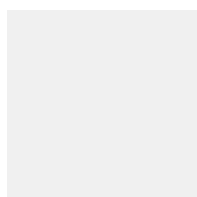
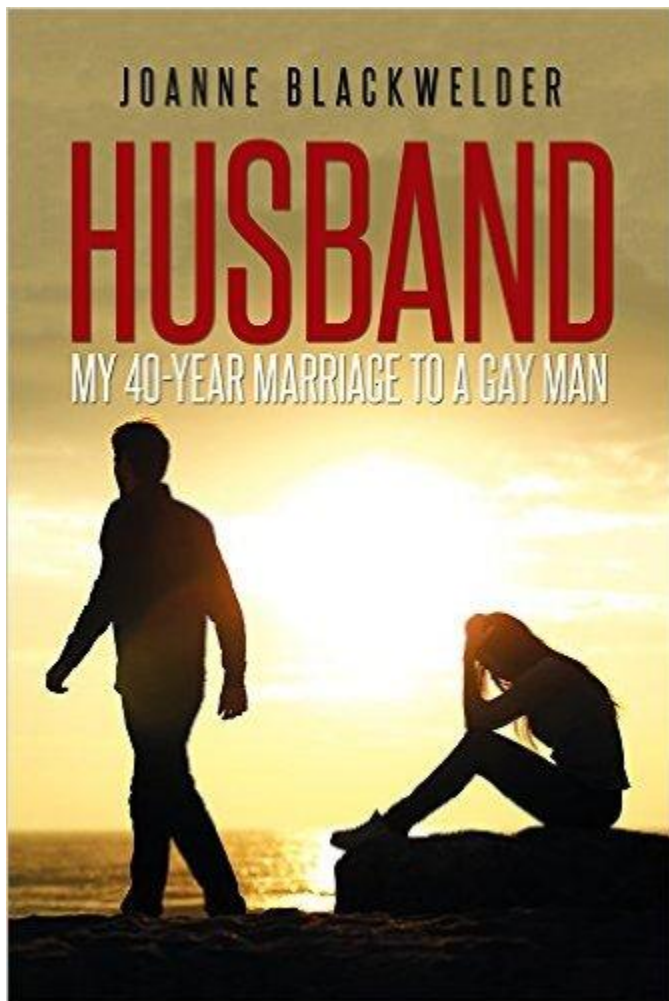
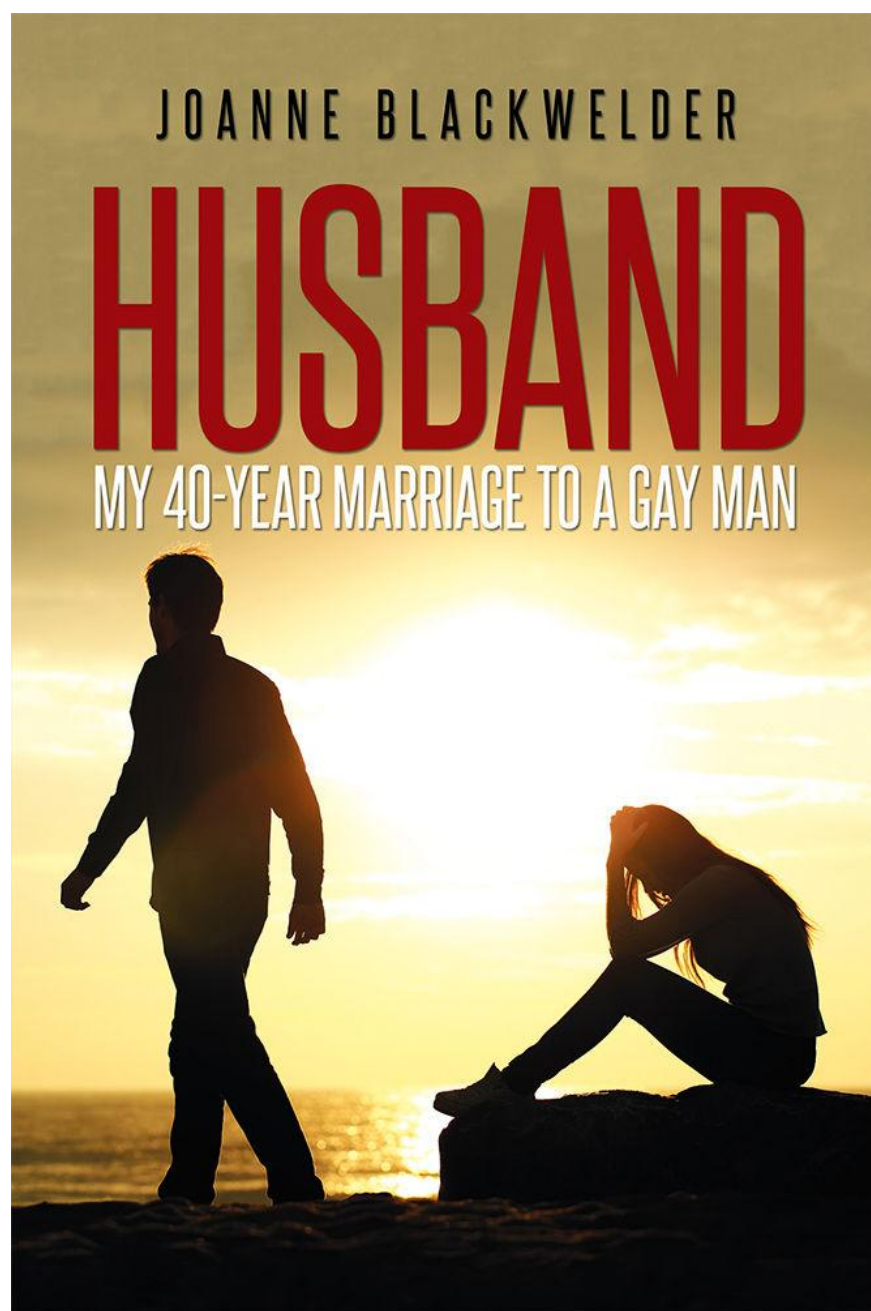


JOANNE BLACKWELDER

# HUSBAND

MY 40-YEAR MARRIAGE TO A GAY MAN





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TO A GAY MAN  
JOANNE BLACKWELDER

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*to Elizabeth and Sarah,*

*love always*

## Foreword

What follows is an account of my 40 years (1968-2008) with a husband who was gay.

When he died, I realized that I didn't understand how I could have stayed with him all that time. Frustrated that my own memories were not enough to satisfy my understanding, I climbed to the attic and took out the file box containing his journals. There were nine volumes of heavy paper, hard-bound in 8 1/2" x 11" black covers, more than a thousand pages of small, right-slanted handwriting, illustrated with male pornography, beginning in 1983. Steve wrote that he had thrown out his earlier journals because he wanted to start over, be better.

In this memoir I've juxtaposed Steve's version of events with mine, whenever this was possible, from 1983 on. It was often emotionally wrenching to see the two perceptions side by side on these pages. It's the way our marriage was.

Over the years, he often left his journal open on the table so I could have read it if I'd cared to. I did glance at a page occasionally, but his writing seemed to have nothing to do with me or our daughters. When he began to paste in pictures, I couldn't help seeing the photos. I tried not to. I'd known he was bisexual and had a strong attraction to men, but I didn't believe that he acted on his homosexual urges or that they diminished his love for me and our two daughters. My hope was that his journals were helping him deal with those impulses, that it was therapeutic to write down disturbing thoughts. Until his death I clung to the belief that our love story was salvageable. In hindsight, I see how naïve this was.

