

CHAPTER 6: COURTING IN THE CASTLE

When Lou and I stopped fucking, not much changed in our relationship otherwise. We didn't skip a beat in being good friends and neighbors. I must admit that in later September I did miss the physical intimacy a bit and wrote a number of awkwardly bittersweet poems, none worth citing. We continued helping each other on our work projects, and he still frequently joined the supper club. But daily life at the Four Bells was busy and exciting enough to distract me from maudlin feelings, and soon it got even more complicated.

Near the end of the month I got a surprising call from Chas that my dear Ken was moving to DC. He'd finished his Library Science degree at LSU and had shown up with his Richard from New York (a longtime boyfriend I'd known about for just as long). They were staying with Chas and looking for a house to buy, and within a week they'd found one—small world: just a few doors up Q Street from Lou's.

The house was in relatively good shape with a working kitchen and a finished apartment in the basement, into which Chas moved immediately, but all three of them joined our supper club regularly for October while they got settled. Charles was pleased to meet my legendary lover-brother Ken and teased that he seemed to be hooked on Richards. Recalling our odd assemblage of Kens and Richards in Milwaukee, I joked about maybe looking for another Ken.

This New York Richard was a small guy, charmingly plain with glasses and sociable company over dinners. Being a lawyer too, he hit it off well with Carolyn and Lewis, and after a tour of old One-and-Two, he and Ken agreed that the ambitious couple had to be out of their ever-loving blue-eyed minds. Privately, Ken told me that Charles and I probably were too what with the scale of the Four Bells. He and his Richard merely had easy rehab work ahead of them.

Early along in October, Lou and I got back into salvaging treasures from the doomed houses nearby. In particular, we found several mantles left to the wrecking ball and hauled them home, stashing some in the basement and installing others in the Four Bells. A white marble one with carved roses went into our parlor in place of the simpler wooden (albeit walnut) one. A slate mantle with fantastically colored faux marble panels went up in the dining room between the two floor-to-ceiling windows (with stained glass panels at the tops).

Thrilled by the historic acquisitions, Charles encouraged our reclamation activities, and we bought an old blue van. I named her Lavenia Van Dodge, and she served well for several years of salvage. Since it went on for such a long time, I really can't pin down when we found what, but there were architectural details of all kinds, including ceiling medallions, fancy woodwork, and even an entire staircase of the same design as our own in tiger-eye oak.



Crown of Eastlake Mirror

Perhaps most elegant prizes were the two over-mantle mirrors. One was an Eastlake walnut fantasy about six feet square with an exuberant crown which went over the dining room mantle. The other was a black lacquer confection (nearly six feet tall) with gilded details which contrasted beautifully with the white mantle in the parlor. (The walnut fantasy eventually moved away with me, and now lives in the library of Santa Fe's posh La Posada hotel.)

Salvaging sometimes provided dangerous adventures. One day when Lou was otherwise occupied, I went alone into a derelict house and hauled my ladder into its crumbling dining room



Victorian Ceiling Medallion

to remove the ceiling medallion, an intricate plaster wreath of leaves and flowers. In the middle of the job, the entire ceiling of plaster and lathe let go of the joists. There I was standing at the top of the ladder like Atlas holding up a very heavy sky! With extreme caution, I tilted the slab to rest one edge on the floor, and propping the sky on the ladder, I climbed down. It was fairly simple to remove the medallion and break up the ceiling to retrieve my ladder, much easier than the weeks of effort required to strip and restore it for the parlor. Though I don't have a picture of that precise medallion, the one shown here is a close approximation—maybe even a bit less elaborate. Over-the-top ornamentation really turns me on.



The Centennial Chandelier

While boasting about treasures we found to restore the former glory of the Four Bells, I've got to tell you about Charles's find later that fall of 1973. He went one weekend to Philadelphia to meet about the restoration of Independence Hall for the upcoming Bicentennial—he worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation—and came home with a chandelier they were taking down from one of the rooms. Baccarat crystal, it was a Centennial gift from France (along with the Statue of Liberty), with prismatic crystals, some a foot long. (I still have two of the prisms hanging from the portal of my front porch.)

