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11th July 1960

“Hallo! Is anyone there?”

I woke up with a start. Someone was in the house yelling.

“Anyone in?” he yelled again.

The landing lights were on. I jumped out of bed, climbed quickly into my underpants and went out onto the landing. A burly police sergeant was standing half-way up the stairs. Immediately he asked: “Don't be alarmed, but are you alone in the house?”

“Yes.” I replied quickly.

“I'm sorry to give you such a shock, but your front door was unlocked..” He didn't finish his question, but I explained.

“I always leave the door unlocked when I'm alone in the house - I'm terrified of fire. What's going..”

“Ah.” he cut me short, and smiled. “OK son, you get yourself back to bed, and we'll shut the door behind us.” He raised his hand, and turning, made his way back downstairs, and I heard the front door being closed behind him. In a daze, I switched off the lights and lay down on my bed. I looked at the bedside clock - 3:15am. He'd neatly ducked out of answering my nearly-formed question, and my mind was turning over trying to guess what had happened.

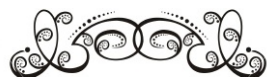
I lay for a while, but curiosity had me and would not let go. Despite still feeling weak from the last bout of fever, I dressed and quietly left our maisonette and walked along the corridor to the landing. It was

empty. I opened the window that looked down to the front entrance of the building - nothing. Moving over and opening the rear-facing window, I leaned out. I couldn't miss it. There were two big arc lamps, an ambulance and two police cars. There were several policeman standing in a group, and one man kneeling on the ground beside a shapeless mass. It was mostly white, but with dark patches, and I backed away from the window. From eighty foot up I couldn't make out any detail, but I knew it was a body. There were two Joes standing on the landing at that moment - One wanted to run back along the corridor as fast as they could, the other wanted to know who it was - couldn't, wouldn't relax, until they knew who it was.

I slowly and quietly descended the stairs, afraid that if I used the lift it would attract attention. At the third floor, I walked over to the window and opened it quietly. I leaned out and the terrible scene made me recoil in horror. It had been a woman, she was wearing a nightie, a very distinctive nightie, with tucked and frilled cuffs, and V-neck trimmed with lace. I'd seen that nightie before - twice, but on only one woman. It was Milly.

I stood reeling, and wanting to heave. I knew it was true, but at that moment I was insane, I needed proof. I ran back up the stairs, along our corridor and grabbed her key from it's hiding place. Then I ran back along to the landing and up the stairs to her flat. I was shaking so much I fumbled with the lock, and letting myself in, closed the door behind me. I looked around, it was as tidy and pretty as ever. I ran through to the bedroom, the bed was made. With dread I opened the wardrobe. The nightie was gone.

I sat on the bed and wept uncontrollably. Slowly, I came to my senses. The police would not be far behind me. I looked around for some sign she may have left me, and there on her small dressing table was a pink envelope with 'Joe' on it's face in her neat, elegant handwriting. I opened it and read, though it was through a flood of tears as I neared the end. I replaced the letter in it's envelope, put it in my pocket and left her flat for the last time.



10th March 1960

“Joseph! Good Afternoon!”

I knew that voice, it's slightly bantering tone, and I sighed inwardly.

Turning, I said “Good Afternoon Miss Carson.”

She was a tallish, pretty woman in her late thirties, but she dressed as though she'd just left the set of a war-time movie.

She was smiling as she looked at me, and I smiled shyly back.

She pursed her lips once and gave a little nod of her head.

“There are those that say you are a wilful boy Joseph. Are you?”

Her green-grey eyes looked steadily into mine - a look that belied the gentle fun in her voice. I answered quietly

“I hope not Miss Carson.”

“I'm certain you are a clever boy Joseph, but clever people are sometimes tempted by the Devil.”

Since she hadn't asked a question, I just nodded slowly.

Behind me I heard the lift door open. I stood aside to allow people

out, then I entered, holding the door for Miss Carson to follow me. I

pressed the button for the top floor, and turned around to face her.

She smiled. “You are certainly polite, and you have a pleasant manner, but is your personality as many-faceted as there are colours in your coat?”

I struggled with that one, whilst she watched my obvious discomfort.

“Er.. maybe.”

She laughed, then said more seriously: “You are very special. A great responsibility will lie on your shoulders one day, and you must prepare for that.”

Suddenly I got it - her metaphysical meanderings were generally rooted in the Bible, and she was referring to Saint Joseph - him of the multi-coloured coat and step-dad to God.

Conversations with Mildred Carson usually went like this, and I wasn't alone in getting the 'treatment'. The other kids in the block had nicknamed her 'Sister' Mildred, and they tried to avoid her at all costs. Although in front of my friends I found her interest in me a little

embarrassing, I secretly liked her. Her face was pretty, if a little sad at times, and to be honest, I loved the attention she paid me.

“Will you do something for me?

The bantering tone had gone. It was a shock. In its place was a velvety-smooth gently-modulated voice.

I stared. I couldn't help it.

“Yes - if I can. What do you want?”

“I hear you are good with electricity, do you think you can fix a broken table-lamp for me?”

I relaxed. I hadn't been sure what was coming next.

“Of course. When would you like me to call?”

“After you've had your tea? - my number is 97.”

“OK” I said.

She reached out with her right hand and touched the side of my head lightly. I knew she meant only to touch me and withdraw her hand, as I had felt a hesitation, but she didn't. I could feel her fingers gently touching my scalp. I looked at her, but she was gazing straight through me, at what I knew not. My instinct was to pull away, but I couldn't. I just stood immobilised as she fondled my head, and I felt myself going all gooey. Suddenly the lift stopped and the door opened.

She withdrew her hand quickly and said “I'm so sorry, I shouldn't have done that, I don't know what I was thinking about.”

I smiled at her. “Look, it's OK, don't worry about it.”

“Will you come after tea?” She asked the question as we left the lift, and there was a hint of sadness in her voice as if expecting a 'no'.

“Yes, I'll be there about 5.00 - is that OK?”

She smiled and thanking me turned the corner to the stairs up to her flat.

I walked along the corridor to our house and let myself in. Her touching my head was as totally unexpected as the change in her voice, and I began to wonder who she really was. All anyone knew about her was that she was pretty, lived alone, quoted the Bible endlessly to kids, and wore badly out-of-date clothes. No-one, as far as I knew had ever been inside her flat, and I was keenly curious as to what it would look like.

After washing the school's sweat off and changing my clothes, I sat

down at the table and quietly ate my tea.

“What are you up to?”

I looked across at my father. “Nothing.”

“Nothing? You're never this quiet unless you're hatching something.”

My sister laughed and I smiled weakly. “I've been stuck in the overheated sticky form room at school all day, and I need some air, so I'm going out on my bike.”

He nodded his approval. That was OK. Riding a bike was always OK by him. I relaxed again, and after finishing tea, I went upstairs and grabbed a small test meter, screw-driver and pliers, together with some electrical tape, and stuffed everything in my coat pockets. I could have told everyone where I was going, but something stopped me. I wanted to keep this to myself, and felt strongly that *she* would have wished it so.

It was 4:45pm. Dad often stood at the window looking down at the kids playing on the lawn, so I left the block with my bike and rode away up the hill in front of the flats, so if he was looking, he would see me. Further up, out of sight, I did a right turn, and then doubling back, came in the back door of the block. No-one was around when I reached the seventh floor, so I shouldered the bike and climbed up the few stairs to Miss Carson's flat.

I knocked, and she answered straight-away. “Who is it?”

“It's Joe, Miss Carson.”

The door opened and she beckoned me in.

She was wearing a long, patterned skirt with a smart white blouse, and I could detect a discreet scent of roses which I assumed was her perfume. I wheeled my bike in and she shut the door behind us. She turned and smiled at me.

“I'll show you the lamp.”

There was no trace whatsoever of her usual bantering tone. Instead, as in the lift, her voice was low-pitched and gentle.

She walked over to a long sideboard and pointed to a sleek table lamp. It was beautifully-made, the nickel-plated form of a naked woman supporting a stylish stained-glass shade in the form of a fan. An old-fashioned cotton-covered twisted flex came out of the base and it was plugged into a socket down on the skirting board.

She switched on the lamp - nothing. She looked at it sadly, then turned to me. “Can you fix it, or is too old?”

I smiled. "It's very beautiful. It looks like something typical of the '30's, but yes, I should be able to fix it."

She nodded. "Oh, I'm so glad. I'll make us some tea while you look at it."

She left and went into her kitchen, and I turned my attention to the lamp. I unplugged it from the wall, and removed the plug-cover.

Testing the fuse with my meter revealed it had blown. I then unscrewed the bulb, which was new. I tested the continuity of the circuit from the bulb-holder to the mains plug - nothing. There was a break in the cable somewhere, so I unscrewed the cover plate from the base of the lamp and saw the problem immediately. The cable had frayed where it entered the base, and eventually short circuited, as there were black marks of burning on the base itself.

I removed the broken ends of the cable from the terminal block and switch, pushed a portion of the cable into the base and baring the wires re-made the connection. I then replaced the base. It needed a fuse and I didn't have one, so I turned to ask Miss Carson if she had a spare.

I expected her to be in the kitchen - she wasn't. She was sat quietly on the settee in front of me, and as far as I could tell, had been sat there, watching me for some time. I don't know why, but I felt myself blushing. She smiled gently at me and asked. "Well? Is it bad?"

"No, Miss Carson, but have you a spare 3 amp fuse?"

"Let's have a rummage." She laughed, and coming over to the sideboard opened a drawer. We didn't need to 'rummage' far. The drawer was laid out with small compartments and boxes, all neatly labelled. Picking up one marked 'electrical', she opened it and removed a card with 2 fuses on it. They were both 3 amp. I took one and fitted it into the lamp plug, replaced the cover, plugged it in and the lamp lit up with a healthy warm glow.

Her face lit up too, and she took my head in both hands and said: "Oh you clever, clever boy!. If you only but knew how precious that lamp is to me."

She kissed me lightly on the forehead, and then said. "Now come and have some tea."

As she moved away, I picked up my tools and put them in my coat pocket. I was lifting the scraps of wire from the sideboard top, when

my eye caught the photograph of a young man on the side wall of the flat. His face looked oddly familiar, and I walked over to it for a closer look. The photo was black and white, and the young man looked about 20. He was wearing a white open-necked shirt and blazer, and was smiling happily at the photographer. Close up, I was even more struck as to how familiar his face was. Suddenly I knew. Cold shivers ran down my spine and I felt my knees trembling. It was me.

I felt faint and turned around to sit heavily in an armchair close by. She stood stock still in the kitchen doorway, a tray in her hands, and had obviously seen my reaction. I pointed around to the photo and said: "Who..?"

I didn't finish asking, as I saw tears welling up in her eyes as she put the tray down on the coffee table. She sat down on the settee, and putting her head in her hands she wept silently. I hadn't stopped trembling, but my instinct was to comfort her, so I joined her on the settee and put my arm around her. She didn't protest, and leaned sideways, her head against my chest, and I gently stroked her head until she had calmed down.

Finally, she sat up and turned to me. Her eyes were red and frightened, and her lips quivered. Then she spoke.

"I am so sorry. I cannot forgive myself for what I have done and for what I feel. Can *you* forgive me?"

I reached for one of the napkins on the tray and unfolding it I wiped her face gently. She was trying hard to keep control, and her breathing was laboured and uneven, with the odd uncontrolled sob breaking out. Quietly I said. "Let's have some tea. If you feel like explaining later, that'll be fine. At the moment you are too upset."

"Aren't you angry?" she asked.

I smiled reassuringly. "No, not angry, just very confused."

I reached forward and poured out the tea. She passed me a plate of Ginger Snaps, I took one and bit into it ravenously. Slowly, my shakiness left me, and she had stopped her involuntary sobbing. When we'd finished the tea, I leaned back in the settee, and she asked quietly: "Will you hold my hand while I tell you?"

I took her offered hand, and she began her story.

"His name was Joe. He was in the Royal Navy during the war. I met him at a local dance when he was on shore leave, and I think we fell in

love with each other as soon as we met. When he was away at sea, it was purgatory for me, never knowing if he would come back to me or not. When he did come back on leave, we laughed and sang and danced and loved the few days away we had together, until the terrible time came to say goodbye again. I took that photograph early in 1944, on one of leaves. It was such a happy time. He bought me that lamp - the one you have just repaired.”

At this point she started sobbing again, and I reached up with my left hand and touched the side of her head gently while she recovered.

“We got engaged in 1945, and made plans to marry on his next shore leave. He left on the Sunday morning and I never saw him again.”

She began sobbing, and put her arm around my neck, burying her face into my shoulder.

She eventually calmed down and sat up to wipe her eyes. They were wild and afraid, and I cursed myself for my reaction to the photograph.

