’t some missing element in the people that makes them unable to build a democratic or at least a civil society.”

“Still, if you look at our own society, we’ve had Kennedy

and Malcolm X assassinated, and as I said, the killings of civil rights workers and supporters in the South. Your birthplace – Flanders – is a watchword for the most ghastly of battles, just 50 years ago. And you, your Mum, and both Luc and Martin were victims of the second go round just 20 odd years ago.”

I felt a wave of sadness, like someone had opened a window and let in a blast of winter air. I said,

“It’s true. We can only hope Canada never goes back to what Flanders in the World Wars represents.”

“But on the other side, both of us are here, and here together because of how our parents managed to counter the horrors of their time with fortitude and ... well, love.”

“Thanks for that, Peter. It’s sort of the lesson I got from my return to Flanders, but I hadn’t found a way to express it. And now I want to kiss you and we’ve food in our mouths.”

“I’ll take an IOU. But of course the rate of interest is several hundred percent.”

“Dad told me to watch out for loans at high interest, but in this case I don’t think I – we – can lose.”

Peter smiled a knowing smile. I smiled back. Somehow we stopped talking and continued our meal quietly.