It was absolutely eye-boggling. I believe it was Charles who took this photo of it hanging in our dining room—and that's a barely discernible me reflected in the walnut fantasy mirror. The faux pink marble of the mantle can just be seen as can the end of the stained-glass transom. I'm sorry you can't make out the intricate chestnut woodwork around the double pocket doors into the entrance hall or that behind the curtain around the window. And yes, that odd line of reflection down the side of the mirror is its 1-inch bevel, also visible along the mantle top. We intended to restore Castle Four Bells to Victorian glory, as befitted the royal princesses residing therein.

Observe in the picture the plant at the window, a lettuce-leaf begonia. In our few months at Four Bells (and all's well!), I'd installed much greenery at south-facing windows, and Lou took some home (because I obsessively propagate whenever possible). At this stage, you may have noticed that plants were my pleasant hobby, but in not long they would become something of an obsession for me. In future, I'll try to keep my horticultural chatter to a minimum.

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With such Victorian splendor around and overhead, dinners were truly grand affairs. Though we regulars were well used to it, new neighbors and miscellaneous guests were duly impressed. Charles acted as host at the head of the table, and as associate princess, I'd sit at the foot (with a thrilling view of windows, mirror, chandelier, the whole eye-boggle). If he was away, like that weekend in Philadelphia, I'd be vice-host and enjoy presiding over the many conversations, asking pointed questions, telling tales, or interjecting witticisms.

Charles was much better at it than I, but I was learning fast. He explained that being a hostess was simply a matter of holding court—and that's what princesses were made for. We were holding a stylish court for our favored friends, honored guests, and suitors. A la Mae West, I remarked that I liked people coming up and seeing me sometimes. Charles warned that a princess must always be kind, generous, humble, and fascinating. I figured I could do that.

For a whole week at dinner everyone was tossing out suggested names for Carolyn and Lewis's new puppy—a bull mastiff already the size of a small cow, big dog for big house... All week Carolyn nixed amazing names dogs would die for. By that Friday when Charles was off to Philadelphia and I'm hosting, I'd gotten royally pissed off with all the indecision and issued an impromptu edict to my court.

As no name had yet been chosen for the gargantuan pup (lying nearby at the window like a bear gnawing a bone), she would henceforth be known as Varnish. When I called her by that name, she got up and came to me. Everyone at table was in stitches, even Carolyn who testily complained that Varnish was a terrible name. Magnanimously, I agreed to hold off on formally dubbing her dog Varnish if she'd decide on a name by tomorrow's dinner. Carolyn came in with a decision: Isadora. A vision of that hippopotamus in the tutu in "Fantasia" cracked me up, and remembering to be kind and generous, I assured Carolyn it was a splendid name. Fortunately we soon shortened it to Izzy, and she soon grew even larger—like a pygmy hippo minus the tutu.

Our dinner conversations weren't all that frivolous. Most of us were brave residents of the dubious neighborhood, and we considered ourselves "urban pioneers." We all had tales to tell of trials and victories in restoration and rehabilitation work and concerns to voice about the pace and direction of the District's urban renewal efforts through the Redevelopment Land Agency.



The Iowa Apartments

bureaucratic play. But they weren't thorough: I found the log-in sheet for building permit applications listing the architect as T. F. Schneider, DC's most prominent architect of the time. He'd designed the Executive Office Building, other landmarks, and some 2,000 houses, possibly including the Four Bells! Thus the beautiful Iowa was saved and restored as condominiums.