“Miss Carson..”

“Please! Call me Milly - he did, and I want you to.”

I took her hand. “Milly, I'm sorry I over-reacted to his photo - I got a shock, because he looks so much like me.”

Her hand tightened over mine and she said quite forcefully. “You must never blame yourself for this - it is my fault and mine alone.

When I moved here two years ago and first saw you, I thought I saw a strong resemblance, but as you've grown, so that likeness has, more and more. It has been all I could do to stop from throwing myself in your arms. I invited you here tonight, just to spend a little time with you. Please forgive me.”

I looked at her wild eyes, her lips trembling as she spoke, and could only guess at the pain and torment she had suffered, got through and was now re-living again because of my likeness to her lost lover.

I leaned forward slowly towards her and gently kissed her cheek. I made to lean back, but she moved her right arm up behind my head and leaning forward, kissed me full on the lips. It was as if a fire had coursed its way rapidly through my body, I felt the rush in my face, neck, chest and crotch. She kissed me as I imagined she had kissed her lover all those years ago, and I felt the passion and beauty of her devotion. The kiss was long and deep and searching, and I submitted without protest

to the unfamiliar but delightful probing of her tongue deep in my mouth. She now had me very aroused, and she herself was moaning a little as we kissed.

Suddenly she stopped and leaned back looking at me. Her eyes were now a smoky glazed green, her lips red and full and she was breathing very heavily.

“Will you make love with me?”

I was taken aback. She noticed the surprise on my face and she spoke again as if simply stating something obvious. “I need you Joe.”

She stood up and held out her hand. I wanted her. I took it and she led the way into the bedroom.

She undressed rapidly, facing away from me and then turned. She was beautiful. Her auburn hair tumbled across her shoulders and framed two beautiful firm breasts. Her belly was tight and she stood on two of the loveliest long legs I had ever seen.

We embraced and kissed. Without our shoes on, she was now only a little taller than me and our bodies matched almost completely. She pulled me gently to the bed and placing herself above me kissed my face, my lips, my ears and neck. I wrapped my arms around her and felt her breasts and belly against me. She sat up and taking me in her hand placed me just inside the lips of her vagina, then pushed gently, and I sank slowly and beautifully into a place I'd never been before, had only imagined very poorly, but that was now a wonderful reality, the softest of soft silk, inside this beautiful woman.

She moaned as I entered her, and then began to move slowly and deliberately back and forward. I could feel her muscles tighten and loosen around me and the sensation was exquisite.

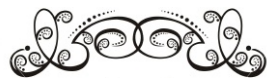
I grasped her buttocks with both hands and buried my face in her breasts, and together we rocked. Her moaning grew louder and she pushed herself upright a little on her arms. I took her left breast's nipple into my mouth and nibbled it gently, while playing around it with my tongue. She started gasping and I could feel her grip on me tightening remorselessly. I fought every fibre of me that simply wanted to explode and I didn't have long to wait. She started to scream, she shook her head and was looking down at me. Her eyes were wild and wide, her mouth fully open and each scream started and finished with a guttural rattling in her throat. Over and over again, the harder I

thrusting the wilder became her screams. I could hold on no longer, I had to let go. I exploded with a force I hadn't known I was capable of, an unimaginable mixture of pain and ecstasy and I screamed with the full force of my lungs.

She fell off me and lay by my side, pulling my arm around her until she was cocooned from behind, and eventually she spoke. Her voice was slurred and sleepy.

"You are the one Joe - the only one. There can be no-one else."

Her words sounded strange, and I should have been more curious as to their meaning, but I too, felt very different about her. She now meant something to me I would never have imagined possible at the start of the evening. I lay cuddling her, and felt her breathing deepen as she drifted off to sleep. I bathed in the simple wonderment of the closeness and reality of her next to me, and eventually I too, fell asleep.



"What bloody time do you call this? Where the hell have you been?"

I was afraid. It was past eleven, and my curfew time was ten.

"I'm sorry Dad, I got a puncture."

He looked down at the very flat front tyre of my bike. He backed away from the door and let me in, but that wasn't the end.

"Where were you?"

"Coxton Hill."

"But you normally carry a repair kit, couldn't you fix it?"

"It was the valve."

He looked at me disbelievingly. I dug the valve out of my pocket and handed it to him. I had carefully removed the small piston pin with my pliers, and thrown it away before I left Milly's house. He squinted at it.

"Hmm, the pin collar must have broken."

"I don't know." I said. "I only know that I couldn't re-inflate the tyre."

"Have you walked all the way home?"

"Yeah." I said tiredly. "I'm knackered."

He turned and poured some milk into a pan. "Would you like a cup of cocoa?"

"Yes please." His anger had subsided as fast as it had risen, and I

couldn't help but feel guilty about my ready deception.

"I'll get some spare valves at the weekend. Take the one from my kit before you go to bed, and remind me later to give you a spare."

Trust him, I thought. Oh well, it's not an excuse I could have repeated anyway.

He made two cups of cocoa and put one down in front me, then sat down and holding the mugs between both hands we both slowly sipped the scalding hot milky cocoa.

"We don't do this very often."

What's that?" he said.

"Both sit together and deliberately burn our mouths."

He laughed: "No, that's true."

With that he got up and left with a parting: "Good night, don't stay up too long, school in the morning."

All was well. The fire had flared briefly, but I'd only managed to douse the flames with a deliberate and calculated lie.



I had woken with a start. It was pitch black and I hadn't a clue what time it was. Milly was still sleeping, her lovely back against my belly. I gently extricated my arm and went looking for a clock. I found one in the kitchen - it was 10:45pm. I swore. There would be real trouble when I got back home. I returned to the bedroom and scrabbled around in the dark gathering, then putting on my clothes.

"Joe?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"Are you going?"

I leant over her and kissed her sweet moist lips.

"I have to, my father will kill me if I'm in too late."

"Oh, I'm so sorry.."

I put my finger over her lips.

"Ssh. There's nothing to be sorry about."

"Will you come and see me tomorrow?"

"I'd love to. What time?"

"For tea, at 4:30?"

"OK. That'd be lovely."

"Thank you Joe, for being so loving and kind to me."

I kissed her once more fully and deeply on the lips, and whispered:
“And thank *you* Milly, for making me feel very special.”
I left, and quietly closed her flat door behind me.



11th March 1960

Friday was always both the best *and* the worst day of the week for me. On the one hand it was only a few more hours to the blessed respite of the weekend, and in this case a long Bank holiday weekend, on the other, the morning started off with a 2-hour maths period which I hated. It was 1960, and Galton was one of those breed of teachers who stood at the front of the class, and copied what was in the book onto a blackboard, whilst each pupil in the class had the same book in front of them. He was useless. I learned nothing of any worth from him and was bored almost to insanity in his lessons. Almost all of my maths ability was due to the perseverance of my father, who always relished a problem, and had taught me well.

As each minute ticked away slowly, I thought of *her*. With my head propped up on one arm, and the sun streaming through the window on me, I went over everything that had happened last night, whilst Galton's boring monotone droned in the background.

I had woken that morning suddenly, and for one awful moment thought that the whole thing was a dream - a beautiful dream, but still just a dream. Of course it wasn't, and I felt so alive, so different and so full of energy that my behaviour had drawn strange looks from both my mother and sister.

I woke with a sudden jolting of my neck, and the sound of the class laughing. My arm had slid over the desk, until my head had fallen forward waking me up. Galton was standing at the front of the class staring at me.

"Ah. Welcome back Mr. Watson. Did you enjoy your brief siesta?"

That received more derisory laughter from the class.

I deliberately fed him the line and mumbled. "Sorry Sir. It's the sun shining on me, making me dozy."

"Well, others may not agree with your deduction Mr. Watson. They *might* say that you were dozy to begin with."

More laughter. I endured this, it was better than a dose of the strap.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Let's get on.” He said, and turned once more to his book.

Walking away from his lesson, I was still counting the hours, but at least the final morning session was one I usually found interesting. Miss Kershaw, who took us for RI, was in her early thirties, and very attractive. I found myself looking at her in a totally new light, comparing her feature for feature with Milly. Despite Miss Kershaw's obvious good-looks, I awarded 1st place to Milly.

The rest of the day moved forward in much the same mode, with me in a semi-dream state, totally pre-occupied with the lovely but strange woman who had picked me out to love.

I had told my Mum I was having tea at a friend's house, followed by board games, and I'd fed my school-bag a clean vest and shirt, together with my toothbrush, before leaving the house. I stood in the school washroom, and scrubbed off some of the sweat and dirt of the day, before donning the clean clothes. I would have to be especially careful not to be seen when I approached our flats. I had no doubts or illusions about what I was doing. It would be a few months to my 14th birthday. I knew it was wrong, and that Milly would be in terrible trouble if someone reported her to the Police. That had to be avoided at all costs.

I stopped the bike and waited at the bottom of the hill. It afforded a clear view of the rear of our block and any approaches. Moreover, our maisonette's living room was on the front of the building. Quickly I rode up to the rear door and entered the block. The next thing to avoid was our landing, so I took the lift to the floor below, and shouldered the bike up the stairs, past the danger spot and finally to Milly's door. I looked at my wristwatch it was dead-on 4:30. I knocked.

A pause, and the door opened, and she stood there smiling.

“Come in.” she said softly. She closed the door behind us and stood looking at me. I felt she was a little nervous, but she moved towards me and embraced me tightly, whispering in my ear.

“Thank God you are here, I was afraid you might not come.”

She turned her head and her lips found mine. Again that kiss, again I felt deeply the eternity of passion and emotion that had remained

locked inside her. I felt her heart beating strongly against my chest, and realised that my own was also pounding. Her hands still held my head whilst she moved her lips sensuously across mine, and her tongue danced fire into my belly. I felt myself growing rock-hard against her, and she felt me too, as she started to rub her groin hard against mine slowly but rhythmically.

We stumbled past the table, all set for tea, and made it into the bedroom, kissing and fondling each other all the way. We stood facing each other and shared our undressing, then stood naked and embraced. I kissed her with a passion I had never known, and this time our tongues duelled, both giving and receiving. My hands moved down her back and across her buttocks, then up the sides of her body. She lay on the bed, and opened her legs for me, and I slid between her smooth thighs and slowly but gently inside her. She gasped and her arms tightened around me, and I moved firmly, kissing her sweet neck and breasts. She began shuddering and I moved more forcefully, penetrating far inside her. Her gasps became screams and we accelerated together as she orgasmed over and over, each time with an increased ferocity. I could wait no more, and burying my face in the pillow I screamed as I came deep inside her. The agony of pain and pleasure I experienced were without parallel, and at one point I thought I was dying.

We lay locked together until we were both breathing normally, and then I lay by her side and covered her with my right arm and leg.

She reached up with her left hand and stroked the side of my head.

“Dearest Joe, that was blissfully beautiful.”

I moved forward slightly and kissed her ear. “Milly, this is heaven, and I never want to leave.”

She was quiet for a while and then, with a tremor in her voice she said: “Do you think it would be possible for you to come and stay with me for one whole night sometime soon?”

I laughed softly. “I was hoping you would ask.”

Her voice brightened. “It would mean so much to me to have you by my side all night, but how would you do it?”

“I’ll ask my parents if I can stay over with my friend in Coxton Hill tomorrow night, but I’ll come here to be with you.”

She laughed. “That would be lovely - a whole night together.”

She kissed me tenderly and then smiling said: “Would you like some of

that tea I invited you for?”
“I'd love some.”

We both rose, and dressed, then Milly boiled some water for the tea and I helped lay out the sandwiches she had made.

I watched her as she moved about, thinking to myself that she was the most graceful woman I had ever seen. Her movements were unhurried and accurate, and there was an organisation and efficiency in the way she worked that I hadn't seen in my mother.

We chatted quietly and she laughed out loud when I told her about my falling asleep, dreaming about her in Galton's lesson.

We sat down and ate, and I realised I was ravenous. Her appetite didn't match mine, but she was pleased I obviously enjoyed her sandwiches. She didn't fuss, or attempt to mother me as some older women inevitably did, but was as perfect a quietly attentive host, as she was a generous and unselfish lover.

We looked into each other's eyes constantly. I could hardly look away. Just the sight of her lovely face made me blissfully happy. At one point I reached across the table, and she took my hand in hers, gently stroking my fingers whilst I tried hard to concentrate on eating. She could see the effect she was having and smiled mischievously at me when I said gently. “If you continue to do that, I shan't be able to leave.”



12th March 1960

Milly opened the door almost immediately in response to my soft knock, and once the door was closed, we embraced and kissed, long and heavily. To get my breath, I stepped back. She was radiant. In all of the time I had known her as 'Sister Mildred', I had thought she was pretty. Today she was something very special. She wore a square-cut red top with a slightly-flared skirt that reached just past her knees, and she looked very much like she'd just stepped off a 40's movie set. "You are beautiful Milly, and I love you."