—Ocean City, NJ, 2013

*Prologue*  
*FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH*

“Sorry, Steve won’t want to wake up to talk about Brooklyn real estate,” I said, but Andrew insisted, so with the phone stuck between my ear and my left shoulder, I shook my husband. He didn’t respond. His right eye was open and a drop of blood hung at its corner. Maybe he would breathe better if I turned him over. I tried, pushing his body up until I saw that his stomach was blue, but he was heavy and stiff and fell back to his original position.

The phone slipped, and I caught it. A space opened in my body, the way it had years ago, when, up on the ice-age rock, I had shimmied around the cliff to find that the next step was a thousand feet down.

I said into the phone, “Andrew, I think he’s dead.” I wasn’t sure whether this was true or whether I just couldn’t talk to Andrew right now. Without waiting for a reply, I hung up.

I had never imagined Steve could be dead, but his oxygen concentrator was chugging along, the cannulas were properly inserted in his nose, and he wasn’t breathing. I checked again. His skin was firm and cool.

I had always thought I’d rather be a widow than a divorcee. Was it possible the authorities would think I’d murdered him? What had we done yesterday? Well, his surgery at the periodontist, then that— was it a magnum? of white wine. And I’d walked to the pharmacy for a Father’s Day card and got his oxycodone prescription. Later, when I came home from choir practice, he was passing out on the phone. I helped him to bed—and poured more white wine in his glass when he begged.

Our little terrier had died last November and I’d called animal control. The next spring I’d called those people again: Elizabeth had brought her cat down here to Ocean City because she didn’t know what to do with a dead cat in Brooklyn. A Canada goose had died on my next-door neighbor’s steps a month ago. Same address, they’d say. That woman is a serial killer.

“Now you’ve gone and done it,” I said to Steve unkindly, because in truth it wasn’t my fault, he’d always been testing the limits. I’d tried so often to keep him alive, hiding the sugar cube with the LSD, pocketing the car keys when he’d had too much Scotch, driving him to the doctors, signing him up for the stop-smoking program at the hospital, but this time there was no saving him. I would have to tell Elizabeth and Sarah that their beloved dad was gone.



Dear God, I desperately needed a nap.

I had never called 911 but I didn't know what else to do.

"Where is your emergency?" a male voice asked.

I felt like putting the phone down. I said, "I think my husband is dead."

When the police came, they asked what happened. I repeated periodontist, surgery, wine, oxycodone. But as the day, and afterward the months, dragged through the emptiness that had been our life together, I was haunted by that question, "What happened?" Friday June 13, 2008, marked the end of my marriage. I was finally separated from Stephen Myron Blackwelder—by death, even though at our wedding I refused to say "till death do us part."

At the beginning, I'd been uneasy about marrying him. Often afterward I thought I should divorce him. Too many days during our years together, the ties binding me to him were too painful to bear. And yet I remained his wife until he died.

How had I stayed married for nearly 40 years, to a husband who was gay?

To answer the question, I'd have to begin in the 1960s, when the loneliness of my high school and college years had led me to the University of Wisconsin, where eventually, I met a young man named Myron, whose mother, like mine, had decided he would be called by his middle name.

# 1

## ADRIFT BETWEEN LAKES

After the mountains of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, my old green Rambler belched black smoke, mirroring my mood. It would have been better *not* to have let my professors talk me into graduate school at the University of Wisconsin.

But Madison was pretty in 1965, and the dorm I was required to supervise had a view of wide Lake Mendota and its parkland. By the fall of 1966 I had completed my MA in English and semi-automatically entered into the PhD program, choosing to concentrate in the dramatists and poets of the English Renaissance. The program required me to take courses half-time. During the other half, I'd teach Freshman Composition for the first year; later there would be literature discussion sections. Feeling rich on my teaching assistant's salary of \$4,000, I began to wonder how the suffix PhD would look following my name.

Meanwhile too many seminars discussed subjects like the pronunciation of final "e's" in Middle English. Those days I knew the PhD was hopeless. Luckily I knew artists, who seemed to have more interesting lives. In college I had roomed with Susan, a painter, and now I was fortunate enough to meet a lovely, dark-haired sculptor who needed a roommate. Helen and I, plus an undergraduate friend, Linney, rented an apartment in a Victorian house not far from Madison's other lake, Monona.

In the big TA office in Bascom Hall, some of us English PhD candidates had to share a desk. I liked my desk mate, John, who was married. Together, John and I often stole glances at a TA on the other side of the room named Myron Blackwelder. John said he thought Myron might be queer. I thought *queer*, a condition we'd sneered at in high school, meant someone who had sex with men. In college we'd learned about Oscar Wilde. Back in Merchantville, NJ, where I'd grown up, a bachelor with a handlebar mustache had lived across the street from us; Mama emphasized the word *bachelor* when she mentioned him. Was he queer? Certainly he wasn't a family man. Myron's bleached blond hair was weird. I'd never met a man who colored his hair.

But it didn't make sense to me that a queer man would have a love life like Myron's. In the TAs' office, we'd heard that he regularly had sex with an undergraduate nicknamed Baby, an obese girl with white-blond hair. John said he'd heard Baby hated her dark roots so much, she peroxidized

them every few days. John bet Baby's hair would fall out any day now. He said, "I wonder if Baby will try to charm Myron when she's bald."

I thought I'd like to see that, too. "I've heard Myron's engaged," I ventured. "I don't know how he could be queer if he's engaged to one woman and having sex with another."

"Don't ask me. I just want to be around the day Baby's hair falls out."

My teaching life got harder when I was assigned to teach English Composition on Saturday mornings. The climb up Bascom Hill was at least twice as tough on a day I associated with sleeping in. As I dismissed my class that first Saturday and slumped back to the office, I found Myron stuffing books into his desk. I asked what brought him here so early on a Saturday.

"Freshman Composition 101, 8 a.m. Saturday. You too?" he said. "Un-fucking-believable. The English Department's got their heads up their asses to think anybody could learn anything at this hour. Goddamn freshmen hate this course even at normal class times."

One Saturday morning he looked rougher than usual. "A little too much 602 last night," he said. "Great crowd there on Friday nights. You should come."

Occasionally I did show up at the 602, a bar on State Street, where I learned to play pool. Then on Saturday mornings both Myron and I would need to get through English Comp with as little lecture as possible. He gave more quizzes than I dared, said he didn't give a flying crap what the kids thought. Nobody could teach at that hour.

Relaxing with a cigarette afterward, he confided he was from North Carolina, said his name was really Stephen Myron. His mother wanted to call him by his middle name—which, he said, was the name of a great Greek sculptor, as of course, I knew. I said, well, now I did. He said his mom had named his brother, six years younger, Joseph Denis, Joseph for their dad, Denis for some Frenchman, he didn't know who. And called *him* Denis.

"Makes sense to me," I said, "My mother called me Ruth JoAnne and never used the Ruth, and my sister Lucille's real name is Grace Lucille, so maybe it's just quality people who are called by their middle name."

He snorted. "You and me and J. Edgar Hoover." On another subject, he said his girlfriend Carol, who was Jewish and from New York, had thought

he'd be stunning with lighter hair, so she'd helped him become more blond. "So now I'm her golden-haired Adonis." His smile was ironic.

