

## CHAPTER 20: IN THE SWEET SUMMER

My year of foreign fame, 1978, wrapped up in a trip to Chicago for the OPERA America Annual Meeting which offered the dubious honor of briefly meeting Beverly Sills and being charmed by her gleaming smile. Otherwise, it was the usual two days of simple business as choreographed by Ann and me. The special benefit was sharing a hotel room with my dear Jim, who basked in his bureaucratic glory with the opera directors in the days and after sumptuous dinners enjoyed my geisha attentions at night. Our friendly relations may have been noted by some, but I expect most considered it merely collegiate closeness and organizational cooperation.

After the meeting, I saw my Jim off home to DC and rented a car for a sentimental journey up the wintery road to Milwaukee. In cold winds and light snow I wandered the UWM campus, by the old Bellevue building, and along the lakefront, savoring old memories of my two dear Kens. Then I drove to Madison just for the hell of it—to see that frozen campus and hit the local gay bar. A cute grad student named Jesse supplied warm Wisconsin hospitality with lavish amenities and in the morning in his turn saw me off to O'Hare.

My flight took me to New Orleans to pick up Mother and drive us to Florida for the family Christmas, a huge affair with all the out-laws, successor spouse Jack, ex-in-law Gene, five kids, four dogs, and two snooty cats. Mother and I stayed at a nearby motel as a safe haven from the holiday hubbub, but she was fairly well shell-shocked. I reveled in the familial comfort, great cooking, commotion, and confusion, paternally playing with the angelic toddler called Bubba, maybe after President Carter's brother Billy? My attempts to call him Buster (after my high school best friend), never caught on. My girls grew ever more beautiful and maidenly.



*Ms. Yvonne at Almost 60*

A day's drive back across the Gulf-coast, and I stayed one more with Mother at her little house for an unusual evening at her Square Dance Club Christmas Party and Dosido Do. A self-conscious wallflower, I didn't try the ritual choreography but sat woodenly watching and deeply appreciating Mother's beaming joy as she pranced and twirled around the square. I decided on a motto for her from that old book by Don Marquis, "Archy and Mehitabel." "There's dance in the old dame yet!"

Her new man-friend, a dour widowed grandfather named just plain Joe Perkins, square-danced gracefully in a cowboy way, and I thanked him for taking good care of my mom. I was pleased to think that my Mother, soon to turn sixty, had maybe found romance, but she'd told me some years earlier about not intending to marry again—who needed some man in the way all the time? Her son, the inveterate geisha guy, certainly didn't need one and much appreciated having his Jim under foot around the house only every week or so.

To our modest New Year's Eve party for a dozen or so closest friends, my weekly or so lover brought his Jim in celebratory tow. He kissed me in the vestibule and again, dramatically, at midnight, his Jim politely not watching. Drinking in new 1979, Charles announced a surprise celebration and called the celebrants down the staircase, Diana in an elegant white sheath with pearls and that handsome guy Walter she'd often had to dinner—in a tux. Charles did a kind of Native American wedding ceremony, and Diana went off to live in Virginia as the factitious wife of a deeply closeted, professionally successful husband. I wished them connubial bliss.

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On going into my file for 1979 (which I hadn't done since then), I found to my surprise (horror?), that I'd kept a journal! I made entries every week or so recapping and recording mundane details, starting on January 21, Sunday, and writing well into December. Reading it now has given me a surprising (horrifying?) new perspective on that year of adventures and challenges, and moving memories I'd forgotten. The 125 pages overwhelmed me with evidence that my salad days, my heydays, were then—but passing. With Charles's breakdown and demise of the Supper Club, my social life and geisha career were fading away. For comfort, I made myself a warmer kimono in burgundy denim on the pattern of the one Chi had made for me.

As the mistress of a big shot at the NEA, I found it easy to neglect my geisha practice. With Ann leaving OPERA America, I was soon to be the acting director, and the organization would take over my life. My Jim's weekly or so amorous visits were all the "romance" my libido needed. Early in the pages, I noted on Saturday that "Jim came by, procrastinating his work for a stolen *après midi*, albeit a late one. He laughed at me for still being in my kimono at 4 pm, and I explained that certain folks often didn't dress till time for dinner. He seemed at ease again after his recent mind-storm over who means what to whom." For the first time since his Santa Fe romantic flush, he said he loved me, and I said go right ahead, whenever he felt like coming up to see me. I fear he may have missed my Mae West intonation.