She blushed, but I could see my words had pleased her. "Dearest Joe, you are so kind. Would you like some tea?"

Whilst she busied herself in the kitchen, I sat and looked around the room. I realised that despite being here twice already, I hadn't really noticed it, for when Milly was in the room, I had eyes for nothing else.

The furniture and décor were that of the late-thirties and early-forties, at least that's what I supposed, as my only frame of reference had been a few black-and-white war movies. One particularly pretty piece of furniture caught my eye, and I left the settee to look at the beautiful walnut cabinet with a matching lid. I ran my fingers over the highly polished wood and lifted the lid. It was an old radiogram, and there was a small collection of 78 rpm records stacked neatly in a well specifically designed for purpose. I lifted some of them out carefully. Most were recordings by Glenn Miller. Some of the tunes I knew, some I had never heard of. I took out 'In The Mood' from its paper cover, and the record appeared to be almost as new.

I realised I had been day-dreaming - and prying, and turned around guiltily. Milly was sat on the settee watching me, and gave me a smile. I felt myself blushing. "I'm sorry Milly, I was curious.."

She laughed. "It's fine Joe - whatever is mine is also yours. Do you like that music?"

"I do."

"Shall we put it on?"

I smiled. "Yes, please."

She came over to the 'gram and switched it on, and loaded the disc onto the turntable. After the set warmed up, she set the turntable moving and placed the heavy pick-up onto the record. The rich, mellow, tones of the 40's came out of the large speaker grille on the front of the unit. She turned up the volume a little, and standing in front of me, offered her hands up to dance.

I took her right hand in my left and placed my right in the small of her back. She moved in close to me and we began to dance. Milly was surprised. "Where did you learn to dance like this?"

I laughed. "We do 50-50 dancing at school."

"And you enjoy this?"

"I do when I'm with you."

We shuffled around for the remainder of the recording, and when it stopped, I thought I could feel Milly's disappointment.

"Will we play another?" I suggested.

"Yes, I'd like that Joe." She had a faraway dreamy look in her face, so I suggested she choose. Another rich, smoochy 3 minutes went by with us holding each other and moving slowly around the room.

The tea stood on the small table getting cold, as record after record were played while we embraced tenderly as we moved. Milly began kissing me, sleepily, dreamily, as we went around the room in each others arms. Even when the short record collection was exhausted, still we swayed back and forth, turning slowly, a long beautiful embrace. Finally, we sat together on the settee, her head resting on my chest, while I stroked her silky hair softly. We didn't speak, it wasn't needed. I closed my eyes and drank in her the beautiful smell of her hair, and the closeness of her lovely body, and I let my mind drift.

"I'm a terrible host, what must you think of me?"

I opened my eyes, to see hers dancing in front of me. She was smiling, and I grinned back. "I think you are lovely."

She laughed and kissed me lightly on the lips. "I've prepared a salad for us, would you like it?"

She made the table ready, whilst I cleared away the now luke-warm pot of neglected tea, switched off the radiogram, and tidied up the records we'd left out, then we sat down and ate.

“Do you dance with the girls at school during the dancing lessons?”
I laughed. “Yeah, it's one of the few activities we are allowed to do together, the idea being that we get to dance properly at the school party. The lessons are held in the gym. All the boys line up on one side, all the girls on the other. I still find it difficult, because most of the time we have little to do with them, and I'm intensely shy.”
She laughed. “But you aren't shy with me?”
It sounded like a question, so I answered it. “I was.. I am.”
Her face softened and she reached out for my hand. “I'm sorry, I don't mean to upset or confuse you.”
I smiled and squeezed her hand. She added. “I really enjoyed our dance, Joe. Very, very much.”
I looked across into the lovely grey-green eyes and said. “I did too. You make me feel very special.”

We cleared away the table and I helped her wash up. Before we sat down again, she handed me a newly-cut Yale key, and smiled. “That's for you. There's no need to knock now - just let yourself in.”

Nothing was said, but we both understood that we needed to be discreet. I smiled, and thanked her. I went over to the bike near the door, and removing a short piece of stout string from a pocket on the pannier bag, looped it through the hole on the key. I then threaded the looped string around the saddle support of the bike, and dropped the key into it's hollow centre. She watched with some interest, and nodded her head in approval. The bike went everywhere with me, and now the key wouldn't easily be found on my person and become an embarrassment.

We sat on the settee and talked, though at one point Milly turned me around so that I was lying with my head on her lap looking up at her. I was curious about Milly. She listened carefully to my somewhat impertinent questions, and answered most of them without hesitation. She told me about her job as a secretary to the bank manager in our local branch of Lloyd's, how she had been educated in shorthand and typing, and how she read the Bible, but apparently didn't believe in a God. I found this fascinating, as I was by then an unbeliever myself, but when I asked her to explain, she politely side-stepped it. I deliberately avoided asking questions about her life during the war, as I knew that might cause pain. I knew she had more to say on that

subject, but would only speak when she was ready. Throughout our conversation, she had idly played with my hair, and gently stroked the outlines of my cheekbones. Finally I just shut up, lying still and quiet, bathed in ecstasy at her gentle touch.

She undid the buttons on my shirt and ran her left hand over my chest, finally stroking my right nipple between her finger and thumb. A shiver ran through me, and I made to raise my hand to her head, but she stopped me with a gentle. "Lie quiet, and let me love you." Her right hand continued caressing my head, whilst she played with my nipples, gently rubbing them between her fingers, tracing around the aureoles, which I found so pleasurable it was almost unbearable. I had grown stiff and hard, and finally I looked up at her with what amounted to a plea. "Milly..?"

She helped me sit up and taking my hand, led me to the bedroom. She stood in front of me and after undressing me, beckoned me to lie down. She kissed me long and slow on the lips, then kissed each nipple in turn. Her right hand found me, and she gently caressed me from tip to base, over and over as I lay moaning with pleasure. There was a brief pause as she removed her clothes, and then sitting astride me, she guided me once again into her silky soft vagina. When I started to move, she gently pushed me back and whispered. "Let me."

I lay, caressing her breasts, sides and back as she gently moved forward and back over me. The waves of pleasure washed over me, but Milly seemed to know just how far to go, and each time took me to the edge, only to pause so that I didn't come. Each time, the pleasure and pain grew in intensity, until finally she relented and I could feel her tighten and slacken rhythmically around me as I came. My screams even frightened me, and she moved her head down to kiss me as she came herself. We convulsed together, until finally, she rolled off me to lie by my side, breathing heavily. This time she didn't turn over and offer her back to me. She cradled her head on my right arm, and her right leg and arm held me in a tight embrace, and in that position we both fell asleep.

I woke twice during the night, thirsty and needing a pee. On the first occasion Milly didn't stir, but mumbled softly as she turned over. On the second, she spoke as I came back into the bedroom with more water. "Are you alright Joe?"

I sat in the moonlight on the edge of the bed and sipped the water.
“I’m fine. Just thirsty. Would you like a drink?”
She gladly took my glass, and I headed back to the kitchen for a replacement.

“It’s lovely having you here with me during the night.”

“I love being here.”

“Come back into bed and cuddle me.”

I finished the water, and lay down beside her. This time she turned over and pulling my arm over to cover her, snuggled her back into my chest and groin. Minutes later I felt her breathing deepen as she drifted off to sleep. Shortly after that I was asleep myself.



A soft pair of moist lips kissed my own, and I opened my eyes. Her eyes were dark-green this morning, and her face was glowing. She flashed her small white teeth at me as she smiled. I hadn’t seen her so happy and I was glad. The faint but delicious smell of bacon wafted in through the bedroom door.

“I’m cooking breakfast, would you like some?”

I kissed her. “You bet!”

She laughed, and went back to the kitchen. I had a quick wash and we both sat down together at the table for my favourite breakfast, bacon eggs and toast.

I wolfed it down and she laughed out loud. “Steady! You’ll choke yourself.”

“It’s lovely, Milly. Thank you.”

“And thank you Joe for making me very happy.”

There was an intenseness in her voice I wasn’t expecting, and I looked up from my plate.

“Milly, you have made me very happy too.”

She smiled. “Everything was lovely. The dancing, the lovemaking. Just you being close to me.”

“I could probably stay over again another night next week. If you want..?”

She reached across the table and took my hand. “There is nothing I’d like better. Yes, please.”

“OK.” I replied. “I’ll find out early in the week and let you know.”

All too soon it was over. I had helped Milly clear away our breakfast clutter, and now we stood just inside her front door embracing. She kissed me long and gently and said. "Please be careful on the roads on that bike, and please come back to me." There was sadness in her voice, and I felt a little wretched at leaving her. "I will.. and I will." She kissed me again. I said "I love you Milly", and closed her door behind me.

3rd May 1960

It was just after seven on Tuesday evening when I turned the key in Milly's lock, and let myself in. She wasn't in the sitting room. I closed the door and called her name softly. "Milly!"

I heard her muffled reply. "Joe darling, I won't be a minute."

I walked through to the bedroom, and she was putting away some freshly-laundered clothes into her wardrobe.

She smiled, and walked into my arms, and we embraced tightly, and then kissed. It was a deeply passionate kiss, at first gentle and slow. I was turned-on almost instantly, and I reached down with my hands on Milly's buttocks and pulled her tight against me. Milly moaned and her kisses became more urgent, until both her hands were holding my head as her lips opened and closed over mine and her tongue darted in and out of my mouth like a firebrand. She took my right hand and placed it over her groin, and I grasped and kneaded the lips of her vagina between my fingers and thumb through the thin material of her dress. We swayed back and forth, turning slowly, as though dancing, then abruptly, she led me to the bed.

She lay on her back and pulled me down beside her. Again she took my right hand and this time thrust it up her dress, opening her legs a little, then reached up her arm around my head and caressing it she kissed me.

I ran my hand over her knickers and down the inside of each silky thigh and she moaned. As I caressed her, she moved under my hand thrusting herself into it. I gently pulled down her knickers, and she kicked them off, as I did my trousers and underpants, and she pulled me on top of her, lifting up her dress, then guiding me inside. We moved together on the bed, the only parts of us touching our writhing groins and our lips as we kissed. Milly screamed as she came, over and over again, until I could hold back no more, and buried my face in the pillow to mask my agonised screams.

We had dozed. It was dusk, and the last light of the day lit Milly's room

with a reddish glow. I looked past her head to the half-open wardrobe doors on the other side of the room, and was struck by a lovely white garment hung neatly at the front of the wardrobe contents. Milly was lying, still asleep cradled by my chest and belly, but still grasping my left hand lightly in hers. I nuzzled my face into her lovely hair, and she moaned sleepily. I kissed her lightly on the neck and as gently as possible got out of bed. I looked down at her. She still had on the top and skirt, and I too was still partly dressed.

I crossed to the wardrobe, and opened the door fully. It was a nightie, and it was beautiful. I felt the material between my fingers and it was silky soft. Fine lace trimmed the V-shaped neck, and the ruffles around the short sleeves, and I stood back and thought of Milly wearing it. I heard movement behind me. Milly got up out of the bed and removed the skirt and top she was still wearing, together with her brassiere. She stood in front of me beautifully naked, just for a moment, then smiled and reached into the wardrobe for the nightie. She turned again to face me, and raising the nightdress above her head, let it fall over her, all in one movement. It was as if it was a second skin, it fitted her perfectly. She stood in front of me with her hands clasped together, and moving her head to one side, she said. "Well?"

I gasped. "Milly, you are so beautiful."

She grinned at me. "You like it then?"

"Like it - I love it." I stepped forward and touched the fabric on the shoulder, and let my hand slide down and across Milly's breast, down across her waist and belly. I repeated the movement with my other hand on the other side of her body.

"Lie down on your belly." I whispered.

She lay face down and I sat at her side and caressed her shoulders, back and buttocks through the silk. She was moaning softly at first, and then started writhing rhythmically as I moved my hands up and down her.

"Joe, please.."

I lifted the bottom of the nightie up and slightly parting her legs, I entered her vagina, as soft and silky as the material of the nightie. She gasped, and I moved slowly back and forward within her, each time ending up in intimate contact with her lovely bottom. Milly began to moan louder, then small screams. I moved a little faster and harder against her and she began to shout in between her moaning. "Yes, Oh

yes! Joe, my lovely Joe. More, More” Her exhortations turned me on even more and I moved faster and more violently within her. Her words were now indistinguishable, blending with her screams, as she orgasmed over and over again. With one final effort, her scream nearly deafening me, I let myself come, violently and loudly. I had to stop. My arms were shaking badly, and I lowered myself gently to lie full length over Milly.