He was funny and easy to talk to. He said he was 5'8," but standing beside me, I wondered if he really had six inches on my 5'2"; his 5'8" seemed optimistic. I noticed his ears stuck out a little and he was thin. I had always loved my dad's blond hair and blue eyes, so I marveled that Myron's eyes were even brighter blue than Daddy's. But sometimes Myron would look at me with eyes so wide and intense, I could imagine him as a supernatural being in Tolkien's Middle Earth. Anyway, he belonged to Carol, so I didn't have to worry about dating him.

## 2

### *TYGER, TYGER BURNING BRIGHT*

Most of my dates were forgettable, but one late afternoon toward the end of February 1967, when I was having coffee in the white stucco and half-timbered Student Union called the Rathskeller, a tall young man asked if he could share my table and introduced himself as Tim Hoffman. He was just over six feet tall and slender, with dark brown hair and brown eyes. I didn't know until he told me that he was also an English TA. Explaining that he was fascinated by the poetry of William Blake, he asked if I'd like to attend a lecture with him. That sounded delightful.

When he left my table, I thought about his rugged features and felt flattered, and when I asked in the TA office, John at my desk and Stan at the next told me they'd heard that a bunch of the faculty considered Tim Hoffman promising. I liked Tim's drive and decisiveness, and when he would debate with assistant professors or friends, his command of facts and figures boggled my mind. My roommate, Helen, approved and told me she'd seen envious looks cast my way. I began to accept that it was time to believe in good luck again. It had been four years since I'd had a "serious" boyfriend, but I'd been given another chance, and if I were careful, I might be able to have a relationship of my own. One day Tim came to my office and asked if I'd like to see his apartment when I was finished for the day. "I'd love to cook dinner for you," he said.

I felt like a kid about to try a new roller coaster, ready to be thrilled, scared that I would embarrass myself.

He served me a rare T-bone and salad. At my undergrad school, Wilson College, they had never served steaks in the college dining room, and at home in Merchantville, Mama reserved steaks for Sunday dinner. Tim knew exactly how to broil a steak, and after dinner, when he gently kissed me and began tender caresses that ended with both of us naked, that seemed perfect also. He was gentle, and I felt cherished, not used, as I had with Glen, my college boyfriend, whom I was trying not to remember. In the thrill of first times we reached climax together. I breathed with relief. Nothing was guaranteed, but this was a good beginning. Would I come back tomorrow? he asked afterward with a kiss. Yes, I said. Yes, of course.

The next night it was another T-bone and another salad. He confessed this was what he preferred to eat, and now that he was cooking for himself, he could have it every night. Yes, I thought, why not treat ourselves? And I

began to go back not every night, but most. After about four weeks, steak and salad had become less extraordinary, and the love-making was also becoming predictable. Tim had grown distant, maybe particularly while making love. As the second month turned into the third, I started to wonder if Tim felt it was his duty to end our evenings this way. And I didn't know what to do to revive his lust. I stopped having orgasms and began my old pattern of faking a climax. I kept wanting to ask, "What are you thinking?" and when I did, Tim's answer, "Not much," didn't fill the void between us. There was so much I liked and admired about him. It seemed sad that our relationship was so lifeless.

That June of 1967, Tim took me for a summer jaunt to Dartmouth, where he'd been an undergraduate. Away from his books, he drove joyfully, telling me stories about his college days and his relief in escaping Wisconsin for a few weeks. He was a California boy and like me, he felt stranded in the midwest, at a greater distance from the west coast than I was from the east. I relished the landscape of New England, with its white churches and woodsy hills that were dappled emerald and gold against the cobalt sky.

After Dartmouth, craving a look at the ocean, we drove to Old Orchard beach in Maine and hung out with a rock band for a night. The next day, over breakfast at a little restaurant in town, he told me he'd heard about a place nearby where we could go to sky-dive.

In answering him, my voice came out a half-octave higher than usual. "Oh, Tim, we've been having such a good time, and I like you so much, why pick today to die?"

He was surprised. "Where's your spirit of adventure? I've always wanted to do it. It's perfectly safe, and they say there's nothing like the thrill of it."

To me sky-diving was simply unthinkable. I knew I should try to be tolerant, but my heart had begun to pound and my tongue was sticking to the roof of my mouth. "Please, please don't. No way I'll do it myself, and I can't stop you, but please, please don't do this."

He finally connected to the alarm in my voice. OK, he said, we could go hiking on the Appalachian Trail instead. I sighed with relief. As he drove on in silence, I felt sorry I couldn't be a braver and less anxious person, but I wasn't. He knew a cabin on the trail. On the way he told me about the hike when he and his friends had stayed there, and I chattered about camping years ago in the Poconos with my Girl Scout troop. Now that the danger was past, I leaned on his shoulder, feeling glad to be with him.

At the cabin, he built a robust bonfire, then we cooked the campfire stew I remembered how to make, snuggled by the fire, and as the logs collapsed into red coals, made love on the grass, steeped in the aroma of wood smoke. Everything was so lovely, the journey, the country, and the night under the thousands of stars, that I tried to imagine us getting married, but as I drifted to sleep I thought, I can't picture Tim with kids. Driving back to Madison, we talked less, as his thoughts returned to his academic preoccupations.

Back at the university, caught up in the round of teaching and taking classes, I continued to spend a few nights a week with him but rather than looking forward to it, I began to think about going over to his apartment as a responsibility. I felt I was fighting for his attention. When I asked, "What are you thinking?" generally Tim was thinking about Herman Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* or Hesse's *Steppenwolf* or Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*. He was wallowing in intellectual ferment, eager for discussions with the professors and his circle of friends, about expanding consciousness, alternatives to capitalist society, and novel approaches to reality. I was awed. I felt he'd read everything important and had a photographic memory. He gave me reading lists, but I read slowly and couldn't keep up. By the time I got through his recommended book on social justice, he was onto a new school of art criticism. I suspected he thought me less intelligent than the groups he liked to be part of.

Sometimes, instead of going to Tim's, I'd look in to Rennebohm's Drug Store, because sometimes Myron was having lunch or dinner at the counter there: like me, temporarily escaping real life. Myron swore he was even more bored with grad school than I was. I smiled. Citing the Chaucer final "e" seminar and equally lengthy probes of Elizabethan rhyme schemes, I declared it wasn't possible to have classes more soporific than mine.

After Tim's steaks and lofty intellectual pursuits, it was comfortable to wallow with Myron through Rennebohm's dinner menu, deciding between macaroni and cheese or the open-faced hot turkey sandwich, or maybe meatloaf with mashed potato. The food reminded us of our moms' cooking. I confided that Rennebohm's canned peas were especially good. Every once in a while I'd get a Young Romance comic and he'd buy a Spider-Man.

On October 18th, 1967, when Dow Chemical, the makers of the napalm used in the Vietnam War, tried to recruit on campus, protesting students

blocked access to the building, and police tried to bodily remove them. For the first time, tear gas was used in a student protest, and scores of students and police had to be hospitalized.

With classes to teach, we TAs were required to carry ID and submit the cards to men in army uniforms who carried rifles with bayonets. In class, heckling students refused to talk about assigned readings, asking us how we could discuss subjects as irrelevant as Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* when our society was falling apart and the pigs were killing children. In the TA office we debated whether it made sense for us to try to get the PhD in English in this place that felt less like a campus than a battlefield.