Our greatest fear was for a huge beaux artes apartment building at the corner of O and 13th called the Iowa, which like the Rockingham had been left out of the Historic District on purpose. Wandering through its wracked-out interior, I lamented that it was in such imminent danger, and in the fifth floor hallway I found an old wooden trunk, which I hauled home for a souvenir. (For forty-plus years it's been sitting at the foot of my bed for blankets and linens.)

RLA claimed they were justified in tearing down the Iowa because it wasn't historic, but I disagreed. At a later time, I researched it at the National Archives and found that RLA had checked out those records some years before and never returned them, a typical

What really got the supper club's dander up was RLA's proposal for "assisting" the Logan Circle Historic District. They offered to install cheesy iron fences along the sidewalks and suggested property owners sell them the facades of our houses so they could "restore" them to their bureaucratic (i.e. economical) standards. Not on your life! I should add that on our block of Rhode Island Avenue we didn't even have sidewalks. Right after Charles and I moved in, they showed up with backhoes and removed the sidewalks for sewer work, leaving piles of dirt worse than a plowed field. I immediately filed a request with the District to install brick sidewalks appropriate to the historic district, but that took several years to transpire. Yes, years. Wait for it!

Our committed group of urban pioneers around the supper table held the first discussions that soon led to the formation of the Logan Circle Community Association. (I immediately volunteered to be the secretary, writing the newsletter and taking minutes of the meetings—which I patriotically did for a number of years.) As community activists, I and various LCCA members attended all the public meetings of RLA and raised holy hell about their idiotic urban renewal plans. My hidden agenda was to discover their demolition schedule and keep a step ahead of them in my salvage operations. In that connection, over the years I gave many of the old and new Circle residents rescued mantles and woodwork from our basement, including that staircase—which probably was also designed by T. F. Schneider.

Meanwhile, our work on the second-floor bedroom continued, and Charles figured we'd get it done by November. Making such good progress, we also started on the parlor, a huge project that would take much longer than we expected. I moved our minimal furniture out into the entrance hall, a huge square room with its own Schneider staircase, dadoes (chair rails), and Lincrusta panels. And thus began untold hours of staring at the parlor walls while scraping off old wallpaper and stripping several layers of paint off the intricately floral Lincrusta. (I still have the icepick I used for the detail work.)

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While everything on the home front was sociable and excitingly productive, without Rysza for Russian chatter, my work of analyzing research was depressingly solitary and boringly productive, but the pay check was reasonable compensation. Then in mid-October, the Division sent me to attend the Southern Conference of Slavic Studies in Columbia, South Carolina. I'd been planning to go to New York again for Kenny's birthday, but duty called. I drove down to Columbia in Lavenia Van Dodge and was immensely unimpressed by that state's capitol city and the cheap motel where I stayed.



The Famous Spy

In my later report to the Chief of the Division, I advised that in the morning session on October 12 I learned the unsurprising facts "that there's a vague linguistic universal on the formation of the conditional; the phoneme [v] does not behave properly in Czech; the teaching of complex sentences in Russian may yet be mastered; and linguists are still doing the same tricks as when I was one." The next two sessions on Soviet foreign policy and social issues were even less enlightening.

It was curious how respectful the participants were of the "famous spy," but I quickly got rather irritated with how everyone was always citing and talking to and about Dr. this and Dr. that as though they had an inside line on truth or monopoly on wisdom. My several years in graduate school

had well inoculated me against that sycophancy. I pitied the cute grad students indoctrinated with that bigotry. Several participants expressed condolences that I hadn't finished my degree, but I assured them my important, high-security intelligence work had no need of such credentials.

Being already halfway there, after the conference I drove Lavenia on to Florida to visit with Barbara and the girls. She'd bought a little house a short way down the street from Martha and Gene's and was happily settling in. The boyfriend Paul had decided he couldn't deal with a divorcee with kids and moved on, but Barbara didn't seem particularly disturbed. Her graduate work in education at the university apparently was quite satisfying, and the girls, now seven and almost six, were doing wonderfully in their school. We spent a lot of time together coloring.