After a minute or so, I rolled off her and she turned to face me.

We both lay awhile recovering our breath.

She touched me playfully on the nose. “How do you know what to do?”

I had to think about what it was she was asking - and why. It was a good question, because I had little sexual experience prior to this with her, and I wasn't sure I knew the answer. “I don't know. I am very aware of you. I suppose I follow my instincts.”

She kissed me. “Your instincts are good.”

“Thank you.” I paused. “How did *you* know I wanted you to wear the nightie?”

She laughed. “It's no big secret - I was watching your face as you looked at it.”

I felt myself blush. “I thought you were asleep.”

She kissed me gently, and said very quietly “I haven't worn that nightie for over 15 years, since the last time I wore it for you.”

I didn't know what to say, so I did the best thing and said nothing.

Anything else would have given away my strong feeling that I had stumbled into a place where I was still a stranger, an outsider. I wished she hadn't said that. I felt confused and at the same time, inexplicably jealous.

I made an excuse of needing a pee and left the bed, quietly putting my clothes on when I returned. I could hardly look at her, and she grew quickly alarmed.

“Joe, please tell me. What is it that I've done wrong?”

At that moment I felt as if I was drowning - totally out of my depth, and completely unable to deal with the rash of emotions conflicting within me. I could hardly speak, but needed to tell her.

“Tonight is the first time I've seen your beautiful nightie, Milly.”

There was a pause as she took in my words, then her hands went up to her face and she cried out. “Oh no!”, and she reached up from the bed and took my hand, bidding me to sit. There were tears in her eyes.

“Forgive me darling Joe. For my stupid remark, and for upsetting you so thoughtlessly.”

I raised my head and looked at her. Her eyes were pleading with me. I felt like crying like a little boy, but stifled the tears and leaning forward I kissed her mouth. “Ssh.” I whispered softly. It's already forgotten.”

She walked me to the door, and embraced me tightly. There were tears in her eyes, but she looked at me hopefully. “Will you come and see me again?”

“Yes, Of course I will. My friends are going camping at Bressey again this weekend, would you like me to come and stay all night on Saturday?”

She brightened up and smiled, then embracing me again, she whispered. “That would be lovely. I love you so much, darling Joe.”



8th May 1960

I left Milly's flat without incident. Sunday mornings in 1960 usually meant a lie-in, and no-one saw me leave. It was a lovely morning with a light south-westerly breeze, and I made good time of the ten miles to Bressey.

Finding the gang wasn't difficult, they were camped in our usual 'secret' place, far enough away from all of the other tents that inevitably appeared every weekend during the summer.

I looked around. There were now six of us, including myself, all good mates, and all seasoned campers. 'Wild' Bill Hutton smiled broadly and approached me as I stood my bike amongst the others against a large tree.

"Hi Joe, what kept you?"

"I couldn't get away."

He looked at me. "Again? That's not like you, you're nearly always first here."

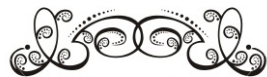
I just smiled at him.

"OK" he laughed "I'm sure she's worth it."

I said nothing, but nodded. He knew not to press me. I never talked about a girl until I was good and ready to - and that was usually when it was all over.

"Good to have you here, we'd have missed your cooking."

"Yeah, I'll bet!"



I had just dozed off dreaming of Milly, when a sharp elbow in my ribs jerked me back to reality.

"Look at those two over there."

It was mid-afternoon. We'd walked down to the clearing by the river, to do some 'girl-gazing' as Bill called it, and had lain down on the grassy bank watching assorted day-trippers walk by.

I looked. They had sat thirty or so yards away, and were both very pretty. One girl had golden-blond hair, all curls, and the other had dark-brown hair cut in a page-boy style.

"Hmm, they're nice." I murmured.

"Nice? You *have* got it bad, they're *lovely*!"

"C'mon, then," I said "Which one?" I didn't hesitate. He was a good friend, and the least I could do was help him separate them.

"The blonde."

He was so predictable, but I was quietly pleased. Although I had no intention of pursuing anything with the pretty dark-haired one, I liked the way she had looked at me.

We got up and walked over to say hello. They both smiled shyly, and didn't demur when we asked to sit with them. Bill parked himself with Julie, the blonde. She was Nordic-looking, and had a soft tinkling laugh, a bit like music. The page-boy introduced herself as 'Meech'. I smiled and put my head to one side in a question, and she explained.

"My full name is Michelene - I am from Rouen."

She spoke with an attractive accent, but her English was impeccable. I tried my year-three French on her, and it made her laugh.

"Ah, Michelene Bonjour, Je m'appelle Joe, il me fait plaisir de tu rencontrer."

She encouraged me to describe where I was from etc., in French, and my halting replies caused us both more amusement. She had blue eyes - a startling contrast to her dark hair, and I noticed that as we talked she never looked away from my face. We sat talking, sometimes French, sometimes English, and became completely engrossed in each other, swapping information - and laughter, when I came unstuck translating.

Bill suggested a walk back to the tents 'for a cup of tea', and both girls readily agreed. Bill and Julie walked ahead of us, and Mich and I straggled behind as we continued my French lesson.

When we arrived at the tents, the rest of the gang were off elsewhere. I lit a stove and made us tea. Mich had never seen a Primus stove before, and was also intrigued that we were sleeping outdoors in the flimsy little tents.

After the tea, Bill and Julie had started necking, and so I suggested Mich and I go for a walk. She seemed pleased, and relieved. I know she

liked me, but probably wasn't ready to show me yet.

I was a frequent visitor to the woods, and had explored the whole length of them from Hartford to the Great North Road. So we ambled for about an hour and a half, talking and laughing, as I pointed out specific points of interest, the hidden farm, the stepping stones, a rope swing we'd erected, and the deep pool where trout were rising to the swarming flies.

I brought her back an alternative route, along the top edge of the woods, alongside the farmer's fields. At one point she stopped. "What is that noise? It sounds like the sea"

I laughed gently. "No, but it's a pretty good impression, come with me."

I took her to a gap in the large dense hedge and we climbed over the stile. I simply said "Look"

Half-ripened corn was being blown hither and thither with the fresh breeze, and it did sound like gentle waves breaking on the shore. She stood and gazed at it. "I'd never have thought. It sounds so much like the sea."

We walked along the edge of the corn and I felt Mich's hand take mine and squeeze it gently. She kept hold of it as we walked and listened. We didn't have far to go, when she stopped walking and turned to me. "Will you kiss me?"

I took her head gently in both hands and kissed her. Her mouth was sweet, and she opened her lips and ran her tongue around the inside of mine. I had intended to keep the kiss short, and then explain my reservations, but could not. Her arms reached up around my neck, and she thrust her pelvis against me, and I felt myself growing hard against her. I could feel her nipples pressing against me through her thin blouse. We stood embracing and kissing for several minutes. Despite my resolution I had become very aroused. She was breathing heavily and moaning softly. She paused as if for breath, then took my hand and walked into the corn. She lay down and beckoned me to do the same. I lay beside her and we we kissed again. I lay partially over her and kissed her lovely neck. Her hands ran up and over my back underneath my shirt. She moaned a little as we caressed each other. She reached for my belt and began to unbuckle it. I put my hand on hers to stop her, and sat up.

"What is wrong Joe, I thought that you liked me?"

I held her hand very gently, and looked straight into her lovely blue eyes. "Please believe me Mich, I do like you, very much. You are very sweet, but I can't do this."

Her eyes looked sadly into mine. "Can you tell me why?"

"There is another."

"Another?" She said the word as if she didn't understand. I repeated it in my poor French. "J'ai déjà une petite amie."

"Oh." She said it very matter-of-factly, but there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you." I said.

She looked up bravely at me. "Well, thank you for telling me, though the way I feel..."

She was searching for the words, and I could only wait.

"J'aurais probablement préféré que tu n'aviez pas. You understand?"

"Yes, but I couldn't do that to you." I mumbled.

"What is wrong with me?" she said "Every time I find a clever, good-looking boy, someone else has found him first."

She was stumbling over the words, as the emotion took over from her usually superb English.

"There is nothing wrong with you, please believe me. You are beautiful, kind and intelligent, and your accent is adorable. Despite my situation, I was very tempted to lie with you and say nothing."

"Que ce que c'est 'tempted to lie'?" She asked. This was difficult, but I had to try, wanted there to be no misunderstanding. I squeezed her hand gently.

"Malgré ma situation, j'ai été très tenté de faire l'amour avec toi et ne dis rien."

"Ah Oui. You are very kind and thoughtful Joe, but I have a strange feeling inside of me about you. I feel so strongly that we will be together, that I am despairing about what will happen to you."

I wasn't sure of what she was saying, whether it was just an emotionally-charged translation failure of her thoughts, or whether it was a metaphysical warning. She seemed to know I was having difficulty, and spoke again slowly in French.

“Nous avons été faits l'un pour l'autre. Je me sens dans mon cœur. Je me sens déjà la douleur d'être sans tu et je suis sûr que tu le sens aussi. Il marchera avec nous jusqu'à ce que nous sommes à nouveau ensemble.”

I shuddered. I couldn't help it. She was right. I could very easily fall in love with this lovely girl, and I already felt the pain of stopping myself.

I said nothing but nodded, I was afraid of my reply.

“What is she like?”

She was punishing herself.

“We shouldn't do this Michelene, you will only feel more hurt.”

Her shoulders sagged, and she took my hand and held it, saying nothing for several minutes, then spoke again.

“Je ne peux pas tu laisser partir sans tu demander une promesse.”

I had no idea what she was about to ask for, but felt it couldn't make matters any worse. “Oui, s'il te plaît dites-moi.”

She spoke slowly, considering each word, as if making sure she made no mistakes.

“Write to me, when it is over, and I will come and find you.”

I was shocked. I looked at her face. Her lovely blue eyes had tears in them, and her lips trembled, but I could see that she was being very brave, and honest about what she felt.

Without hesitation I said “We will exchange addresses back at the tent and I will write to you.”

Her hand tightened around mine. “Only when it is over.”

I nodded. “Oui, et alors seulement.”

We held hands for the remainder of the walk back to the tents, and just before I took the path into the woods, she stopped me.

“Will you kiss me again Joe?”

I wrapped my arms around her and we kissed. I could feel her heart beating strongly against my chest, and her hands caressed the back of my head and neck. I was lost. She was so different to Milly, but her effect on me was electric just the same. She moaned quietly as we

kissed and we stood there, locked in each other arms for a long, long time.

Finally she broke away, and taking my hand, but saying nothing, we walked into the camp.

Bill was sat with Julie, brewing up some tea, and I dragged out a groundsheet for Mich and I to sit on. Both Bill and Julie had that 'flushed' look and shared several intimate glances. Mich sat quietly by my side, holding on to my hand. I wrote out my address, and tore out the page from my notebook giving it to her. I passed the pencil and notebook to her, and she wrote on an empty page. Bill and Julie watched us, then smilingly exchanged glances.

Both girls were catching the six o'clock bus to Ashington. So when we'd finished the tea, we set off to walk them to the main road. As before, Bill and Julie led, laughing and talking. Mich held my hand, giving it the occasional squeeze, but saying little. We reached the edge of the woods, and before we crossed the road to the bus stop Mich held back. She turned to me and said

"I love you. We will meet again, when you write to me." She took my head in both hands and kissed me briefly on the lips, then said "Please don't wait at the bus stop with me. Walk away now or I will cry." She backed away from me, then spoke again.

"Au fond de la nuit la plus sombre, je vais penser à tu."

Tears welled in my eyes, and I turned and walked back into the woods. As I approached the last point of view from the road I turned. She was still watching me. I waved, and she waved back, then she turned and crossed the road. I stood there until the bus arrived, and departed, then turned around and headed for the camp.

"You're quiet."

It was a statement. It didn't need an answer, but he was my friend. We were sat on the groundsheets watching the kettle heating up. I'd lit the stove before Bill got back, and was setting out the tin mugs when he'd arrived.

"I know, I'm sorry."

He looked at me thoughtfully. "That petite French bint got to you, didn't she?"

I nodded. It was obvious anyway.

“Love 'em.. “ I stopped him. “Yeah, I know, and leave 'em. If only it was that simple.”

“It is, Joe. It is.”

We sipped the scalding tea. I didn't have Bill's uncomplicated view on relationships, and he didn't have mine. We both respected each other, and I could see he was fighting his desire to help, with his instinct not to pry.

“Well mate, if you want to talk, I'm your man. Just say the word.”

I looked over and thanked him.

“OK Bill, thanks. I need time to work out what I feel.”

He nodded.

“Are you seeing Julie again?”

He smiled cheerfully “Nah, we had fun, but that's all it was.”