Jim's visits of convenience few and far between, I had ample occasion to socialize otherwise, though infrequently. In mid-February dear Peter from Denver dropped in for some days and affectionate nights. When my Jim showed up again, I didn't mention my visitor, but we talked about me maybe going for Ann's job. He discouraged that, judging that it was too early in my career. Not really serious about it in any case, I took his professional advice.

On his next visit at the end of the month, Jim made love to me with protestations of missing me terribly and then went away on an unexplained 10-day trip somewhere. I made use of the time to entertain a sweet young thing named Paul in town from New York. When he got back from wherever, Jim found a thank-you note from Paul and got jealous, which made him a much more ardent suitor. Paul came back the next week for a refresher, and Jim parried with dinner at the Paramount Steak House, one of our rare public appearances. Over our barbecue he said his Jim was unhappy, feeling neglected, and I asked him to convey my sincerest sympathies.

Right around then was when a winning candidate for Ann's job appeared, an attractive guy named Tom who'd been an agent for opera singers in New York. I wasn't sure how that qualified him for being an executive director, but President John apparently had confidence in the guy, or at least in his looks. Jim was noncommittal but had a party at his place to welcome the new colleague. I was honored to meet another friend of Jim's there, the opera composer Carlisle Floyd. The neglected other Jim sat with me, amiably thanking me for not "stealing" his Jim away. I assured him I was perfectly fine with merely borrowing him now and then.

Picking me up for "I Capuletti," my Jim stayed all night with repeated assaults on my virtue, much appreciated for their ardor, probably spurred by seeing on my desk another letter from Paul wanting to visit again. In the morning he was upset by our "quadrangle," and I joked that I was rated geometrically for dodecahedrons. He came to dinner on my birthday, and we made love almost perfunctorily. In the morning I said I did indeed love him, but sex was actually my way of being virtuous. He asked me to decide if we should continue our affair, but when I went the next night to his place for dinner, he'd already decided we should keep on fucking.

All through May and June, we went on with our sporadic encounters and then my Jim disappeared on unspecified business for all of July. I had plenty to keep me occupied.

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My more or less steady guy got back to town by the first Saturday in August and took me to dinner at the Tokyo. He didn't bother telling me where or what he'd been up to and didn't ask me about my where- or what-about, but I nevertheless described the fun weeks with my kids in town, buying a Minolta camera, and going to see La Cage aux Folles. We relaxed in the parlor with aperitifs, snuggling up on the blue sofa and talking about our feelings. Mine were too multifaceted to explain and best left as tenderest affection and good will. I didn't allude to my jungle, so Jim eventually had to ask about the coming night. I teased him, wondering if he still wanted my old body, and he offered to carry me upstairs. Being back in the saddle after so long was thrilling and nicely distracted me from my many other emotional involvements.

Four days later we both were off to Santa Fe for meetings and opera shenanigans. For economy, new boss Tom and I stayed in a suite at the Hilton, using the living room as an office. We had king beds, mine rarely even mussed as I slept upstairs in my Jim's room. Thank goodness we weren't staying long enough to enjoy John's Salome again, but the first three were beautifully done. At receptions I happily greeted Claude Corbeil (Joan's father, now in Grand Duchess of Gerolstein) and Brent Ellis (Joan's lover Lionel, now in Lucia di Lammermoor) and met famous Raymond Leppard, conductor of Magic Flute. We easily got VIP seats down front for Jim, Tom, my tall raven-haired David from Baltimore, and my almost famous self.

On our last day there, Thursday, was another Lulu, this one with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting. Being almost famous, I had to go, but during the first act I decided to leave. In the intermission, Tom, who'd had similar thoughts, and I snuck away in our rental car back to the Hilton. On our own together relatively early in the evening, I introduced my new boss man to the Senate Lounge for drinks and dancing and entertained him with the tale of another Lulu when I ran off with Randy in his cowboy boots. The boss got drunker than I expected, and I wound up helping him back to our suite, where we agreed on just this one time, our secret. Jim wouldn't be back from the opera and backstage with MTT till much later, and I could get upstairs by then.