While in Gainesville, on a whim I dropped in at a plant store called the Garden Gate and lost myself in their tropical vegetation. It was all I could do to keep from buying everything in the place, but I settled on only a couple exceptional plants. One was a reed called Cyperus, or more commonly umbrella grass, a relative of papyrus, and the other two were Rex Begonias with unreal, almost surreal, multi-colored leaves.

Back home with my treasures, I parked the Cyperus (with stems nearly six feet tall) in a tub by the dining room window. To keep them from flopping, I used fishing line with beads to bind them into a loose sheaf which Charles said looked absolutely Egyptian. Since it grows easily and every leaf grows a new plant, I soon spread the reeds all over the neighborhood. The two Rex Begonias were the first in what would eventually become an enormous collection, and they proved to be incredibly easy to propagate from leaves and seeds in a terrarium.

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Of an evening soon after, over lively dinner conversations, I turned my gay geisha charms on an attractive youth and lured him upstairs to see begonias. "Gay Geisha" is a variety of iris I sold much later when the Iris Man and a great title for the poem written the next day:



Gay Geisha

GAY GEISHA

*As I let a stranger out the front door,
The morning came over me Thanksgiving,
A faint chill on the wind like November,
The scent of possible snow soon,
And trees on the street gone gold.
Grey clouds are spreading blurs,
And nations of leaves scatter in yards.
How well I say goodbye to someone
After sharing each other all night.
We won't ever see each other again
For the courting ritual is complete.
He went down the steps without turning,
And I didn't even look out the window.*

10/28/73

My poetic mood continued with a few verses mostly about fall with lyrical lines like: "Now trees are flowering with evening, / Changing their summer robes for rustling mantles / And the coppersy bangles of October..." However, for the most part—maybe influenced by the Slavic conference—I wrote in Russian. Two of those pieces, "Po polyu" (Outside) and "Zhar-tsvetok" (Fire Flower), were intended as lyrics for Chas's music, and he may have actually set them.

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Charles certainly knew his business because we finished work on the second-floor front bedroom in early November. It was elegantly restored with pale gold walls, ivory woodwork (with a hint of mint), ceiling like a pale sky, and oak floor with an amber gloss. He found us a renter the next day, a tall, gracious beauty right off the cover of GQ named Patrick—with an appropriately Irish surname. Patrick was impressed by our grand Four Bells, loved his new quarters, and moved in that afternoon. He joined the supper club that evening, bringing the headcount to fourteen, including Lou, Ken and his Richard, and other usual neighbors.

Over dinner the stunning Irishman stole hearts right and left, male and female, as he told us his story. He'd been secretary for J. Edgar Hoover (who'd died in May of 1972, just before I got to town) and was now secretary with the third Director since by name of Clarence Kelley. The succession of bosses hadn't been easy for Patrick, but he was a survivor. He told us Mr. Hoover had been extremely polite to him, untroubled by his being covertly gay at the office, and never intimated any carnal intentions of his own. Of course, Patrick had seen the mind-blowing files of pornography but had never commented a syllable. Though he'd known Mr. Tolson quite well, he hadn't seen him since Mr. Hoover's death.

On their way out after aperitifs, Ken's brotherly advice was to watch out for my new housemate, and Lou said pointedly that he'd be back tomorrow for Irish stew. Carolyn and Lewis hung around engaging Patrick and Charles in chat and spots of brandy while I washed the dishes. When I was done, they politely took off and left us housemates in post-prandial peace. Charles assured Patrick he'd be a wonderful addition to the Four Bells, an apprentice princess, and then with a querulous glance at me, retired to his chambers on the third floor. Patrick smiled nicely, maybe a tad tipsily, and said he'd really like to see my legendary begonias.