“She looked happy anyway, you must be doing something right.”

He laughed loudly. “I'll get you for that!”

“What about tomorrow? Any plans?”

He laughed. “Just more fun I hope. I hope it's hot again, I fancy a swim. Thought we might leave for home latish, maybe six?”

“Sounds great. Now for supper.”

We peeled some spuds and I went about my magic. Most of the tins of meat pooled by the gang went into a big billy to heat up, and a big billy of boiled spuds, mashed, was ready as the rest of the gang drifted back to the tent.

Stories were swapped, and dirty jokes were told until we were tired and shuffled off into our tents for the night, when the sound of Radio Luxembourg on someone's transistor radio took over the chatter.

Out there, amongst friends I could pretend I felt OK. Lying in the tent, waiting for sleep, I knew I didn't feel anything like OK. I had arrived earlier today, still buzzing with happiness over my night with Milly, and in a few short hours I felt like someone had taken hold of me and shook me until my bones rattled. What was wrong? I loved Milly. I would be seeing Milly again, in two days time, for as long as I wanted to go on seeing her. But, I had let Mich go.

I tried to tell myself I had done the right thing. I would hate to think that someone would cheat on me, so I had instinctively 'fessed up to Mich. Alternatives hadn't been an option, but I'd been struck with Michelene's assertion regarding keeping the truth to myself. What if I had? I knew why I hadn't. Yes, it was loyalty, and yes, I wanted to be

fair to Mich and not simply use her as a diversion. But these were peripheral. The real truth was that I was afraid that making love with her would have ended what I had with Milly.

Then a terrible conviction seized me - a conviction that my affair with Milly was doomed as soon as I met Michelene, whether I had made love with her or not. The young French girl had known it long before I had, felt it in me, and had tried to tell me. I had nearly pushed her deeply insightful thoughts away as badly-constructed English, due to the emotional stress of my rejecting her.

With my conflicting emotions tumbling around in my head, I lay awake, almost until it was dawn, before finally drifting off.



I woke to a rough shake of my shoulder and a steaming tin mug of tea thrust into my hand. Bill said. "Come on, let's breakfast and go for a swim, before the hoy-polloy arrive."

I groaned, and he laughed. "You had a rough night? Forget it, it's a lovely day!"

I sipped the tea, and listened to the sizzle of bacon as he rustled up the breakfast. When I heard eggs being cracked, I jumped up out of the flop and pulled my boots on.

Everyone was already up. I was last, but no-one cared. The sky was clear blue, and already there was a warm breeze making it's way through the trees. Beans, bacon, eggs and mountains of bread were despatched, and the whole gang headed off for the river. We washed the dirty billies and plates in the water, using sand and grass as pan scrubs, then stripped off our clothes and jumped in. I swam up and down the short stretch of the river that was sufficiently deep, until I could swim no more, and I felt better. Yesterday was another day. Today would be different.

It was still early, and the 'hoy-polloy' - Bill's code for day-trippers, were only just starting to make an appearance, so the spectacle of six naked adolescent young men chasing and smacking each other with wet towels went largely unnoticed. We donned our clothes and headed

back to the tents with the billies and plates. I boiled up some water for more tea, and was sat looking into my steaming mug, realising that today wasn't that different, that I still felt a crushing sense of loss and longing.

“Hey, Joe. C'mon. You need a walk.”

I looked up at Bill, smiling down at me.

“Yeah, I do.” I slung the remainder of the tea into the bushes, and we walked. I broke my own rule and talked. I told him of what had happened yesterday, and how disturbed I felt. He didn't interrupt. Only when I'd finished did he comment.

“Wow. She sounds deep, and you are smitten. Why did you let her go?”

“I had to - the other girl...”

“Ah, the mysterious other girl. She must be pretty special too.”

He was curious, but I didn't bite. “She is, but I'm so mixed up.”

“I can see that. Let's try and give you a rest from thinking about it.

How's about chicken for lunch?”

I looked at him, and he grinned.

“OK.” I said, “Let's do it.”

It was time to pay the local chicken farm a visit. The inevitable sneaking around the farm, nabbing an unsuspecting bird, and getting away without being caught, occupied us for the next hour. And after the messy business of plucking and gutting, the bird was chopped up and in a billy can for lunch, together with onions, carrots, peas and spuds.

In the afternoon, I declined to join in with Bill's girl-gazing, and dozed in my tent, trying to make up for the sleep I didn't get the previous night. This time I did sleep, for about 2 hours, and woke up dreaming about Milly.

Some of the gang were already packed up and leaving for home. I made another brew and half-expected Bill to turn up with another blonde, but he arrived alone.

“No joy?” I asked.

“I got a snog, but her mate started whinging, so I gave up.”

“Sorry.” I said.

He laughed. “No problem, to be honest, I've been thinking about Julie.”

I laughed out loud. “What happened to love 'em and leave 'em?”

He looked sheepish. “Guess we both caught it bad yesterday. Thing is, I don't have her address.”

“Ah, might be able to help you there.” I went to my bike and pulled out the notebook from the pannier pocket.

I passed it to him open, and said “Look, Mich wrote down her home address in France *and* where she's staying while she's here on holiday in England, c/o Julie Connaught, who lives in Trantwell. All you have to do is look up Julie's number in the 'phone book.”

He stared at the page, and a big grin lit up his face. “I could kiss you!”

“No thanks to that.” I replied and handed him my pencil. “Tear a page out and copy her address.”



10th May 1960

I had woken on the Tuesday morning after another fitful night, despite the welcome comfort of a proper bed. There were huge nagging doubts in me that wouldn't go away despite my resolution to carry on seeing Milly. Michelene's face kept flashing into my mind, and the taste of her sweet lips on mine felt tangible. I was also afraid. Would Milly notice any change in me tonight? What if she did and asked me questions about my trip?

The thought of school further depressed me. I wanted dearly to be anywhere other than in a sticky, smelly classroom. The reality was little better until the afternoon first session - 3rd year French. Suddenly this lesson had an obvious attraction for me, not that I hadn't liked it to begin with. I found language fascinating, and learning French had helped me with my real passion - classic literature.

It was only later, on the ride downhill from school that it occurred to me that already my meeting Michelene was changing me. I tried to dismiss thoughts of her from my mind, substituting them for Milly, and hoping that the pain I felt would go away - soon.



12th May 1960

It was Thursday morning at 8:35am. I slipped a note through Milly's letterbox. I had hardly turned to go back down the few stairs to the landing, when her door opened. She stood there, beautifully-dressed for her work, but her face looked gaunt and miserable, and her eyes looked red from crying. She had my unopened note in her hand.

"Please come in Joe."

I followed her into the flat and she closed the door behind me.

She gestured to the note. "Please tell me this doesn't say what I think it does."

I was taken aback. I stared at her.

"Well?" she said.

Suddenly I felt annoyed. In the same way I got annoyed when my father accused me of something I didn't do.

"Milly" I said quietly. "Why don't you read it?"

She burst into tears. "I'm afraid of what it will say."

I held out my hand. "Then give it to me, and I will read it for you."

There was fear in her eyes, but she gave me my note back. I opened it and read my words out loud to her.

"Dearest Milly, I've got permission from Dad to stay over at a friends tomorrow night, so I will be with you then at around 7:00pm. Until then, My Darling Milly, I love you, Joe."

I handed the note back to her, and kissed her gently on the lips.

"I love you, please don't doubt me. Now I must go, I am late for school. See you tomorrow."

I let myself out.

It was half-way through the morning, during a particularly boring geography session, that my wounded pride was replaced with a crushing guilt. She *knew* there was something different. She couldn't say what it was, because she hadn't identified it yet. She hadn't asked about anything in particular about my 2-day camping trip - just if I'd had a good time with my friends. I tried to search my memory as to what, if anything I'd said or done to give her doubt, but I was certain I hadn't - not physically anyway. I tried to tell myself there was nothing

to hide, and nothing I'd done to feel guilty about, but pondered on the fact that I did feel guilty - hadn't I fallen in love with someone else?

My reverie cost me 200 lines. 'Old Nick' Nickleson our Geography master had eventually caught my attention by leaning down in front of my desk and bawling loudly in my ear “Does anyone know whereabouts in England, can we find the location of Mr. Joseph Watson's brain?”



13th May 1960

“I have been very silly, and I want to apologise for upsetting you. Please forgive me. You have made me so happy, I am desperately afraid that it will end.”

She was sat across the table from me, and had reached out her hands and was holding both of mine. She was calm, and in control, and as beautiful as I'd ever seen her, with just the tiniest glint of tears in her lovely green eyes. She'd greeted me at the door, as I'd let myself in, and embraced me lovingly, then whispered could we sit, because she wanted to speak.

I squeezed her hands gently, and nodded. “It is I who should apologize to you Milly. I behaved badly yesterday, when you were clearly upset - I'm so sorry.”

She smiled bravely, and continued. “My remark about the nightie last week was thoughtless, and I know it hurt you.” She paused.

“Sometimes the past catches up with me, and I get confused.”

I smiled gently at her “I realise that, and I over-reacted. Let's put it behind us.”

I stood up and walked around the table. She stood and we embraced again, then sat together on the settee. Her head rested on my shoulder and I stroked her long silky hair. She undid some buttons on my shirt and caressed my chest. If there had been any problems in the past few days, I forgot them and bathed myself in the intimate presence of this lovely woman. We sat and just caressed each other for quite along time, knowing that we had all night together and there was no need to hurry.

As the sky darkened, Milly led me to her room. We undressed and she bade me lie down. She covered me in kisses and caressed me with her hand until I was gasping her name, then she moved over on top of me, and we made long slow love, until finally neither of us could hold back any more, and we melted into each other in a hot furnace of sexual frenzy.

Twice more during the night, Milly had woken me, kissing and touching me, and we had repeated that long slow sensual sex. On each occasion I wondered from where within myself came all the passion I felt with her, as I always seemed to be as ready as she was.



22nd May 1960

She was radiant - as radiant and alive as in any of the previous three months. I was pleased, but curious, then after a long and loving embrace just inside her door, she bade me sit down. I sat at the table and she took both my hands.

"I have some lovely news!"

I smiled at her enthusiasm and prompted her. "Well? Don't keep me in suspense, what is it?"

"We're going to have a baby!"

I sat stunned and speechless.

She looked at me puzzled. "Aren't you pleased, Joe - you're going to be a father!"

She announced the last word in triumph.

I still could say nothing, but my face must have said it for me. The happiness in her eyes visibly changed to fear, and she gripped my hands tightly. "Speak to me, Joe. Please speak to me. Tell me you're pleased."

I struggled to recover. I loved her, and didn't want her hurt for anything. "Sorry Milly, you took me completely by surprise. Of course I'm pleased, I'm delighted."

I didn't want her looking at my face as I lied to her, so I stood and walked around the table, taking her hand to stand up, and I embraced her. I felt her relax and she kissed me passionately, before whispering in my ear. "What do you want? A little girl, or a little boy? And what shall we call him or her?"

I mumbled rubbish. "Er, we can call the child whatever name you like best darling Milly."

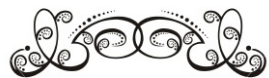
I was in despair. I didn't feel a worthy partner to her, I just felt like a silly kid at the seaside, who had swum way too far out, and now hadn't the strength to swim back to the shore.

Milly was nibbling my ear, and nuzzling my neck and I was grateful, so grateful for her affection, because above all else I needed time to

think before we spoke again. In spite of the darkest forebodings, in fact because of them, I yielded willingly to Milly's intentions and concentrated on making her feel loved and wanted.

I sat on one of the dining chairs, and gently pulled Milly down onto my lap facing me, with her legs astride of the chair. I kissed her neck, and undid the buttons of her blouse. Reaching around her, I undid the clasp of her brassiere, and lifted it free from her breasts. I filled my mouth with her left breast holding it there as I sucked and scoured her nipple with my tongue. Her arms went around my neck and she pulled my head in tightly to her. She was gasping and moaning, as I reached up and grasped her other breast gently, whilst rubbing her nipple between my finger and thumb. Her head went back and her throat gurgled as she moaned. I could feel her hips gyrating on my thighs and she raised her head and whispered. "Joe, please.. lets go to bed."

She lay on the bed, and I removed her skirt and undies, then moving over her I kissed and caressed each breast, and moving myself down between her legs, I kissed the sweet lips of her vagina. Her stomach rose and fell as I probed her with my tongue, after drawing her in with my lips. She began yelling and gasping "Please, Please." and I reached around her thighs and grasped her hips in my hands. I lifted her pelvis up and forced my mouth hard against her, my tongue reaching far inside her. She screamed as she came, and screamed again as wave after wave of pleasure washed her body. When I felt she was nearly finished, I moved up and entered her. We finished in one long sexual explosion and I lay down beside her and held her very close.