Besides, we were all leaving in the morning for Salt Lake City and a three-day confab of seminars at Snowbird up in the Wasatch Mountains, a stunning ski resort in the summery throes of wildflower season. I almost burned up my new Minolta on shots of ephemeral flowers blanketing the Albion (alpine) Basin. We stayed in the Cliff Lodge with balconies looking out over Big Cottonwood Creek—in separate rooms, which helped Tom and me adjust to having done our miraculous one-time thing and left my Jim and me to decide whose room to sleep in. In our three nights there, I went up once to his, and he came down twice to mine. At times it was an effort practicing my virtuous charity, but it kept me from thinking about one-time things.



*The Factotum on Snowbird's  
Hidden Peak*

My Jim was a special participant in the Snowbird Confab, with subjects I didn't bother finding out, Tom the congenial host of the group, and I the general factotum and/or chauffeur. I picked up and delivered seminarists from and to the airport, to and from doctors, dentists, and drugstores, a few times a day negotiating the long winding, steeply sloping road up and down the mountain. I often found times to walk the mountainsides, to stand transfixed by sloping vistas of colored blossoms. While riding in the cable-car with Tom up to the Hidden Peak summit, he shyly confessed to now having a little affair going with someone I knew. I guessed our David and was correct. The picture he took of me turned out halfway decent for being in my late thirties. I was still sort of svelte, I think seductively so.

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I no sooner got home from my vacation after Snowbird than Tom came over with bad news that there was a movement on the board to boot him out. As this will be part of a later peroration, I'll skip the details right now. That next week Tom resigned, and I was acting director again, which I preferred to call administrator. Also right away, my Jim showed up for a small dinner I'd cooked for a half-dozen and remarked on Tom's fix, joking that maybe he should apply for the job. Very sternly I told him to forget about it—or I'd have to resign.

Jim admitted looking around for another job but wouldn't say why. (Back at Snowbird he'd intimated not caring much for Tom, and I wondered if he might have had a hand in the boss man's debacle.) Jim figured oddly maybe it was time for him to "go out into the field," and I told him his ten months on the NEA job was way too soon. He'd be nuts to leave DC. A couple weeks later at a little supper, Jim announced accepting a job with the Houston Grand Opera to start in January. He suggested I apply for the ED job now, but I had no desire to be a director, content with being just an engine keeping the organization's wheels turning administratively, and the car needed a driver to steer it somewhere. Later in bed my lover said he was scared about going to Houston, and I told him to have fun playing in the field.

In late October my Jim and I flew as opera officials to Toronto to attend two days of talks hosted by Central Opera Service, and we shared a room and intimacies at the Park Plaza. Though neither of us said anything to the effect, that turned out to be our last session of love-making. However, our terminal closeness didn't get in the way of my afternoon dalliance with an ardent, handsome colleague from Wichita Falls named Bob (who had courted me unsuccessfully at Snowbird). Then, leaving Jim to arrange for his condo in Houston, I zipped over to Detroit for the Michigan Opera Theatre's production of Joan and stayed with friendly opera director David, his wife Karen, and two daughters in ritzy Bloomfield Hills.

The Friday night performance "pleased me, particularly in its clarity." More pleasantly, I was thrilled that David didn't use most of Mario's ham-handed revisions, and my original love duet would almost have worked for a Broadway tune. "Mignon Dunn as Joan had good sound, at times clear diction, but poor presence. Best of all was the King, really ideal, only a little out of control at times." I loved Saturday's performance with Susan Marsee. "Her Joan was the best yet." These kudos aside, I still was chagrined that the Pyotr Ilyich's work was so flawed.

In mid-November, Jim and I went to a resort in Virginia called the Airlie House for more NEA meetings with Carlisle Floyd and stayed in merely friendly separate rooms. Watching him with Carlisle, I got the distinct impression that Jim had now moved on to a more illustrious lover. It was no surprise afterwards only hearing from him a couple times on the phone before I took off with Martha and her kids to Durham for Thanksgiving. At the December Annual Meeting in Miami (more sessions with Carlisle), we again had separate rooms at the Hotel Intercontinental and didn't even visit each other—no time or inclination on either part.