Climbing the grand stairs on Patrick's arm, I watched out for him as my Ken had advised. After he'd admired the reds, purples, and silvers of my begonias for a reasonable moment, I found myself in his arms and seriously disposed to be hospitable. In my fancy iron-work bed (recently obtained at a junk store), we agreed only to do this once and welcomed each other to the Four Bells with much physical tenderness and affection. Then Patrick picked up his fancy clothes and walked off splendidly nude to his new bedroom. Once would be enough.

The next day Patrick brought home a special present for me—an angel-wing begonia about three feet tall with silver spots on serrated leaves and a hanging cluster of nearly red pink flowers. A fibrous, stalked variety as opposed to the rhizomatous kind like my lettuce-leaf and Rex, it had belonged to Mr. Hoover, and I promptly named it Jedgar. I hoped the closeted old man's spirit would enjoy living in a gay castle, and Patrick was sure he would. Henceforth we were the best of housemates and sumptuous supper companions. At table, he learned to hold court with the grandest of us princesses.

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After I'd gotten back from the Slavic conference, Charles and I talked about the stupidity of my undead dissertation and the fact that I hadn't heard shit from my chairman now for way over a year. It was a subject I preferred not to think about, but he urged me at least to write to the asshole and find out where things stood on the zombie thesis. He was right that I shouldn't just leave it hanging this way—either poop or get off the pot.

So I wrote, respectfully wondering why in the hell I hadn't heard from him since sending that infuriated package to him in Vienna.* I made sure to advise him of my important, high-security intelligence work and politely requested a response at his earliest goddam convenience. His earliest was three weeks later, soon after Patrick moved in.

* For details on this dissertation debacle, see *LORD WIND*, 6.3 *HARD LABOR*.

Dr. S. wrote that the Dean had reorganized my thesis committee, replacing two who'd left in the middle of last year, and they'd been discussing my work for several months now. (First, there wasn't much to discuss about the work, and it certainly wouldn't have taken several months. Second, it wasn't really my work, but his own dictated conclusions.) Dr. S. continued that the committee had concluded that *my* work tried to cover too much territory in the subject of Russian word order and should be scaled back to focus solely on the nominal phrase. (In other words, it had tried to be significant but should be cut down to academic nonsense.) I expect that both Patrick and Charles heard my shouted curses at being told to write a fifth dissertation.

I was ready to turn a voodoo doll into a pin cushion, but with his usual calm, Charles talked me down to mere rage. He argued that with my literacy in the subject, writing scholarly-sounding nonsense should be a snap, especially for the fifth time. I had to admit he was right and said maybe I really should poop in that pot again. If they wanted shit, by George, I'd could give them a great, steaming turd. Charles congratulated me on my enthusiasm, and Patrick was astounded that I'd already spent six years writing four dissertations on Russian word order.

Cursing my fate, I arranged with the Division to make use of their cadre of Russian Intelligence Specialists—I was just a lowly Research Analyst—as native informants. I'd run a battery of nominal phrases in every possible permutation by them and record their interpretations and comments. Most were elderly men who clearly didn't like speaking Russian with me. One told me I sounded like a snooty Muscovite—which I took as a compliment. An old woman asked why I was messing with such silly stuff and refused to have any part of it. I wound up with ten more or less unwilling native informants.

Since I had about a hundred phrases to process with each of them, and they each could only schedule about 20 minutes with me twice a week—and I was only allowed to devote two hours a week to the interviews—I roughly estimated it would take me way too many months, but what the hell... I'd give my committee some high-class bullshit.

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November rolled in with some serious cold, and we discovered that our high castle was mediievally drafty, the windows loose enough to rattle in their frames when hit by the wind. The steam radiators had all they could handle keeping themselves warm, much less offering any heat to their rooms. Our new princess Patrick had it more bearable in his restored room because we'd re-fitted his windows, but everywhere else we taped up plastic sheets over the window openings. The still air and rising temperature were glorious, but we soon found the old furnace couldn't hit much more than 55 or 60 degrees. We had to wear sweaters and coats around the house.