Upset with the chaos, Tim began taking cover in the library. Over dinner the next Wednesday, he told me he needed a break from the brouhaha, and would I come rock climbing with him on the weekend? I told him I had no experience and it sounded frightening. "I'm terrified of rock climbing," he said. "That's why I do it." Not to worry, we'd have an experienced leader and ropes.

One Saturday we drove to the bluffs north of Madison, an ice-age formation of rocks that created a sheer wall a thousand feet high. I let Tim strap me into the gear, climbed with the party, learned to fall, and felt my knees turn to jelly as I rounded a chimney and faced nothing but the treetops a thousand feet down. The only part I sincerely liked was rappelling back down the cliff and realizing that the terror was over for the day.

In early November 1967, Tim and I drove to Chicago to visit his friend Bill and his wife, Geraldine, both assistant professors of English. On the drive south, Tim mentioned that Geraldine loved cats and had adopted about thirty of them. Suddenly the prospect of the next two days was appalling. I said, "Why didn't you tell me? I'm deathly allergic to cats. I can't stay there."

I'd told him about the allergy before, but he didn't seem to understand "deathly." He said not to worry, there was a big porch. "Maybe you can sleep on the porch, in the fresh air. I'm sure Geraldine has extra blankets."

I wasn't reassured. On arrival, I saw that the porch surrounding the front of the sprawling old house was littered with firewood, cat beds, and piles of papers. Inside, Tim introduced me, hugged Bill and kissed Geraldine, and we joined a jovial party of eight for pasta, salad, and gallons of cheap wine. By the end of dinner, I could feel my first symptoms beginning their



stealthy assault—a little itchiness about the eyes, a couple of sneezes. Bill and Geraldine were charming, the wine abundant. It seemed there were no extra beds and really no place to settle in on the porch, but no one left. By midnight, most of us were passing out on the carpet in the living room. I had no trouble falling asleep.

A half hour later, I woke to soft kisses and stiffened, realizing that the caresses were not Tim's: the mouth on mine was Geraldine's. With so many people sleeping quietly close by, it didn't seem appropriate to jump up to escape; besides, I was warming to the gentle hands cupping my breasts, traveling down to my belly button. When I began to reciprocate with caresses of my own, Geraldine and I were borne up on a great wave. As the climax began, she laid a finger lightly on my lips, but I was holding my breath so as not to cry out. I was amazed. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. Afterward, we held each other for a few moments, breathing deeply. Then with a final kiss, she sat up, rearranged her long, fragrant hair, and moved quietly away.

Pulling myself up on my elbow, I couldn't breathe. Gasping, I ran out the open front door.

Tim followed me out. "I'm sorry. You're bothered by the cats. It probably didn't help to be sleeping on the rug. But you and Geraldine had something going on there for a bit, didn't you?" He seemed pleased, a little amused.

Maybe he couldn't see me in the darkness, but he could hear me wheezing and coughing. I couldn't answer him.

"Bill has told me she likes to swing both ways. Was it good for you?"

I coughed but couldn't draw in air. I was on the verge of passing out.

Tim put his arm around my shoulders. "Let's walk around in the fresh air a bit until you feel better."

By the light of the moon, I saw he was still smiling. When the asthma was this bad, the fresh air didn't help much. I thought of a newly married friend whose husband had died of asthma. I wished Tim would take me home, but he had emphasized that Bill and Geraldine were good connections—as always, I thought, he's paving his career path. Anyway, he'd said we'd go home in the morning. He'd heard that a paper bag might help and actually found one. He asked if he should call an ambulance. I struggled, determined not to need one. Somehow I'd tough it out. On the way back the next day, I was still too asthmatic to be able to talk much. He

also was quiet, driving fast, apparently unhappy that he'd not been able to stay as long as he'd planned.

I spent the next five days mostly in bed, dragging myself out only to the most essential classes. The extreme reaction took nearly a week to wear off. In my miserable state, I felt defenseless when Geraldine called, hoping to meet me at a motel. I didn't want to meet her again but wasn't sure how to decline her invitation without hurting her feelings or marring Tim's carefully cultivated path. When I called Tim for help or advice, he encouraged me to see Geraldine again. There was surely no harm in that. Anyway, he was too busy to talk about it right now. He'd been encouraged to publish a paper on Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and he had a lot of work to do. He didn't know when we could see each other next. I should do whatever felt right about Geraldine.

Tim's enthusiasm for my encounter with Geraldine made me wonder if he was hoping the four of us would swing together on another occasion, but I couldn't see myself being part of that scene, even without cats. My mother had been certain I was too wild in my teen years, but compared to the goals of some of my peers in Madison, my personal preferences were rather conservative. Like my undergraduate friends in my women's college, like my roommate Helen in Madison, I had spent too much of my life believing in the one-man-one-woman paradigm. Around us a sexual revolution was raging, and I was interested to know about it, but more intellectually than physically. Feeling like Marian the librarian, I called Geraldine back and said it was wonderful to hear from her and she had been lovely last week, but sorry, I didn't feel comfortable about meeting again.

She said she understood, but sounded hurt.

When I finally got back to the office, Myron, expressing sympathy for my asthma, told me he'd broken off the engagement with Carol and asked if I wanted to go to Joyce Harkin's pre-Christmas party on Saturday.

Ordinarily I would have declined, but today, needing space from Tim and also nervous about having to tell him that I'd snubbed Geraldine, I thought, To hell with Tim, and said yes to Myron, even though Joyce Harkin was not the sharpest pencil in the pack, and even though her party, according to my TA friends, was guaranteed to suck.

## 3

## A BOTTLE OF SCOTCH

Myron was on time. As I watched from the front window, his bottle slipped out of his arm and smashed, exploding whiskey over the sidewalk. “You may think,” he said as I opened the door, “this proves that I’m clumsy, but in real life I’m graceful, just accident prone.”

I had to smile. The stench was awful, and we would have to buy another bottle, which neither of us could afford, but he was right. It was ridiculous that our first date should begin with a smashed bottle of whiskey, and *he* was ridiculous, pitifully shivering in his winter jacket with his head uncovered, stupidly trying for a macho look on this frigid night. But we could both laugh, and did. I was glad I wasn’t with Tim. I couldn’t imagine Tim as ridiculous in any way. I said, “Come in and get warm.”

Myron was all business now. “No. Just get me a dustpan and a paper bag, if you can. I’ll clean this up. We can pick up another bottle on the way.”

As he shoveled glass shards, I said, “I’ll go Dutch on another fifth.”

“I’m so sorry. I was trying to adjust my scarf and the bottle slipped.”

As we headed downtown into a stiff December breeze, I thought, maybe his breaking the bottle was a bad omen. Would Tim care if he found out? Did I care? Meanwhile, I knew Myron would have juicy gossip on some of the characters at this party, and it was like a vacation for me to be out with him, rather than trying to find the motivation to tackle Tim’s reading list.

On the way, Myron talked a little about why he and Carol had broken up. He said they may not have had much in common. He’d tried to get her interested in foreign films, but she didn’t even care about American movies—and he was a real movie buff. He’d recently gone to Bunuel’s *Belle du Jour*. “But the one I’m into now is domestic. Did you see *Bonnie and Clyde*?”