In passing, Jim and I saw each other a lot in the meetings with minimal but congenial communications. Watching him with Carlisle, I felt immense relief being so completely out of the picture. When I left on for my Caribbean vacation, we said no goodbyes. Back in our Toronto finale, in his condo arrangements we'd agreed to write—probably a subconscious way of exiting the long affair. We'd been our kind of lovers for fifteen months, longer than any other in my amorous life. Our unspoken leave-taking in Miami, without even a parting glance, had to be my least emotional parting ever from a beloved. It was the right way not to say goodbye. We didn't "talk of love or chains or things we can't untie," recognizing that "It's just the way it changes, like the shoreline and the sea." Thank you once again, Leonard Cohen.

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Now that I've told the vaguely romantic tale of being Jim's more or less faithful mistress all year I'll circle back and provide boring details of how work took over my life. You may recall that dear Ann resigned, and I became acting director of OPERA America, which meant I kept on doing everything I'd been doing and added on 'supervision' of Bobbe's and Theresa's programs. Basically, I just kept out of their way. The minimal direction I needed was easily gotten on the phone with John, and he presidentially kept out of my way. I kept my nose out of the board's business of finding a new Executive Director.

My first acting innovation was to simplify the monthly newsletter, usually Ann's separate reports on NEA panels and meetings, and focus it more finely on things Opera—featuring a monthly column from the Opera-Musical Theater Program written by none other than its new director, my snuggle-bunny Jim, and I asked member opera companies for info on their season schedules. Work in March and April was routine budget stuff and arranging for the next Board Meeting in early May in New York. Doing logistics for these august events was fun—making reality theater, the artform I wrote about in an earlier chapter.

The Board's business progressed in secrecy till late March when on a Monday morning President John showed up with a charismatic and undeniably hot fellow named Tom, who could've been Robert Redford's better-looking brother. With a straight face, John advised that the Executive Committee was seriously considering Tom for the job. He'd been a talent agent for opera singers in New York... I caught the qualification and during a classy lunch with them, I kept my nose clean, quite professionally (and diplomatically) describing the working relationship I hoped for with an executive director. The decision to hire Tom was apparently made that very night in some decisive procedure, and he showed up Tuesday morning as our new Boss Man.

While explaining all the operations of the office (which I essentially managed), and showing the vast files I'd built on opera companies, I was not unpleasantly struck by his butch persona, which I recognized as a skillful performance by a humane soul. That afternoon I took him to the Endowment to meet respective bureaucrats, including my sub rosa main squeeze, Jim. They were both so polite with each other I almost laughed. Tom invited me to a coffee break on Connecticut Avenue, where I pointed out the Lambda Rising bookstore, and we talked about our lives. I volunteered to help him find a nice apartment to rent nearby. That's when he told me he was caring for a 96-year-old black man. I'd have to look for two bedrooms.



*The Cairo Apartments*

In two days I'd found a great one in the historic, newly restored Cairo Apartments on Q Street. In the post-WWI years, the black man, Billy, had been a ragtime pianist in whorehouses of DC and New York and survived in Harlem on occasional gigs till too old and deaf. Two years before, Tom had found him starving in a gutter and took him in for proper elder care. I was humbled by Tom's compassion. Once they got settled into the apartment, I dropped in and met Billy, a feeble oldster nearly bald, with few teeth but frequent smiles. With hands knotted by arthritis, he could still pound out a ragtime tune on Tom's piano. When Tom was out of town, I was happy to watch out for him, sometimes even make him supper.

Then my Jim threw the welcoming reception for Tom. In the crowd was the famous composer and NEA big shot Carlisle Floyd who was happy to meet Tom and merely polite to the peon on his staff. Tom's next weeks were a breeze with me handling most things, and then we were off for his first Board meeting.

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Allow me to quote briefly from my journal. "The morning was beautiful in New York. Tom and I went immediately to his friend Benton's place on West 72<sup>nd</sup> (*in an elegant apartment building named the Oliver Cromwell*). While he settled in, I watered Benton's plants and gave them solace in their ordeal. (*Benton was an opera conductor frequently away on gigs, like now.*) Then we were off to a Special Constituencies meeting at the Met, followed by a nice walk around Columbus Circle at the corner of Central Park to get Ann a present.