Everyone got used to the seasonal chill over the supper club, and we lit extra candles for warmth. Some said it was even colder in their houses, some that extra wine helped. Lewis and Carolyn had it nice in their one room, but the rest of old One-and-Two was like the arctic. I never could understand how the two of them could always emerge from that tiny garret looking impeccably coiffed and dressed, like movie stars, but then they were lawyers. Myself, I always felt quite chic all snuggled up in the blue mohair sweater my Kenny gave me.*

I was wearing it when he showed up Thanksgiving afternoon, which the supper club made a big deal out of. The 30 invitees included all my near and dear as well as Kenny and handsome, muscular Sam who'd come down with him from New York. I wondered if he and this stunning Sam were together, so to speak, but they didn't seem to be.

Ken's antennae went up when he saw the guy, and I observed how the crowd spread across tables in the entrance hall and parlor frequently stole glances at Sam. The object of such

* Regarding this fluffy sweater see *LORD WIND*, 2.5 *SHOWTIME*.

popular interest seemed oblivious of his celebrity. I watched him pay liberal attention to the many neighbors' house-tales and particularly to Patrick, who acknowledged his attentions like a true princess, demurely, chastely, and irresistibly. All this I observed while concentrating on my entourage seated around me at my foot of the main table: Kenny, Ken, Lou, and Chas.

Charles presided as bird-carver in a grand ceremony at the table's head beneath the mirror and chandelier, giving a touching speech of gratitude for all the excellent and admirable friends and neighbors present. He admitted not knowing half of us half as well as he'd like and liking more than half of us twice as much as we deserved. Recognizing his clever twist on Bilbo's farewell speech, I joined everybody in Thanksgiving cheers and hoped Charles wouldn't suddenly disappear from our midst. He calmly stabbed the bird in its broad, brown breast.

The feast went on for hours. Most of the club regulars had conspired on it, marshalling forces to feed the multitude out of our 25-ft. galley kitchen. For my part I'd handled much of the prep work and was off the hook to hang out with my favorites for most of the meal. I also had the duty to clear plates after dessert. When I got back, Sam had switched places with my Ken, who was now talking up Patrick. (He was on legitimately on the prowl because his Richard was home in New York with family for the holiday.)

Sam had latched onto my impressionable little Lou, asking about his house, and his work, and... Lou meanwhile was fixated on Sam's pectorals, powerfully evident in his tight maroon sweater as were his bulging biceps. Someone refilled our coffee cups and poured another round of Benedictine. Dear Chas was deep in conversation with beloved Kenny about dance and theater. They'd met over a New Year's in New York a couple years before.*

Gazing round at the guests, all nicely stuffed and flushed with cheer, I eavesdropped on my chatting courtiers, and in one sweep my eyes ran slam-bam into Sam's. He was looking around Lou straight at me and in two beats said he wanted to find out all about me. I smiled cautiously and asked if he had week free to hear my tale. He didn't but wondered if I could tell it to him in just one night—like tonight. Everybody laughed heartily at Sam's directness, but I played Scheherazade, worrying that if I told my whole tale in one night he'd chop off my head.

There was more laughter around and attention aroused from other parts of the table, but without cracking a smile, Sam said he didn't want to hear the end of my tale, so I didn't have to worry. The princess was primly silent, but my excellent and admirable friends and neighbors could all see that we had a successful suitor on our royal hands. On my right, Kenny leaned close and whispered that he had to catch the train back to the city this evening, but Sam needed a place to stay... Further negotiations were unnecessary.

When dinner was over, it was early winter evening, and in various bunches our crowd dispersed to stroll the neighborhood and walk off calories. My entourage plus Sam and Patrick, a remarkable bunch of beautiful men, if I do say so myself, bundled up in hats, coats and mufflers and ambled around the Circle in holiday spirits. Chas and Lou left first to take Kenny to catch a cab on 14th Street and then head home up to Q Street.