“No, but I’d love to.” It was true. Tim had never taken me to a film, and movies were a special treat for me. Myron had told me he and at least one parent went to the Cabarrus Theater and saw a movie every weekend when he was growing up. My mother had always said that we couldn’t afford to go. Movies were for very special occasions only. I told Myron I’d seen *Alice in Wonderland*, *Ben Hur*, and *This is Cinerama*. “Oh, and I took my little sister to see *Psycho*—that’s it. But I’m crazy about movies. It would be great to see *Bonnie and Clyde*.”

“What about you and Tim?”

“He’s busy trying to publish a paper on Blake. I doubt he’d mind.”

“Next Saturday, then?”

“Maybe. I’ll let you know.” I felt a twinge: I had intended not to go out with him again, yet I’d just penciled in a follow-up date.

When we arrived at the party, we made the rounds, greeting too many people we didn’t want to talk to. Myron, having turned away from a brief conversation with Wasserman, a tall, soft assistant professor known to get sloppy at parties, now nodded at a spot in a corner near the big Christmas tree. “We spent too much on this Scotch” he said sotto voce, “to be offering to mix it with Wasserman’s soda.” I sat down on the floor and slid on my butt to make room for him. He had secured two empty cups and some ice, and handing them over, he sat down beside me. Behind the Christmas tree, we opened the bottle and settled in.

I woke to pain. I never got headaches, but this morning my head was full of rocks banging together inside my skull as my brain fell siege to storm troops of fire ants. I needed to pee, but raising my head necessitated vomiting. I hurled myself at the bathroom and fell on my knees, holding the throne to vomit again and again, even though each retch caused a stab of pain from my eyes to the rear of my skull. Back in bed, I was desperate for sleep, but the room spun and my forehead throbbed. It was the worst pain I could imagine, yet I discovered I could ramp it up even higher by turning my head to one side. This caused the death blow to surge from my head to my stomach, again setting off violent vomiting.

At about five o’clock I found I could gingerly sit up and lower my feet to the floor. I sat for minutes before I stepped out of bed. The phone rang. It was Myron.

“How are you?” He had just become mobile himself, he said. He’d been in bed all day. When I tried to describe to him the heights and depths of my agony, he was sympathetic. “I know. I’ve been the same. I’m so sorry. But we had a good conversation last night, didn’t we?”

“I guess, though honestly, I don’t remember getting home. I hope I wasn’t disgusting.”

“You were perfectly lovely. You could never be anything but charming. You’re the most beautiful girl I know.” He told me to drink a lot of liquids, take aspirin, and get some rest. He said it was a wonderful evening, it just stunk that he was a bad influence and now I had to suffer the consequences. “If it’ll make you feel better, I’ll bring you flowers.”

“Don’t be silly. Please don’t bring flowers. I’ll be OK.”

“Well, I’ll call you.”

His voice, as always over the phone, was deep and masterful, comforting, like a news anchor. Free of it, I tried to picture him as he must be right now, in his underwear, skinny, short, with those super-intense blue eyes. I didn’t want to tell John in the TA office that I was going out with him. Maybe I wouldn’t go to *Bonnie and Clyde* with him next week. When I felt better, I’d call and tell Myron something had come up.

## 4

### *JOURNEYS END WITH LOVERS MEETING*

After *Bonnie and Clyde*, walking back toward campus on State Street, I noticed that tonight Myron was wearing hat, gloves, and scarf. At least three big snows had fallen and never been shoveled, and though both of us wore boots, my toes were beginning to freeze. He asked if I'd like to stop by his apartment. "It's on your way home, and I'll give you the *New Yorker* with Pauline Kael's review."

He assured me I'd be safe. He had two roommates. "You'll see. It's a trip."

His apartment, on the second floor of a 1920s house, was enormous, for student digs, with a living room plus alcove, which opened into three bedrooms on the left and a galley kitchen on the right. "California Dreamin'" was on the turntable. The song was new to me, but I liked the beat and the harmonies. A lanky, long-haired young man was passed out on the couch, his right hand resting on the textbook he'd let fall. "That's Scovill," Myron said. "Fried his brains on acid. He used to be better in the morning, but lately—"

He took me past two mini-skirted girls in conversation on the carpet, to the alcove where, at a dining room table, roommate Michael and his Peggy had just won a hand of Canasta over roommate Jerry and his girl, Debbie. As Myron brought me in and introduced me, Michael loped toward the kitchen, calling, "Hey, good to see you, Prof, deal you in next hand" and Jerry and the girls made space for us. When Michael returned with glasses and ice, Myron poured himself and me a Scotch from the half-full bottle at the center of the table.

Taking off my coat, I stuffed my gloves and scarf into the sleeves and blinked as the first sip of Scotch burned my throat. "Like the finest chocolate," I said, to general laughter. The memory of my pre-Christmas hangover poked into my consciousness. The Scotch tasted no less delicious than it had that night, but I promised myself to drink much more slowly this time.

I hadn't played cards since Wilson, where someone always had a bridge game going. An oddity of my strict Baptist upbringing was that everyone in my family played cards. Canasta was my dad's favorite. Before this, I'd known nobody at Wisconsin who liked to play cards. I had to ask, "With six, is it two or three decks? It's been years since I played."

“Gotta be three decks, including the jokers,” Michael said. “Lotta’ damn cards. You remember jokers and deuces are wild, red threes are 100, and black threes are trash. You’ll be Myron’s partner, I guess.”

Jerry passed a dog-eared pad. “The list of points and how to score, if you need to review.” Michael shuffled. Myron grabbed a stack of cards from the unmanageable pile. Michael’s Peggy, a tall honey-blond with a pony tail, handed me the potato chip bowl. “Here, I’ve had my share. I hear you’re an English TA, like Myron, but I’ll forgive you for Freshman Comp if you let me win at Canasta.”

I smiled at her, said, “I’ve heard that if there are potato chips, it must be a party, and no way will I beat you tonight. I can barely remember what a canasta is.”

“Like we’re experts,” said Debbie, who was small and slender, with platinum blond hair. She looked suburban in her powder blue sweater twinset, rather up-tight for this group, but her voice was gentle: “The more the merrier.”

“Absolutely,” Jerry agreed. I liked his deep brown eyes, big nose and shock of dark hair. As Michael dealt and the cards flew around, my tension unwound. The cards reminded me of being a child at the big table with Daddy and Mama, Grandma and Lucille, trying to sort the slippery things and having them fall out of my hands. For the first time in Madison, I felt like I was surrounded by family. Laying out my two red threes, I sorted my spades and clubs. Myron winked at me from across the table.

In January of 1968, when we both got back from Christmas break, Myron began to call almost every night. One of those nights, when I was flipping through note cards, desperate for a theme for a paper, I wasn’t sorry to be interrupted by his call. He sympathized when I told him I had to write on Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, but really he’d called to tell me that Chris had attempted suicide again, “or so she wants us to believe.”

I didn’t know Chris but had noticed she was often turning up in his recent conversations. This time, he said, she didn’t slash her wrists, just went running out the door, heading down the block toward Lake Mendota, screaming she was going to drown herself. “I wasn’t exactly surprised that when I caught up, she didn’t even have a foot in the water. I almost had to carry her back, sobbing, beating me upside the head. She says I’m ruining her life.”

I wondered why he was telling me this. Was Chris his new relationship? I didn't understand how it had become so dramatic so quickly. "I thought Chris was just hanging out at your apartment because she was Peggy's friend."

"Well, she's not staying there because I asked her to—or because she needs a place to sleep. She has her own apartment. You know her father's a doctor."