There were two days. Two days in which I could not think about anything else except Milly's news. A baby! Mich's sad words regarding 'walking with pain' echoed in my head. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and was almost oblivious to the sometimes caustic, always cutting, rebukes that came my way at school because of my preoccupation. Whereas on other occasions I would have escaped real wrath from teachers through humour, or my apparent lack of guile. This time I ended up getting strapped twice and writing 400 lines.

“What's wrong Joe” she asked.

I'd never seen her look so serious. I'd been asked to stay behind at 4:00pm, as she needed to talk to me.

“Er.. Nothing Miss.”

She dropped her head to one side and looked at me. “Don't give me that. I've had six complaints about you in two days. I know you to be a handful, but not like this. We are concerned about you.”

I looked up at her. I liked our form tutor 'Ma' Fenwick a lot, and I didn't enjoy lying to her. I shook my head slowly.

She sat back in her seat. “Can't say, won't say, is it? I know you. You're in trouble of some kind, but you aren't going to tell me, are you?”

I looked at her, pleading with my eyes.

She shook her head, and reached in her desk drawer, bringing out some notepaper. She scribbled an address and telephone number down, and handed it to me.

“That's my telephone number and address. If you need help, or want to talk, get in touch. I've already talked to the headmaster and he's agreed that, for your sake, and ours, you should have some time off.

I looked at her in alarm. “But, Miss..”

She cut me short. “No, you aren't being excluded, but if you feel unwell, then you are excused from attending those lessons you might find a problem.”

We both knew what she meant. Those lessons where my day-dreaming was annoying certain individual teachers.

“Spend some time in the library, on the playing fields, or helping out generally. Keep yourself busy and out of trouble.”

I gulped and nodded. “Thank you Miss. I'm sorry. I want to tell you but I can't.”

She smiled and reached over to pat my hand. “OK, I understand. No doubt you'll talk when you're ready.”

She nodded again, and I got up and left.



27th May 1960

Milly had changed. It was subtle, and although I had recognised her altered state earlier in the evening, I'd had difficulty pinning it down to one particular thing. Only when she had gone to the sideboard and retrieved an old-looking photo album did it hit me - she was much more confident.

It was Friday evening. She had greeted me inside her door with her usual generous warmth and sexual affection, then we had sat and ate the lovely tea she had prepared. She had asked about school, and I talked around and away from my problems, telling her about what I thought of some of the teachers.

After clearing the table, we had sat and listened to the radiogram. Me with my head on Milly's lap as she played with my head and chest. Milly talked about our child. She was excited and happy, and for the first time since she had given me the news, I wanted to believe that it was somehow going to work out alright. She knew that her pregnancy by me had to remain a secret, and appeared more than happy to have our situation remain as it was - clandestine and known only to us.

"I never wanted another baby until now."

I tried not to flinch. Her right hand was gently caressing my ear, and her left was inside my shirt playing slowly over my chest.

I tried to sound as casual as possible. "You had a child?"

"Oh yes, a little boy. A long time ago."

"Well, where is he now?"

I was looking up at her face as I asked, fearful of disturbing another grim memory for her, but she looked down at me and said simply "He was adopted Joe, I was too ill to look after him."

"Oh Milly, I'm so sorry!"

She smiled gently at me. "There's no need for you to be sorry, and anyway it's a long time ago."

I reached up and touched her cheek where a small tear had trickled from her eye.

“I've got some photos of him. Would you like to see?”
I nodded and sat up.

She came back opening the book as she walked across the room. She sat down beside me and pointed to a group of three black-and-white photographs of a very young baby. He was swaddled in two of them, with only his little face showing. The other was taken showing him in a minuscule cardigan and knickers, with his tiny little arms and legs akimbo. He was a beautiful baby, only a few weeks old. Milly ran her index finger gently over the photos, and the tears were running in free flow down her cheeks, despite the proud smile on her face.

I got up and returned from the bathroom with a clean dry facecloth, and kneeling down in front of her, I wiped away the tears. She didn't protest when I carefully removed the book from her grasp and closing it, put it down by the side of the settee. I sat down beside her and cuddled her in my arms.

“I looked for him, you know.” she said.

“Could you not find him?”

“I looked everywhere, but I could not find my baby.”

“I'm so sorry Milly, that must have hurt you.”

She gripped my hand gently. “Never mind, that's over. I found you, and we will have a baby again.”

She nuzzled into my neck and kissed me, her warm moist lips and tongue dancing delight into me that ran like thunderbolts down my body. I breathed deeply of the lovely scent of her hair, and my concerns and worries of the past few days were forgotten, as she set my body on fire with a passion for her, that I'd never known in my life before. I felt at that moment that I would do anything, suffer anything, as long as I could feel so loved and wanted as she made me feel.

She stood up and held out her hand, and we went into the bedroom. We made love, long beautiful, slow love, until we could contain the tension inside us both no more, and exploded together, to fall asleep in each others arms. The sleep was simply taking a breath, a pause, because several times during the night Milly woke me, only for us to love each other again and again.

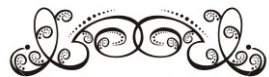
I finally woke with her sweet lips on mine, and the smell of breakfast cooking in the kitchen. She was leaning over the bed looking at me. “Good Morning, lover of mine. I love you so much.” I held her head in my hands and kissed her then whispered, “And I you, Milly. With every breath in my body.”



I had made no comment about the photographs, other than to say how lovely her baby was. Each of the photographs has been neatly annotated in her faultless script, together with the baby's name - Joseph.

It was reasonable to assume that her baby's father was her dead lover, hence the baby's name. I could only guess at the terrible trauma she must have felt at his death, and later, when her loss was compounded by the unkind and thoughtless removal of her child.

I still felt uneasy, and if anything, the fact that Milly already had a child added to my unease, but under the circumstances, I could not and would not do anything to upset her, as she deserved a happiness that had escaped her for so long.



1st June 1960

On Wednesday 'Ma' Fenwick asked me to stay behind after registration, and asked how I was.

“A little better, thanks Miss.”

“Ah yes. It's been noticed. Do you think your troubles are over?”

I looked at her. It was pointless to lie, but what could I say?

“I'm trying to work through them Miss.”

She nodded. “My offer still stands. If you want to talk - about anything, call me.”

I thanked her and left. Since last week, I had only missed a handful of periods, those ones that didn't distract me enough from my worries. In their place I had busied myself fixing some of the audio gear on our school hall stage, helping out a trainee teacher with some 1st form sessions, and had painted over obscene graffiti in one of the boys wash rooms at the headmaster request. Altercations with teachers who demanded my full and total attention had been completely avoided.

As the week drew to a close, I had resumed my normal lesson attendance, but was aware of being under close scrutiny by the staff. Those teachers I normally had exceptions with, tended to look away if I caught their eye in class, and I suspected that they had been advised to give me some 'breathing-space'. I respected that, and was on my best behaviour.



6th June 1960

I dumped my bag in the hall, and went into the kitchen. Alongside my breakfast bowl were a few envelopes. I studiously ignored them and filled my bowl with flakes, a dash of sugar, and tossed on some milk. I looked up at my Mum and sister who both chorused "Happy Birthday" I laughed and continued eating.

"Aren't you going to open the cards?" Mum enquired.

"I'm hungry."

"Typical" said my sister, "Always his belly first."

They both laughed and I made them wait.

Only when I'd downed the flakes and poured out a cup of tea, did I pick up the envelopes.

Aunts, uncles and a few friends, as well as unstamped ones from my parents and sister. All were duly opened, looked at, and passed for inspection to my sister and mother. I had nearly exhausted the pile, when I saw a small envelope, the writing on which was instantly recognisable as Milly's. I nearly froze, but recovered sufficiently to simply put it to one side and continue opening the remainder.

"What about that one" My sister tapped it with her finger. I knew I was blushing. "I'm keeping that 'til later."

"Ah Ha!" She pronounced, giving my Mum a knowing look. "I told you he had a girl-friend!"

I ignored their demands to open it there and then, and quickly made my exit for school. As soon as I reached the ground floor, I stood my bike against the wall, and with trembling fingers opened the envelope. It contained a beautiful floral card with Milly's message in her unmistakable neat script.

"To My Darling Joe,

All of My Love, My Passion and My Life are yours alone.

Enjoy your special day, and may you have many happy returns.

Milly."

I was deeply touched with her message, and that she had taken the

trouble to find out when my birthday was. I stood trembling. I leaned against the wall and wondered about the card I hadn't received, and possibly would never receive from the girl who was waiting to hear from me. A girl, that despite the heaven I found in Milly's arms, found a way into my thoughts more and more, over and over again. I was gripped once more with that terrible sense of loss I'd felt when I'd said goodbye to Mich, and alongside it was an ever-growing sense of an impending doom which I didn't understand and which frightened me.

“Hey Mate, You OK?”

Bill was standing in front of me. He looked concerned. I brushed away the tears from my eyes and smiled at him. “Yeah, I'm fine - thanks for your card.”

He nodded, and smiled. “You're welcome - catch you after school?”

“OK” I said “Let's do that”

I climbed onto my bike and we said goodbye.



13th June 1960

“Well, How can I help?”

We were sat in the empty form room at just after 4:00pm.

“Miss, can I start by saying I cannot tell you everything?”

She laughed softly “That's refreshingly honest - yes, OK”

“I believe I'm adopted.”

“Ah! and your parents haven't told you themselves?”

“No Miss.”

“Joe, please call me Katherine - we're out of school hours, and I want you to think of me as your friend.”

“Thanks M.. Katherine”

She grinned. “Why do you think you're adopted?”

I looked into her kind eyes and just shook my head a little.

“OK. Is there a good reason why you haven't asked your parents?”

“I feel that they aren't ready to tell me yet Katherine”

“You say that as though you are very convinced that it is true.”

I nodded. “I do..”

She heard me stumble. “OK. You obviously have a good reason why you want this knowledge without alerting your parents. I believe you have the right to know, so how can I help?”

I took out the piece of notepaper I'd written the details on and gave it to her. “That is who I believe I am”

She scanned the notes I'd made. “Oh! It was your birthday last week.”

She was looking at me concernedly, and her kindness had the tears welling in my eyes. She said nothing, but passed me a spotless white handkerchief.

“Listen” she said “I've a friend who will look into this for you in the strictest confidence, is that OK?”

I nodded, and she put my note into her handbag.



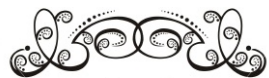
10th June 1960

I'd felt like a thief, and hated myself for what I was doing. I'd waited until I knew she'd left for work, then let myself in with her key. I started with the photo album, and wrote down in a note book what scraps of information I could find. I recognised quite a few of the locations in which the now-fading photos of Milly, her boyfriend and other friends had been taken. When I'd exhausted the album, I picked my way through the whole contents of the sideboard, from left to right and all three drawers, again making notes of anything that I thought would be useful.

I carefully put everything back and mentally thanked Milly for the order and neatness in which she kept everything, which perversely made my odious task easier to go undetected.

I made my way to school and reported in late to the school secretary, saying I had been unwell, and later, spent a free afternoon period in the library carefully re-writing the information I'd gathered into some coherent form. I added my own name and birth date, together with Milly's and her boyfriend's names.

I sat and stared at what I had written, and wanted to destroy it, forget it forever, but I couldn't, I had to know.



24th June 1960

I sat waiting in the empty secretary's office, praying and hoping that all of what I was thinking was just a silly delusion. That I was punishing myself because of my thoughts of Michelene. My overwhelming feeling was one of guilt and shame for sneaking around Milly's flat and going through her possessions like some nasty little pervert.

'Ma' Fenwick came in together with a young lady in a business suit. I looked at the stranger with surprise. Katherine saw my concern. "It's OK Joe, this is a friend of mine, anything said here will be kept in the strictest confidence."

The smart young woman held out her hand "Linda Quinn, pleased to meet you Joe"

I rose and shook her hand. We all sat down. Katherine said briskly "Let's not beat about the bush, I know how important this is to you. Joe, your assertions are absolutely correct."

I had tried to prepare myself, but had failed badly. They were both looking at me, both concerned, ready for a reaction, but neither I suspect, had expected the violence of mine. I felt my gut erupting and turning quickly, I dived off my chair and lifted the secretary's steel waste bin to my face. I knelt on the floor heaving and only vaguely heard the voices behind me. A door opened, and closed, and I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder whilst another rubbed my back. I was aware of Katherine's voice, but not of what she was saying. Another hand held a glass of water in front of me as I lifted my head, and I shakily took it and drank heavily, only to bury my face once again in the waste bin.