As Ken, Patrick, Sam and I walked back along the muddy, missing sidewalk to the Four Bells, it started lightly snowing. Inside, we found Charles entertaining a fine gentleman with brandy, nicely dressed in a suit no less. I'd observed him up at Charles's end of the table and was pleased to meet Frederick, a legislative aide. Not to intrude, we four went upstairs to respective boudoirs. Scheherazade got so distracted by the Shah's spectacular body that I lost the thread of my tale more than once. In bed Sam was even more beautiful up close by candlelight, the gilded contours of his chest, the shadowed columns of his thighs, the glowing curves of his...

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* About that meeting, see *LORD WIND*, 6.1 ROAD TRIP.

Sorry for that ellipsis, but I think I've written enough about that intimate scene. Stories mustn't end before the night's over. After coffee and Danish in the morning, the six of us who'd slept in the castle attacked the wretched mess left in the scullery for the morrow. Well, this was the morrow, and it took over two hours to deal with. Afterwards, while taking Sam on a walk past the White House down to the Mall, I told him the rest of my tale, and on the way up to Union Station for his train, he told me about his ambition and attempts to be an actor. (We didn't meet again, but I learned of late—via Google—that Sam indeed made a B-movie with lots of skin in Italy in 1983—and in 1986 died of AIDS. It gets dicey when one googles old friends.)

Twice over the fall we had visits by a professional associate of Charles, a handsome historic architect from Chicago named David who was involved with the architectural study of our fabulous Logan Circle. Each time he came to dinner, he subtly gave me the eye down at my end of the table but wound up warming Charles's bed. For his third visit at the beginning of December, Charles happened to be away in Memphis inspecting potential historic sites for the National Register, and David sat on my right at the head of the dining table.

His charming, courtly conversation over dinner earned a berth in my bed, where we spoke not a word about historic preservation. David was astounded by my begonias and fascinated by my warm hospitality between the sheets. He later removed sheet and blanket and had me pose like Goya's Naked Maja for a whole bunch of Polaroid photos. I wish he'd left me even one of them to include here. I bet they were beautifully artistic.

A few days later, David wrote to me from back home in Chicago remarking on the gorgeous souvenirs and professing affection and appreciation, but I never heard from him again. (Happily, Google tells me he's still a successful architect in that city this half-century later.) As I'd mentioned to Charles before, having guys come up and see me sometime—even just once—was quite nice. Here in my royal castle, I could graciously entertain my occasional gentleman callers and then tenderly bid them goodnight—or maybe goodbye in the morning.

Charles came home from Memphis full of tales of splendid mansions and their wild Masonic Temple and immediately set to planning a holiday shindig, an afternoon Christmas Eve reception for all and sundry. Of course, Carolyn and Lewis and many other supper folks pitched in. We drove Lavenia way out into the woods of Maryland for an enormous tree that stuck its top up the stairwell to the second-floor landing, and it took the whole neighborhood to decorate it with donated ornaments.

Lou and Lewis heavily decked the halls and walls with swags of spruce and holly, and Ken outdid himself making a huge feathery angel for the tip of our Tannenbaum—to celebrate his new librarian job with the Army over in Crystal City. Club stalwarts Connie and realtor Barbara commanded the food and drink brigades respectively, the feast filling the flowered table, tantalizing in the light of the glorious chandelier, and the libations liberally available on the breakfront. Chas brought two pretty-girl violinists who accompanied many rounds of carols in a merry community-sing, probably the first in many decades in the old neighborhood.

Charles was radiant throughout as master of ceremonies and *maître d'hôtel*, while I served as event coordinator, stage manager, troubleshooter, and tour guide, in other words, a terribly busy princess. Forgive me that I can't recall any specifics of the occasion, but I've got this nagging suspicion that a merry holiday reveler turned into a suitor, and I invited him upstairs to see my begonias.

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