I suspected little freshman Chris was staying in his apartment because at some point Myron had taken her to bed. I had never known anyone who had sex with so many girls in such a short time. Maybe he was right that she was overreacting. On the other hand, maybe he should take some responsibility for making her unhappy.

Reacting to my hesitation, he went on, "But enough about Chris. How are things with you? What's happening with Tim?"

Needing to vent, I told him I'd stayed at Tim's place one day last week, and it seemed we didn't have much to talk about. Tim had bent my ear for more than an hour about the association of art and architecture to Blake's poetry until I realized I hadn't spoken for a long time.

Myron said, "I get the impression Tim prefers the sound of his own voice to just about anything else."

He was only saying what I had implied. I'd had dreams of a deep connection when Tim and I began dating, but now I felt I was losing it, if it had ever existed. I didn't know if the problem was Tim or me. Before Myron's call that night, my apartment had been silent, and writing my paper was difficult partly because I couldn't stop thinking that I was failing at yet one more relationship. Maybe I really was frigid, as Glen, my college boyfriend, had claimed. I told Myron I felt like Madison was a Sargasso Sea, and my life was going to hell. A couple of days ago, I said, I was pacing the floor and found myself at the big window at the front of my bedroom, not really caring to keep my balance, looking down into the shadows. I was leaning forward and it looked easy to fall, but then I sort of came to. It occurred to me that three stories were probably not enough to kill me, so I stepped away from the opening, shut the window and went back to my index cards.

One thing I liked about Myron was that he never judged. He said, "Throwing yourself off the third floor is pretty extreme. Maybe we could have coffee tomorrow and talk about our problems, though I can't guarantee we'll solve any."



I said I'd have coffee with him. It was something to do.

The next day, after our coffee, he said I might like to come home with him again tonight. He'd invited his sophomore class to his apartment for a lesson on *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Before the class arrived, he assigned each of his roommates with a reading from the play. Then he opened the door to the students. Each, initially confused, gradually caught on that he or she was participating in living theater. What a great teacher he is, I thought.

Soon it became my habit to drop in at his apartment several times a week. If "Monday, Monday," "Layla," or "Ticket to Ride" was playing, lots of people were drinking and somebody was dancing. For Myron, dancing was free-form; he swung his body in wild arcs. One night when the roommates were out, he swooped me into his arms, dipping so low we both fell on the floor. After we laughed and picked ourselves up, we danced ourselves sweaty and plopped onto the couch. He put his arm around me to "You Keep Me Hanging On" and pulled me in for a kiss.

Maybe it was because he kissed surprisingly well that I didn't resist when he put his hand on my breast. He began to unbutton my blouse, and I helped. He unhooked my bra and kissed me again. He helped me get comfortable and moved in above me, first supporting himself on elbows and knees, adjusting, murmuring that I was beautiful, lowering himself... murmuring... until he was quite heavy on my chest and I wished he'd lift himself a little so I could take a deep breath. His head was on my shoulder. I moved my hips. He didn't. His skin felt cool. I wiggled my shoulder just a little to the left, to look at his face. He was sound asleep.

5*MARRIAGE PROPOSAL 1*

In the days following, I expected Myron to say something, maybe to apologize, but he didn't mention our failed attempt at sex. Having decided he was either embarrassed or maybe actually didn't remember falling asleep, I thought he must have had too much to drink. His apartment was always awash in alcohol. Still, all three guys were good students.

In that spring of 1968, I was about to lose both my roommates. Soon after our undergraduate roommate, Linney, got her degree, she landed a prestigious buyer's job at the A&S department store in Brooklyn. It seemed to signal a time for transition. I had finished my course requirements and was ready to take the preliminary examinations for the PhD. Helen and I had roomed together for two years and were close friends, but now she happily moved in with her boyfriend, Bert. As Linney moved to New York, I rented a high-rise studio downtown for the summer months.

Outside, the world seemed to be imploding. The Civil Rights Movement had been set back when Martin Luther King was assassinated in April. Surprisingly, Tim and I reconnected to some extent as we both campaigned enthusiastically for Senator Eugene McCarthy, who that spring was our hope against LBJ and the terrible war. To our delight, with the efforts of our energetic young team, McCarthy won the Democratic primary in Wisconsin. At the end of May, Tim was about to head home to California for summer break. He asked if I'd like to come, but I felt I needed the whole summer to study for the Prelims.

In declining Tim's invitation, again I was choosing to study rather than attend to a relationship, but when I looked ahead to the summer alone, I felt relieved. I didn't know how to make things right with Tim. Getting a PhD was something I thought I could accomplish, a path I knew. Still, when I realized Tim was gone, unexpected tears interrupted my packing as I prepared to move out. How different the summer would have been if I had been open to the idea of California! But I had made the decision and would try not to dwell in regret.

Later, I ran into Myron cleaning out his desk in the TA office. I told him I'd rented a studio with a shared bath for the summer. Myron said he hadn't even thought about Prelims yet. He was off to Denver for the summer and would be staying with Eleanor, another woman friend. While visiting her family, he was going to make a Super-8 film. Would I like to

have his stereo and LP collection while he was gone? I definitely would, I told him.

I was glad; it was a relief that both Myron and Tim would be out of the picture for awhile. Moving into my studio on the sixth floor of a new concrete and glass building, I immediately turned on its powerful window air conditioner, a major selling point for the room. Madison froze in winter, broiled in summer. Doris, with whom I shared the bath, welcomed me warmly. The night of June 5 she called through the open door: I should come quickly. Just now on TV, she'd seen Robert Kennedy shot. Horrified, we both watched the follow-up in silence for more than an hour, aching with this latest senseless death, feeling hopeless in the current of violence against the leaders we had hoped could help heal a battered nation.

Two days later Myron, in a blue chambray shirt and khakis, came over to my new apartment hauling a big carton full of LPs, topped by his portable stereo. My air conditioner was humming because outside it was at least 90 degrees. I was amazed that Myron had walked nearly a mile carrying that carton. He said he loved the sun, the heat was great, and the carton wasn't very heavy anyway. "No trouble. Glad to do it for you." He pulled out the stereo and began to install it on the shelf of my big closet. As he connected wires, I sorted through the LPs, remarking it was great he had such a good collection of classical music.

He said, "I love Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saens. You know I took a course in music appreciation at school."

It wasn't the first time he'd surprised me. For a while there was no sound but the air conditioner's hum. I was sitting on the floor with my legs outstretched around the carton, still pulling out records and placing them in piles around me when he said, "After you ace the tests, you'll be nearly done with the PhD and I'll have made my first independent film. When I come back from Denver, I'll show you my film. And I hope you'll marry me."

I'd just taken out an album by Joan Baez and I kept looking down at her because I didn't want to meet his eyes. I felt the way I had once when I'd swallowed an ice cube unintentionally; it needed time to go down; meanwhile, life would be uncomfortable. I hadn't seen this coming. Since that one time, he hadn't tried to be intimate with me again, though we had spent a lot of time together, both at his place and on the phone. But *marry* him?

Perhaps I should have known. Then again, he'd talked about Chris, and I'd talked about Tim, and I'd thought that meant Myron and I were just best friends. Moreover, I didn't know my status with Tim, whether we would be together when he came back, and even if that relationship came to an end, I doubted I was ready for somebody new.

I looked up, and Myron extended a hand to help me to my feet. He'd had a haircut and with the button-down shirt, he looked crisp. The hot weather hadn't made him sweat. He held my eyes in his steady gaze and didn't let go of me. "I'm serious," he said.