"We had an agents' meeting in the afternoon, and by the end of it, I was thoroughly bored. So I decided to walk down to Kenny's, finding his lover Fred at home but Kenny up on 71<sup>st</sup> with his mother disposing of brother Dennis's apartment. (*The sweet guy I'd met in Milwaukee had died the week before from a long bout with cancer!*) I walked over to the Balloon by Lincoln Center and found Tom and Detroit director David at drinks. I joined them, sitting beside Tom along the wall, and talked with David about their Joan production for November. Suddenly I realized that the guy sitting at my other elbow was Mikhail Baryshnikov!

"In awe, Tom and I left David and walked back to Benton's to change. He had no plans so joined Kenny, Fred, and me for dinner at a saloon on 8<sup>th</sup> where we talked about theatre and ballet—as Fred is a choreographer and costume designer. Coming to know more and more of Tom, I found I liked him more and more. After breakfast in the Dakota restaurant, the Oliver Cromwell being right across the street from that famous building, we trotted off to the Board Meeting proper for a full day punctuated by a lunch and a farewell presentation and ovation for Ann. After the meeting, she and I said an emotional goodbye to our professional relationship. The Tarot reading by Robert on my birthday in 1973 had definitely come true."

Tom often joined me and miscellaneous friends or housemates for dinners at the Trio on 17<sup>th</sup> Street, a favorite hangout, and he wasn't a stranger to the Four Bells, where the fare was far more frugal, but the sparse evening company was welcoming and often amusing. Charles had recently made a new friend named Gary, a gay divorcee living with two teenage daughters over on S Street, and spent most evenings and nights there. I myself took off to Florida for the last two weeks of May to watch the kids while Barbara and Jack went on a cruise to Bermuda.

Again, I much enjoyed the two-year-old exuberance of my stepson Bubba. As Daddy, I helped the girls with papers on such things as Sir Francis Drake and the dingo, and while they were in school, I lay around neighbor Susan's pool with Bubba working on a 'scientific' tan a la Zonker Harris. That last Saturday we went to Crescent Beach near St. Augustine and built sand-castles. On Sunday I went fishing with Jack at Cedar Key, riding in his boat way out among the islands and catching many pinfish, grunts, trout and catfish.

The best part of the vacation was taking up running again. After sporadic happy runs in summer weather the year before (and meeting that cute Ecuadoran), I'd stopped the effort when the weather turned cold. With daughter Jake's exemplary company, I now made it twice around the big block and decided to keep up the exercise back home. After our busy days in the office, I found Tom an enthusiastic running partner, and we bounded around in Rock Creek Park and all over town. Our working relationship was tremendously congenial and exactly what I'd hoped for with him working with the Board to put together the Santa Fe meeting and seminars in Utah.

On the first Sunday in July, I walked to Georgetown with Tom and his conductor friend Benton for brunch. A round-faced, round fellow, Benton wasn't very talkative but a happy sort, his mannerisms reminding me of my Jim. That afternoon I took them by the house and to the Logan Circle community picnic, cut short by a violent thunderstorm. That evening the family arrived to leave the kids for Martha and me to take care of as we might while Papa, Nana, Barbara and Jack went to Europe for two weeks.



Tom in Santa Fe

I've already remarked on the August Board meeting in Santa Fe, the occasion for Tom's and my secret one-time thing, given you the scoop on the Snowbird seminar sessions, and described the shock of his resignation that made me into Acting Director again. The real drama came with old Billy who figured it was now time to leave. He simply stopped eating or drinking and in a week died, leaving poor Tom unencumbered to return to his agent career in New York. I sorely missed both friends.

All fall, the Executive Committee was silent on any new hire, and I concentrated (with John's kind direction by phone) on putting together the Annual Meeting for December in Miami—and writing the annual grant application to the NEA (for the lion's share of OPERA America's general operating expenses). With Ann, I'd done several of those with the requisite orgy of operational details. In October I handed it in personally to my Jim with no worries.

In the fall I also undertook some directorial shenanigans. Under Mayor Barry's Byzantine youth intern program, I engaged a bright black high-school girl named Judy to work on opera season statistics. She gathered info on season histories to see which operas were most often done, and the "warhorses" became painfully obvious, oddly Don Pasquale being the most frequent. For the newsletters I wrote interesting blurbs on the new and rarely performed works to encourage our companies to broaden their repertoires. Jim thought I was doing a great ED job.