Slowly, the contractions in my stomach subsided, and I managed to finish the glass of water. A clean paper towel was put in my hand, and I sat up and wiped my face. Both women wore expressions of deep concern, but also of intense curiosity. Neither spoke. Linda Quinn left the room and came back with a replenished glass of water, and I gratefully sipped on it.

"I'm sorry" I croaked.

Katherine reached out and took my hand. "There is no need to be sorry, you've had a shock, that's all."

I sipped the water. They glanced at one another and Linda asked "Are you OK to carry on with this Joe, or would you like to do it some other time?"

I looked at her and tried to smile. "Thank you, but lets get it over with."

She nodded and lifted a foolscap envelope out of her bag and pulled from it two sheets of paper. "One of these is a birth certificate, the other is a legal document confirming legal guardian status to your parents, of the child named on that birth certificate." She handed the documents to me. I looked at them through a haze of red mist as the blood pounded through my head, then placed them slowly on the table.

She spoke again softly. "We are both here to help you. Your reaction to the confirmation of your suspicions troubles me. If there is anything, anything we can do to help, please say so."

I shook my head. "It's OK, I'm sorry I over-reacted"

I saw them glance at one another again. This time Katherine spoke gently "Have you had contact with your real Mum Joe?"

I froze. "I need time to think Miss.' She took my rebuff without flinching. She considered me. "OK. I think you've had enough for now. Come on, I'm taking you home."

I relented. "Thank you Katherine, but I've got my bike."

She stood up "Sorry Joe, but I'm not letting you ride home on a bike after what you've been through."

I nodded. It was pointless to argue, and my stomach ached badly.

Linda Quinn handed me her card in the car park and said "I would like to come in again next week to talk to you. Is that OK?"

I had no intention of talking to her, but hadn't the energy to argue.

"Yes Miss Quinn, and thank you for your help."

She held out her hand "It's my pleasure."



27th June 1960

Instead of using the key, I knocked on the door. "Who is it?" I heard her ask.

"It's Joe, Milly."

She opened the door, and smiled happily at me. "Have you forgotten your key, sausage?"

She closed the door behind us, and I embraced her - a long firm embrace. I kissed her gently on the cheek and let go of her. She looked at me, puzzled, and smiling nervously. "What's wrong Joe?"

"We need to sit down and talk Milly, there are problems."

She laughed nervously. "There must be if you don't want to kiss me."

I held her again, gently by the shoulders, and looked into the now-frightened eyes. "If I kiss you, I won't get said what needs to be said, darling Milly."

"I missed you over the weekend. Have you stopped loving me?"

"No, Milly, I love you more than anyone or anything on this earth, and will do until my dying day."

"Then please, tell me what's on your mind, because you are making me very nervous."

We sat down facing each other at the table and I reached out across it to hold her hand.

"Do you remember we talked about the little boy you had long ago, who was adopted?"

"Yes."

"And you said that you had tried to find him, but had been unsuccessful."

She nodded slowly, and waited for me to speak again.

"Well, I found him."

"Oh!" She sounded apprehensive.

"Don't you want to know where he is Milly?" I asked her gently.

"Oh, well yes, of course."

I took out facsimiles of the birth certificate and adoption papers I'd had made, and spread them out on the table between us.

I turned both documents around so that Milly could see them both the

right way up, then I pointed to the entries on the birth certificate which named the father and mother. "There is the name of the father of your child, Joseph McKay (deceased), and there is your name as the mother, Mildred Carson. Your baby was born on the 6th June 1946 - a little boy. You named him Joseph, and his given surname was Carson, the same as yours, because of your unmarried status."

I looked at her. She was staring at the papers in front of her, but did not reply. I moved my finger over to the adoption papers.

"You will see that Mr. And Mrs. Paul Watson were made legal guardians of a male child known as Joseph Carson, whose date-of-birth was 6th June 1946, and the child's surname was subsequently changed to Watson."

There was still no reply from her. I had to say it out loud.

"Paul Watson and his wife are my father and mother."

She said nothing. She stared at the papers in front of her, the colour draining from her face. I had expected shock, and knew that I would have to deal with it, but I was totally unprepared for what came next. Slowly, she withdrew her hand from mine, and pushing her seat back, she stood up.

"No! No! No! Nooooo!" She screamed, lifting the documents from the table and savagely tearing them into pieces in front of me.

"No! No! I don't believe you! Why? Why?" She moved around the table to where I was still sitting and beat me forcefully over the head, face and chest with her clenched fists. I tried to stand up, and she pushed me back into the seat violently, all the while screaming. "Why? Why are you doing this? I love you. You are my Joe. Tell me! Tell me!"

My nose started bleeding and one eye was closing as it swelled rapidly, and I knew I had to quell her rage, or she would hurt me badly, or worse, hurt herself. Despite the onslaught, I managed to stand, and throw my arms around her, pinioning her flailing fists to her sides. She struggled, screaming loudly, but gradually the violence in her began to subside, and the screaming turned into heart-wrenching sobs. As I felt her relax, I loosened my grip, and changed it into an embrace, calming away her sobs as I had done those few fateful months ago.

She started to talk. "You are the one Joe - the only one. There can be no-one else."

I recognised the words as exactly the same ones she had spoken after we made love for the first time. This time there were more.

“You went away from me and it hurt. It hurt so much, I wanted to die. I waited and waited for you. I cried your name out loud. I thought that if I cried hard enough, you would come back to me. Now that you have, you mustn't leave me, cannot leave me, to be all alone again Joe, can't you see that? I will die without you, for I would not want to live.”

I was sobbing. “Milly, dearest Milly, I'm so sorry. I had to tell you. I thought that if I didn't, then I couldn't live with myself. Now that I have told you, I still cannot live with how much I have hurt you by this. Please forgive me, there was no other way.”

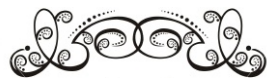
She reached up and gently stroked the tears from my eyes, then stroked the side of my head. She was looking at me again, her gray-green eyes flashing like emeralds with her tears. She kissed me gently on the cheek, then brushed tentatively against my lips, before moving her head back again to look at me. She had one hand around my back, and moved the other to slowly caress the back of my head. I stood as if hypnotized. I didn't know what I was supposed to feel in response to her continued sexual affection, I hadn't considered that it would happen, but at that moment I only felt the love for her that I'd had since the first day I had entered her flat.

As if sensing my confusion and indecision, Milly offered her lips again to my mouth, at first very gently, and then growing in confidence, she opened her mouth and kissed me. The same fire-bolt coursed through my body, the same vivid feelings of the immensity and depth of her love and devotion, were breathed into me by her kiss. Her arm tightened around my neck, her other behind me, holding me, gripping me. I held her tight, feeling her grind her groin sensuously against mine. She was moving her head side to side, up, then down, as she penetrated the innermost parts of my mouth with her tongue. I could feel myself large and still growing, and she broke off and took me by the hand into the bedroom.

I let myself be led - I wanted her as much as she wanted me, and at this moment nothing else seemed to matter. We made love as we had the first time, with Milly above me, but this time our senses seemed heightened beyond imagination, and we writhed together on the bed moaning and screaming in sexual ecstasy, for what seemed forever,

until we both collapsed completely exhausted. I cocooned Milly with her back snuggled into my chest and belly, while my left arm wrapped around her and my right arm under her neck, and in that position we both fell asleep.

From time to time I woke, sometimes to drink water or to pass it, others to just lie beside her lovely warm body, and breathe in her delicious scent, or bury my bruised face in her beautiful silky hair. Milly never stirred. Finally I joined her and fell into a deep sleep.



I awoke with a start. She had pulled a chair close to the bed, and was sat with a face cloth, gently dabbing at my face. She saw my eyes open and smiled a little sad smile at me.

“Good Morning, my darling Joe, can you ever forgive me for hurting you like this?”

I smiled at her and reached up to touch the side of her head.

“Milly, there is nothing to forgive.”

She still looked a little worried. “How are you going to explain your poor bruised face to your parents?”

I laughed lightly. “They are used to it - I do get into fights sometimes.” I didn't mention my real worry - that they might contact the parents of the friend I had 'stayed' with last night and start asking awkward questions.

“Lie still, and I'll finish cleaning the blood off you.”

I lay there watching her face. Even when she was sad, she was still beautiful. And she cared. She cared more for me than anyone ever had before. Those times in the past that I had returned home with a bloody nose, the occasion merited only remonstrations and questions, never the tenderness shown to me by Milly.

She part-filled an eye bath with Optrex and asking me to sit up, she handed it to me to cleanse the eye.

“I'm going to make us some breakfast now. Do you want it in bed?”

“No thanks, I'll get up.”

She kissed me softly on the lips, and left for the kitchen.

We sat opposite sides of the table to eat breakfast. Milly was subdued and quiet, looking concernedly at my face, and despite my encouraging smiles, continued to look worried. After we'd eaten, I reached across the table and took her hand.

"Do you want to talk?" I asked gently.

"I don't know."

"Don't be afraid. Just say what is on your mind - anything that is going on in your head."

"Will you stop seeing me?"

"No, of course not."

"But.. about last night?"

"I hope I showed you what I felt about you last night. I love you, and want to carry on doing so - as long as that is what you want."

"Despite..?"

"Despite what was said."

She looked up at me and said. "I love you Joe, I don't think of you as anything other than my lover, and I want to go on being your lover."

"Then that is what we will do."

I stood up and moving around the table held out my arms, and she stood up to embrace me. We stood there a long time. Then we kissed - a sweet fond kiss, and I said. "I'm late. I have to go and face the music at school, Milly."

"Will you come back this evening?"

I smiled. "I will. About 7:00?"

She laughed and nodded, and I was glad that she felt a little better.

It was just after 9:30 when I knocked on the school secretary's door. I'd missed registration but wanted to ensure I was not marked absent.

She looked up at me when I entered. "Oh! What happened to you?"

"I was involved in a brawl last night Miss. I had a terrible night, and I slept in this morning."

"I'm not surprised. Can you see out of that eye?"

She got up, and came around her desk to inspect my face closely.

"Just." I said.

"I think you should see the school nurse."

"I'm OK, really. I just want to get into class."

"Hmm. Alright. I'll mark you present, and inform your form teacher that you have arrived - bruised but intact."

I smiled, and thanked her.

“Off you go, then.”

It was Tuesday, General Studies with 'Ma' Fenwick. Her reaction to my late and beat-up appearance, was one of sympathy and apparent good-humour, but with a curiosity in her demeanour that only I noticed. The classes reception of course, was a little more rowdy, but after the obligatory collection of derisory and caustic remarks as I took my seat, soon calmed down.

At morning break I took a look at myself in the washroom mirror. It wasn't pretty. Bruising was starting to spread across the nose and cheekbone, and my eye was still quite swollen, half-closed, and hurt like hell. I took myself off to the school nurse and after scrounging a couple of Aspirin, managed to retreat without her fussing the rest of the morning away.

It wasn't so easy to escape the good intentions of 'Ma' Fenwick. She caught me after the 1st period in the afternoon, in the corridor outside the physics Lab. “A word Joe!”

I stood to one side as everyone else filed in, and she nodded to Brooks, our physics man, as he looked quizzically at us standing near the door, before he closed it and left us alone.

She gestured at my face. “Is that more trouble, or part of the same?”

“Er.. It was a fight Miss.”

She knew I was lying, and I knew she knew. I blushed.

She put a hand on my shoulder. “You don't have to put up with that sort of treatment you know.”

I looked at her in horror.

“It's not what you think Miss” I burred hastily.

“And what was I thinking?”

I hung my head. This was getting worse. “My father doesn't hit me in the face.”

“Well, I'm glad to hear that, but who does?”

I raised my head and looked straight into her concerned brown eyes.

She met my gaze and relented. “OK then, I won't keep you any longer, but I'm worried, very worried about you” She squeezed my shoulder gently and smiled. “Be careful”

“I'll try Miss”

With that she left and I took my place belatedly in class.



“My God! What have you been doing?” My mother looked up from her tea cup.

“It's nothing.” I said. “There was a scrap at the football field last night.”

“Oh, I thought maybe they'd been using you as the ball!”

This was better than I expected. My father making light of my injuries suited me for once.

“It feels like they were.”

He stood up and taking my head, turned it to the light.

“Hmm, you'll live. But if that swelling isn't down tomorrow, it's a visit to the doctors, young man.”

“OK.” I nodded. “Will do.”



9th July 1960

“Make sure you behave yourself, I don't want to come home to any trouble, and try to get some rest.”

His last words echoed in my head as I closed the door behind them. Finally, they were gone. I tidied up the lunch-time clutter, and then soaked myself in a bath. Then came the shave. I was becoming bored, even annoyed, at having to do this chore more and more, as it seemed the stubble grew quicker and harder, as the weeks went by. But when I'd seen the effect of my unshaven chin on Milly's soft shoulders, I was determined always to make the effort.