"I can see you are, but that's ridiculous. I can't marry you."

"Then that's what I have to change. I'm going to write you letters over the summer, and you'll study, and when you listen to my music, think of me." Suddenly, he drew me close and kissed me. I was only about halfway through his kiss when he released me and walked out the door.

Throughout the summer I received occasional updates from Tim, but many more long letters from Myron in his meticulous, elegant handwriting, describing Denver and Eleanor's boisterous family. In every letter he asked me to marry him. I read his letters because they amused me, then tossed them into the wastepaper can.

In mid-August, Myron's letter said he'd be home soon. He said he'd always dreamed of becoming a director, and the little Super8 movie he'd made in Denver had taught him a lot. "When I come back to Madison, I want to make a new film, longer and more complex. It's going to be *The Motherhood of Mrs. Thayer*. Since I've started writing it, I've always thought you will be the star."

I taped that letter to the side of my desk. I'd loved acting in high school and hadn't had opportunity to be part of a dramatic production since. One of my selves was thrilled to imagine herself a film star. I began to look forward to Myron's return, if a little trepidatiously. It was definitely silly, but I didn't want to burn my bridges with him if he planned to star me in a film.

As the Monday of the exams arrived, I faced the Prelims with my heart beating so hard I could feel its rhythm in my temples. I'd half convinced myself that I needed such high anxiety to keep me sharp, but lately I worried it could be a threat to my health. The Prelims were the most formidable exams I'd ever faced, a set of five exams, four hours each on

successive days. Four of the tests would probe my knowledge of a particular area of English Literature; the fifth tested my minor subject. My exams would include Medieval Literature, Shakespeare, the Jacobean dramatists, 17<sup>th</sup> Century poetry and prose, including Milton, and my minor, Linguistics. There was no good reason for my extreme anxiety. I had studied English Literature at least eight hours a day all summer. I knew the material, and in fact, each day's exam, though long and arduous, wasn't difficult. Every night, however, I thought about the next day, and my hands shook and my heart pounded, and each morning I found it harder to walk up Bascom Hill.

My nerves brought on a full-fledged attack of the eczema I'd been treated for since birth. The skin of my hands and fingers itched and swelled. I had a cream from a dermatologist, so I applied it liberally and often. By Wednesday, the skin over my knuckles cracked when I bent my fingers, and fluid seeped out. I bandaged my fingers to keep them from leaking onto my work.

After the last exam on Friday, I was as exhausted as if I'd run a marathon or suffered a week-long attack of asthmatic bronchitis. To recover, I returned to Rennebohm's swivel displays of comics and bought all the unique Romance comics I could find. Back in my room, I dropped to the floor and spread them on the carpet. Their shiny covers and big-haired blond or brunette heroines were a cloud of comfort. I opened one and began to read greedily but slowly, so as not to use up the healing pabulum too soon.

At night, from August 26<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup>, Doris asked me over, and together we watched the Democratic National Convention on her TV. I was glad at first that LBJ wasn't going to run again, then dismayed. Although my beloved Senator McCarthy was the popular favorite, he was helpless against Humphrey's machine-like organization. As Humphrey's troops cornered the election, the convention seemed to be muffled in hot air; outside, violent protests broke out. The news had reported that Mayor Daley wanted to showcase how well he had organized Chicago and its security, but when the young people filled the streets, Daley's police, in riot gear, whacked the protesters with billy clubs and dragged them, bloodied, off to jail. I tried not to let Doris know that I felt I was going insane. Finally, unable to watch any longer, I stumbled back to my room, thinking, Not only am I falling apart personally, but America is coming to an end.

My exhaustion was total.

My eczema worsened. Soon I was waking at night to tear at my hands or hold them under boiling-hot water until the pain of scalding trumped the itching for a half-hour. I went back to the dermatologist. He immediately signed me into the campus hospital. It seemed I was not a hypochondriac, I was in a true state of emergency. Nurses soaked my hands in aluminum acetate, covered them in cortisone cream, clothed them in white cotton gloves, and suspended them above my body on pulleys from the ceiling. The doctor prescribed an itch reliever. Swallowing it, at last I could sleep—until five a.m., when the nurse trooped into my room to measure vital functions. Around five-thirty I was visited by twenty-two medical students. Their instructor told them to look closely because I was “the most severe case of eczema” they were ever likely to see. The doctor explained that I’d become allergic to the cream I was using, so it had worsened my condition. To me he said, “Be patient. You’ll be like new in a few days.”

It took five days, but he was right. It was like rising from the dead.

Myron called the first afternoon after the hospital released me. He said he was home from Denver, and as soon as he rented a projector, he’d show me his film. Meanwhile, I should come over and see his new place on Blair Street—just two rooms, but all his. He thought he’d accomplish a lot more there. “I heard you were in the hospital,” he said. “What happened?”

I told him we’d talk soon. I still felt fragile and wanted to see him but dreaded having to deal with his marriage proposal.

Tim also had returned. When he called, to keep my priorities straight, I went over to his place. He looked good and I enjoyed hearing about his friends and family in California. We repeated our routine of steak and sex, but the summer break had not made our hearts beat fonder. I’d hoped sleeping with Tim again would push Myron out of my mind, but by the second afternoon, Tim and I were running short of conversation. Finally, he said it was great to see me but he’d not have much time to be with me in the next week. I felt he was telling me that he’d focus on his dissertation better if I could find another place to sleep for the near future. I could have felt hurt. In fact, I felt released from obligation.

Because my suite with Doris was just for the summer, I’d rented a new studio, this one on the third floor of a house on Gilman, a street that reminded me of Merchantville, with its turn-of-the-century houses and 50-foot maples, oaks, and honey locust trees. Like the boarding house in Lucy Montgomery’s *Anne of the Island*, my room had a romantic window seat in the front gable, framed by sheer white curtains. I also liked the deep-blue

carpet, my desk, double bed, and comfortable chair for reading and tried not to notice the space was small and dark, with just a half fridge and a shared bath in the hall. Adequate, I told myself, for writing 200 pages. This fall would be the start of my fourth year in Madison; with luck, I could finish the dissertation by May of 69, find a teaching job, and bid Wisconsin good-bye.

But I was no good at the artist-in-the-attic-role. I needed companionship. I walked over to Myron's new apartment. He looked healthy after his Denver summer, his white shirt setting off his tan. He always had coffee going, and he poured me a cup. After I told him about the Prelims and my hands, he said what a great time he'd had with Eleanor's Jewish family, so different from his Catholic parents, and he showed me a snapshot of the little Victorian house with purple gingerbread, one of Eleanor's favorites, which he'd found to be a perfect setting for his movie.

"You're pretty close to Eleanor," I said hopefully.

"Eleanor's a good friend, but that's it. She knows I've been asking you to marry me."

"I've always valued you as a friend, too. I can't imagine anyone I would want to talk to, the way I talk to you. But I can't marry you."

Now I'd pushed his button. He got up, found a cigarette, lit it, and paced around the room. "What do you mean, *can't*? I love you. I've never loved anyone as much as I love you." I looked at him skeptically. He seemed to be energized by his summer vacation. His declarations sounded very dramatic, but I believed he was sincere, and though I could see his proposal was putting me in a difficult position, it was also flattering. He sat down across the coffee table from me. He said he'd loved me ever since he first saw me on the day of the Master's exam. "You came in wearing high heels and a purple-flowered mini-dress that was swinging around your legs. You tossed your long hair—I remember every detail. I was reminded of those Breck ads—and you sat down right in the first row."