The Executive Committee continued silent about hiring a replacement for Tom, and we got to the Annual Meeting in Miami without a clue. The main business of the meeting was the election of a new President, director David from the Michigan Opera Theatre. This meant I'd again enjoy a good working relationship with the power structure. John was apparently relieved to step down, and at dinner the last night he again invited me to come to work for him. I begged off, noting that with no executive director, OPERA America really needed me to keep it together. Without saying goodbye to Jim, I flew off to the Caribbean feeling professionally appreciated.

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With the start of the new year, I fully accepted being a big shot's mistress, then some four months as Jim's "other (wo)man." He was my steady guy if you will, *mon homme*, and while his weekly or so visits made me wistful for more constant company, I gave very little thought to sex. With a generically pleasant male face, my Jim wasn't attractive physically—almost unnaturally white, hairless skin, a soft and in places bulgy body, and unremarkable equipment. But his sweet, wicked wit, unusual intelligence, and sincere caresses easily engaged my affection. Making love with my Jim like a good geisha, I was virtuous in my charity, compassion, and devotion, feeling downright saintly in his arms and humbly grateful for his sincere caresses.

My corporeal needs thus satisfied, I mused on stories for my future career as a famous writer. First, I wrote several pages about a backwoods boy named Ben in a village called Frog Level—inspired even then by "Huckleberry Finn" and my own experience with the intriguing boys from Frog Level.\* It was another approach to my stuff from a few years before in "Old Time Country." After describing the situation, I gave up and turned to my even earlier sci-fi concepts, now focusing on the mystic locale of Lake Baikal and Altai Mountains in Siberia. After that geography, I couldn't find a way into a story and got distracted by insidious Acting Director thoughts of achieving Executive status, which my Jim effectively squelched. I went from that to (unsuccessful) attempts to make papyrus paper out of my Cyperus stalks.

\* See BAT IN A WHIRLWIND, written thirty-to-forty years after this sketch.

Something else I started after the New Year, not exactly a resolution, more like a plan, was doing yoga again. The past fall, along with the running, I'd tapered off the practice, and now in spite of winter chilliness I'd spread my mat and pose for an hour or so amongst my plants to keep in shape. Unconcerned anymore at my advancing age about being sexy, I just had to stay in good working order. The daily hour's meditation helped with contemplating stories and relieving the stress of my responsible work. A splendid session was poses in the sunny field behind Nana and Papa's house in Durham at Easter. On Holy Saturday I'd organized a free-for-all game of croquet in the backyard, which Jake craftily won. The dogwoods were blooming everywhere.

Regarding giving very little thought to sex, the surfeit of it with my Jim made me look at men now with new eyes. For sexual purposes, I'd years before (as a charitable, compassionate geisha) started to overlook imperfections, even flaws, and now I enjoyed witnessing beauty for its own sake, as visions of the divine. As a budding Buddhist, I put aside desire and was grateful for the spiritual gift, the epiphany. In practice, I kept a keen eye out for pretty guys and gave them proper reverence, but infrequent acquaintances encountered in the bars were more or less attractive in that plain old human-guy way, like sweet young Paul from White Plains.

Paul's return visits were fun because they got me out to museums. In late March, dear Rene of last year showed up for a night in my jungle. He'd transferred to SUNY-Purchase, essentially in White Plains, and I gave him Paul's contacts. Then Tom showed up, and like the Executive Committee, I was enthralled by his beauty of person and spirit. It was a joy to help him, to admire him, however possible, and work and friendship with him was a gift of grace.

Another gift of grace was at a neighborhood meeting, a black fellow named Thurlow, who lived some blocks over on 17<sup>th</sup> Street. He was more beautiful than any man should be, and I was reduced to abject worship. His interest in me was palpable, but he had to go home for dinner. Leaving the meeting, Thurlow suggested we get together sometime. I soon rode my bike past his place not daring to stop, and only later in mid-July did I dare run by the house and stop in my runner's glow to visit him. He was glorious and graciously introduced me to Leo in the kitchen, also a black man not to be sneezed at, obviously his lover. Another time I ran into them in the Safeway on P Street and made obeisance—epiphanies always welcome.