I re-dressed quickly and left the house, then made my way to Milly's door. She was expecting me, and wrapping me in her arms, she kissed me passionately. She was already excited and aroused, and she thrust her hips forward into me as we embraced. As I paused for breath she chewed my ear and whispered excitedly “All weekend! You're mine for all the weekend!”

It had been arranged for over a month. Dad had organised a long weekend camping, just outside of York. I had told Milly that I would cry off as feeling unwell, at the last minute, so that we could spend the whole weekend together.

Nearly two weeks had gone by since I had shown Milly the documents. Two weeks in which we had been in each others arms as lovers, as often as we could, both of us choosing to ignore the real truth of our relationship. If Milly ever gave any thoughts to our situation, or was bothered by it, she never demonstrated any. I had thought of almost nothing else. I was desperately afraid that we would be caught, and she would go to prison. This fear stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the one that if I ended our relationship she might do something silly, or worse, hurt herself. I took the cowards way out and did nothing.

I had been waking during the night, bathed in sweat, after dreaming the most horrific scenarios. Then lying in a half-dream state for what

seemed hours, as first Milly's face was in front of me, kissing me, then it was Mich's sweet lips upon mine, only when I looked in her eyes, her face would fade into a mask of great sadness, only to be replaced again by Milly's.

The surprise was mine then, that when I'd said to my parents I didn't feel well, and would prefer to stay at home, they had both simply nodded, and a visit to the Doctor's the following week was suggested, if I didn't perk up.

Milly took my hand and led me to the bedroom. Her nightdress lay on the bed. She had worn it only the once for me, and seeing my eyes upon it she said "I'll put it away, if you want."

I shook my head slightly "No, please Milly, put it on."

She kissed me, then I undressed her and she once again picked up the lovely garment, holding it above her head and let it drop, so that it flowed down her lovely body like a silvery white stream. She stood in front of me with hands clasped and smiled. "Well?"

I was electrified. The garment appeared to have become part of her. Every line and curve was covered in this frighteningly beautiful white silky sheen. I took her in my arms and we kissed, as my hands ran across her back, feeling every part of her through the soft gossamer. She lay face down on the bed, and I ran both my hands up and over her from head to calf, letting the material flow under my hands as I caressed her thighs and buttocks.

She moaned "Joe, please come inside me."

I quickly removed my clothes and climbed over her. Lifting the nightie I entered her and she gasped my name and thrust her buttocks up at me, and we rocked together then apart. Her moans turned to screams as I thrust against her harder and harder, until she exploded in one last orgasm and slumped still, breathing heavily. I stayed over her, but supporting my weight on my arms, until they started shaking, then I lay beside her, covering her with my leg and arm.

After she regained her breath she turned to face me. She touched my cheek and said "What's wrong Joe?"

Her face was concerned. "Nothing, Milly. I'm fine."

She kissed me. "No, you're not. You didn't come."

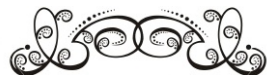
I kissed her. "That's OK, it's not a problem."

"Are you sure?"

“Yes, I'm sure.”

I pulled the sheet over us and closed my eyes. I was exhausted. I wanted to sleep. I pretended to doze, but felt her restlessness beside me. She reached down and began caressing me. As I grew again, she gently stroked the tip of my penis so that I imagined I could feel every ridge of her finger tip, and I became wet as she probed and gently squeezed me.

She pushed me gently over on to my back, and there was a pause, then I felt her mouth close around me, drawing me in with a gentle suction while her tongue probed and rasped around me. I felt her hand on my testicles, gently testing each one in turn, and I started gasping. Her middle finger gently pushed it's way into my anus and probed me until she felt me tense, then she began pushing against my sweet-spot as she worked me with her mouth. When I came, I thought I was going to die. The agony so great I was crying out, begging her to stop, but she would not. Only after I'd orgasmed did she finally relent, lying covering me and whispering love in my ear as I sobbed.



I was aware of a blinding headache, then the touch of something cool on my forehead. I opened my eyes and closed them again quickly, only to open them again slowly as to evade the worst effects of a hurtful glare.

Milly was sat on the bed, holding a damp cloth to my head and a look of great concern on her face. She saw me looking at her and smiled sadly. “Good Morning Joe, I'm afraid you aren't well.”

I tried to sit up but the whole world turned as I did, so I sank back on the pillow.

“What's happened?”

She looked down at me, and shook her head “You had a fever during the night. You must have 'flu or something. I've called the doctor.”

I nearly missed it. I felt awful and just wanted to go back to sleep.

“What did you say? You've called a doctor?”

She stroked my cheek “Yes, sweetness, he shouldn't be long, and we'll find out what's wrong with you.”

I sat bolt upright, and nearly fainted with the pain the movement induced in my head.

“Milly! What have you done? We can't have a doctor find me here!”
She looked at me puzzled. “Please Joe, just lie down, you aren't well, and I'm worried about you.”

I took hold of both of her hands. “Milly, you aren't listening. We can't have a doctor find me here, in your bed, with you!”

She looked at me strangely “Why ever not darling Joe? He's my doctor, he knows you are my fiancée.”

I let go of her hands and held my own head.

“Have you any aspirin?”

She smiled “Yes, I'll get you two.”

She left the bedroom and I dragged myself from the bed. My legs felt like jelly and the room spun, every time I moved my head too quick.

Milly came back into the room as I was pulling my trousers on.

“What are you doing? Get back into bed, the doctor will be here shortly”

I took the glass of water and the aspirins from her and gulped them both down. “I have to go, Milly. I can't be found here.”

“But what is wrong? Why do you have to go?”

She looked frightened. I took her sweet head in my hands. “Milly, If the doctor sees me here with you, you will go to prison.”

She stared at me. “But why?”

I still held her head in my hands and said quietly and slowly “Because you are my mother, and what we are doing is against the law.”

“No! No! No! Why are you saying these things Joe? You aren't well. Please lie down.”

I stood resolute. “I must go Milly. I can't be found with you”

“But he knows about you already! I've told him my boyfriend is living with me, that you're the father of my baby.”

I put my arms by my side. I was shaking and sweating, and my legs were trembling.

“Milly, I have to go. I will come back later in the weekend.”

I turned and walked toward the door.

“No! No! Joe, please! Please don't go. I love you! Please! Joe!” Her last calling of my name was a scream. A heart-rending cry of terror that reached inside of me and gripped me like some fearful claw. I did not look back at her, because I knew if I did, I would stay, and she would go to prison.

Her muffled screams continued as I walked down the stairs. I had just entered the corridor off the landing when I heard the lift door open. I glanced around and saw a sour-faced little man with a doctors bag

leave the lift and make his way to the stairs. It was going to be alright, our secret was safe, Milly was safe.



16th July 1960

He grabbed my arm with enough force to cause pain.

“What the Hell is wrong with you? Sit down and tell us!”

I looked at his hand on my arm, then directly at his face, and spoke very softly and slowly.

“What are you going to do? Beat it out of me?”

He relaxed his grip, and I sat down. “What I feel is something that I and I alone should bear. I cannot tell you.”

“You must tell us.” My Mum chipped in. “You’ve been walking around like a zombie all week - we’re worried sick about you.”

They sat in front of me, and my sister to one side - all staring at me, and probably hating me for making them feel unhappy.

Something snapped inside. I had thought that I could wait them out, but it wasn't simply their pressure, but my broken heart was weeping, and the tears would not be staunches.

I got up and poured myself a glass of water. Their eyes followed me around the room like three spooky paintings. Then I sat down.

“A few days ago you dismissed the death of Miss Mildred Carson, almost out-of-hand. You dismissed her 'behaviour' as madness. The fact is, her surname meant nothing to you, such was your disinterest. Of course neither of you took much notice of her when she was alive, so why would anyone expect you to care much on the occasion of her tragic death?”

My father interjected: “Hey, now come on..”

I interrupted him. “Please, for once in your life, would you try listening? After all it is you who asked me to speak.”

He sat back in his chair, stunned at my reply. I continued.

“During the latter part of the war, Miss Mildred Carson was courting a young naval officer, who was later tragically lost at sea in 1945, but who had made her pregnant on his last shore leave. The baby was carried through to full term, but so serious was Miss Carson's mental state at the loss of her lover, that the child was taken from her and

adopted. The father's first name was Joseph, and the adopters promised to keep the baby boy's name Joseph, in his memory.”

I took the birth certificate and adoption papers from my pocket and spread them open on the table.

There was stunned silence as my words sank in, and their faces turned ashen as they recognised what the documents were. I turned to my father.

“I blame no-one but myself for this. My unforgivable selfishness has killed my mother. Things may have turned out differently if I had been told the truth about your adopting me, but that's only a maybe, and too late now anyway.”

I sipped the last of my water, and stood up. “I'm going away. Please don't try to stop me. I cannot live here at the moment. I will telephone you from wherever it is I go. I promise.”

I picked up the documents and went out to the hall, shouldered my pack and opening the front door, I wheeled my bike out and without looking back, I closed the door behind me.

On the landing, I stood the bike against the wall, and entered the caretakers cupboard. I took Milly's letter from my pocket, and stood to read it one last time.

“My Dearest Joe,

The last few months have been some of the happiest in my life, and I have only you to thank for that. You have shown me a love and consideration far beyond that which anyone would expect from someone so young.

On the other hand, I have brought you unhappiness, heartache, and physical pain, for which I shall be eternally ashamed.

Some time ago, I decided to look for, and contact if possible, the child I gave up so many years ago. I lied to you Joe, about not finding him. I did find him and decided that I wanted to be close to him, but not to interfere in any way until he reached maturity. So you see Joe, that when I moved here, a few years ago, it was no co-incidence that you

were here also.

Several times I had visited the flats near the time you arrived from school. I knew you instantly, the likeness to your father was so strong. I even travelled up in the lift with you, and confirmed your identity later with a brief conversation to the woman we shared the lift journey with, although there was little doubt in my mind as to who you were.

I applied to the council for a flat, and thankfully, one became available in a short while, so I moved in to be close to you. As the months, then years past, and I watched you grow from adolescence into a young man, I witnessed the re-appearance of your father, the only person I have ever truly loved.

Over this time, you only knew me as a strange lady who made gentle fun with you over your saint's name, but I started having doubts and arguments with myself as to why I was here. Finally I decided to be brave and seek to get to know you a little better, and used the occasion of my broken lamp as an opportunity.

When you saw the photograph, and were clearly shocked, I knew I had to explain who I was. Instead I cried. All of the pain I had felt, but thought was gone, all rushed back and I couldn't keep back my tears. You were so kind to me, it should have been easy for me to tell you the truth, instead I was a coward and let you believe it was a coincidence that your likeness was so complete. Then, when you held me in your arms to comfort me, for a few brief moments my dead lover was alive and holding me. I wanted those moments to last forever, and I forgot about you and who you were, letting my delusion take me over.

Instead of telling you who I was, I managed only to tell you of how your likeness had attracted me. You saw my pain, and again you tried to comfort me, and my delusion was complete with the touch of your lips on my cheek. I kissed you. It should have been different, it should have felt wrong. It didn't. Instead, he was back with me, at last, after all those dreadful, unhappy years, and I couldn't let him go again.

We made love, and it was heavenly. You were generous and kind, gentle and loving, and made me feel very special and much wanted. I

couldn't go back Joe. I couldn't go back to that awful place I'd been for 15 years.

I realise the terrible wrong I have done in casting you in his place, and in my corruption of your integrity, once the truth was known to you. You would never have carried on had I not blackmailed you with my unforgivable threats.

I, and only I, am responsible for what has happened, and the only way to stop myself making matters worse, and from the consequences of my actions destroying you, is that I should go - go far enough away that I can never come back.

I will love you for all eternity, Joe. My son and lover both.

Please forgive me.

Milly”

Taking matches from my pocket, I struck one, lit the letter and dropped it into the cleaner's galvanised bucket. I stood until the last pieces had turned to crumbling black dust, then for what seemed a long time after, quietly wept.

Now no-one would ever know her terrible secret.

It was over. I left the building and walked the bike to the phone box across the street. Julie answered, and give me a cheery “Good Morning Joe, look forward to seeing you again”, before handing the phone to her friend.

I kept my conversation short.

“Michelene bonjour, je suis sur mon chemin. Je serai là pour le déjeuner comme promis. Je t'aime, mon chéri Michelene.”

Her gentle laughter at my not-very-much-improved French, melted the ice in my heart.

“Et Je t'aime aussi, sois prudent mon amour, à bientôt.”

I left the phone booth and stood outside looking up at the clear blue sky. There was a steady warm breeze from the south-west, it would help me make good time of the 25 mile ride to Trantwell.