I tossed my hair now, which was close to shoulder-length. I'd recently decided its color was "chestnut," which sounded so much more interesting than brown, and it did *shine*. I explained to Myron that I'd picked up the habit of spiffy dressing for tests from my former boyfriend, who had left me to become an Air Force 2-Lieutenant. Glen had taught me that it was a trick to keep the exams from smelling the fear.

Myron wasn't deflected. "Whatever. You looked like a movie star, like Natalie Wood in *Splendor in the Grass*. For me, it was love at first sight."

All this time, I thought, I had no idea. I'd thought our first connection was those Saturday composition classes. I said, "I like that you were paying attention. And I'm flattered. But I'm still going with Tim."

He said that was bullshit, that I was always saying Tim was too busy, that he was cold and distant. Myron said I spent more time with him than with my supposed boyfriend.

Of course it was true, but Tim and I had been lovers, and neither one of us had said we should break up. Tim was just busy.

Myron went on, "You and I like the same books and movies, we like to dance, we're both left wing pinkos, we laugh at the same stuff. And I'm going to star you in my movie."

"You're full of it. You've had so many women, you don't know what you want. I don't want to be another on your list."

He got up, found the big ashtray, stubbed out his cigarette forcefully, and looked at me hard. "Not one of them can hold a candle to you. The way you look right now, I swear it's like being with Elizabeth Taylor. You're not one on my list—you're *the one*. Give it a chance."

It was stressful, trying to convince him I wouldn't marry him, because, high-minded as I was trying to appear, he'd mentioned the movie. Could I string him along until he made the film? I hated the idea of another girl getting the starring role.



## 6

### *MARRIAGE PROPOSAL. 2*

My best friend in Wisconsin and my roommate for the last two years, Helen was to be married in Oconomowoc, her home town, about an hour away. Tim said he was sorry, he couldn't afford the time right now, so today Myron was accompanying me, driving my new used car, a teal-colored little Dodge Dart, the first car I'd bought on my own. As we sped along on I-94, I lamented once again that Helen had chosen to become a wife rather than a sculptor.

Myron was watching the road. "Helen's a beautiful woman and pig-farmer Bert is a lucky man," he said distractedly, then added, "Our marriage doesn't have to be like Helen's. It can be anything we want to make of it. You know I value your studies and your hope for a career."

His mind was very one-track lately. I said, "I'm talking about Helen's wedding. I never said I'd marry you."

Pushing the speed up to 75, he pulled out to pass a truck and said, "You're thinking that marriage has to be traditional roles—man, woman, boy, girl, dog. The man works at an office, the woman has dinner on the table when he comes home. If you want to be a writer, fine, I'll back you. I'll support you in whatever you want to be."

I didn't want to encourage him, but in my heart of hearts, I *did* value his support. I'd never felt my former boyfriends cared about anything but their own futures and priorities.

He continued, "And I wouldn't restrict you in any way. Even if you wanted to have a romantic fling with someone else, that would be fine with me, as long as I could do the same. People are having all sorts of different arrangements these days."

I let that go. What did he mean? Agreed, people were a lot freer sexually today. But if he was thinking about sleeping around, why push getting married? Didn't marriage mean mostly wanting to sleep with one person? I saw myself as more tolerant than most, sex included, but I had no particular desire to be promiscuous after marriage.

Right now, we needed to talk less and pay attention more. Checking Helen's directions again, I said, "We have to watch for Exit 282. That'll be Route 67 to Oconomowoc."

The day was crisp, the sky a cobalt bowl, the sycamore leaves brown-edged with autumn. I'd worn my gray charcoal sheath with its boxy jacket and two-inch heels. Today I wasn't ashamed to be with Myron, who looked buttoned-up in his navy blazer, pastel blue shirt, and navy and crimson striped tie. I'd been a little nervous, but he hadn't bleached his hair since breaking up with Carol. Since then, I'd seen him in a paisley shirt with more than one button undone, but he was OK today. I liked his Brooks Brothers look.

In St. Paul's Lutheran Church, we found seats in the second to last row on the bride's side. The tuxedoed groomsmen, sporting yellow cummerbunds, entered from a door at the right and stood expectantly at the front of the church. As the organist began to play Pachelbel's *Canon in D*, three bridesmaids in lemon taffeta came forward carrying gold and white bouquets of lilies, roses, and mums. I sat up straight, surprised by envy, telling myself to calm down. We'd roomed together, studied together, eaten supper together, talked late into the night for the last two years. Helen had hugged me and cried when I went home for the summer. I'd thought we were like sisters. Honestly, I'd never wanted to be a bridesmaid. I'd been studying hard all summer, so of course she'd invited her sisters and her best friend from Oconomowoc. But it hurt that she never even asked me if I'd like to be in her wedding.

I looked at my blotchy hands. A tough summer. I still felt shaky, which was probably why I hadn't slept well last night. With loud fanfare, the "Bridal March" from *Lohengrin* resounded its "Here Comes the Bride!" I breathed deeply. Myron took my hand. Helen glided in on her father's arm, looking lovely in her virginal white, complete with trains and veils. I wished I didn't always think about the white being a lie: Helen and Bert had been bedding each other for years now. As the minister began his "Dearly beloved..." I felt goose bumps.

"If any of you know cause as to why these two should not..." I kept silent. God love her, despite her talents as a sculptor, Helen had been aching for this for years. I removed my hand from Myron's and folded both hands in my lap.

"Till death do us—"

I leapt up, turned around and ran through the swinging doors, out of the church.

Myron was right on my heels. "What's the matter? You stood up and shouted in there."

“I didn’t. I didn’t say a word. I couldn’t have.”

“You did. You yelled. Well, you barked or something.”

I was trembling and near tears.

“Hey, take it easy. Probably they figured you had to cough or sneeze.”

I managed to say, “I’m just so tired of these hypocritical weddings. I couldn’t stand that ‘what God hath joined together’ and ‘till death do us part’ crap. People don’t even listen to what they’re saying. Most certainly don’t mean it. They’re just going through the motions.”

“I understand,” he murmured, taking me into his arms. “But our wedding doesn’t have to be like that. We can write our own vows. And you don’t have to wear one of those awful dresses. Let’s go find a place in Oconomowoc to have a drink before we go to the reception.”

Much later, back in Madison, safe on my window seat, looking out at the quiet street lined with pleasant houses, I thought that I should think seriously about Myron’s proposal. I didn’t believe I loved him, but he had certainly become my best friend. I *was* lonely. I needed support. He never stopped saying he loved me. Maybe it wouldn’t be bad to be married to a man who loved me so much. Was it possible to learn to love?

We did share politics. On Saturday, we drove the Dart to Milwaukee to walk in a civil rights protest. The rally after the march was led by the comic Dick Gregory. We’d heard he’d be running for President in November.

“He’s got my vote,” Myron said on the way home, “though that’s throwing it away.”

“I know. It’s probably a vote for Nixon, but what the hell. I’m hoping Nixon may end the war, which he can market as the insanity foisted on us by that warmongering LBJ.”

“Not so sure about that, but I like the way you think,” Myron said. “I’m telling you our marriage will be great. We can make it anything we want. It will be an adventure. You promised you would think about it. Did you?”

END OF SAMPLE