The beauty of black men easily caught my eye, and it being DC, they were everywhere. I'd just not been paying attention... I made no advances, just adoring sheep's eyes, like I'd cast at any handsome number. That fall we got a new janitor at the office named Barry, an almost collegiate-looking fellow, black as night, built, and beautifully... Hearing his vacuum cleaner nearby gave me palpitations. Being near his broad chest and full-lipped mouth took my breath away. He was receptive to young Judy's appreciation, and she was thrilled about the contact until getting a mysterious phone call that she should keep her claws off Barry—or else... I kept my claws off him and stood him on a pedestal as god of beauty, my Black Antinous.

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Getting lovely Diana married off to Walter in the new year left the Four Bells a quiet geisha household with just Charles, me, Russ, and Tom-and-Jeff). With no more Supper Club, someone maybe cooked a couple times a week for self or others, and we'd dine out in groups or alone at local eateries like the Trio on 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Tired after the office, I often made do with a less than healthy peanut butter and honey sandwich and cookies. My Jim's welcome visits gave me good excuse to whip up healthier fare for sociable meals with housemates.

On a mid-February Saturday out of the frigid blue, my sister Judy showed up with her boyfriend Rob, only he was now my brother-in-law. We put them up in 2F and threw a welcome feast that evening. Charles brought his new boyfriend Gary, Russ a cute trick named Ira, and



Tom his young Jeff—who behaved poorly, per usual. My Jim, Lou, and neighbors Jimmie and Joe came too, and the dozen at dinner felt like former Club feasts. My sister and spouse were duly impressed by the grandeur of the dining room, chandelier, etc.

During that night, the Great Snowstorm of 1979 rolled in, and in the morning we looked out on a white swale drifted up to their bedroom window and blanketing the Avenue in three or four feet of pristine snow. I climbed out the window and jumped, sinking out of sight in the snow on the front porch. Judy threw me a broom, with which I cleared ten feet of snow from the front door for folks to get out. We had an epic, exhilarating snowball-fight. The next day, good old GW's birthday, I took Judy and Rob on the deluxe sightseeing tour of their nation's Capital.

Later that month a second Gary moved into 2F. Around then was when Charles started staying over most nights at Gary-One's place. Gary-Two, a reserved gay type and fascinating raconteur, worked with an agricultural lobby group and had till recently been living for a year or so as a hermit in a tent on the Na Pali coast of Kauai. In mid-March, a frequent neighbor-guest named George moved in with him, fortunately a cute guy who liked to cook and did so with panache, often serving fruit crepes for breakfast.

Even with his new lover and managing dosages well, Charles was still rather depressed. I missed his old ebullient self. In early March he found out he could retire on disability with over a thousand a month and medical, but that wouldn't be enough to get by on. I thought having such a steady income—as much as I was making at OA—would be fantastic, but maybe he was right. Even with the Four Bells full of rent-paying housemates, its finances were overwhelming, mostly with costs of restoration work. I reluctantly broached the subject of selling—or at least looking for a third partner. He said he'd ask Gary-One, but no third partner was forthcoming.

Shortly after my depressing 37<sup>th</sup> birthday (definitely late 30s!), old lover David from Baltimore visited. We went to see “Damnation of Faust” and spent some nights in naughty play in the jungle. He was going to work for the Greater Miami Opera, which meant we'd still be seeing each other professionally. Speaking of old lovers, I'd still been seeing my Ken frequently at his parties in Alexandria, though I wasn't wild for his mostly leather-clad, rough and tough friends. I was horrified, but not surprised, when his Richard called to say that Ken had been shot again—three times! The other guy, also shot and in the hospital, was charged with assault. What in the fuck was Ken doing with guns in the first place?

When the family came in July, I went to Martha's for dinner on Monday, bid the travelers bon voyage to Europe, and had her and the five kids over to dinner on Wednesday, the Fourth, with housemates plus Gene, Gary-One, and his two girls Audrey and Alice, only slightly older than Jake and Aimee, respectively. We'd planned to see the fireworks on the Mall, but they were rained out, and so our crowd wound up doing sparklers and Roman candles in the wet Circle.

The youngsters came back Friday, leaving little Bubba with his aunt, and spent the weekend at the Four Bells, again with Audrey and Alice, who said it was like being at summer camp. On Saturday, we shepherded the six kids around the Capitol and museums and played on the Mall, the highlight climbing on the model Triceratops outside Natural History. On Sunday we played hide and seek in the house, ideal for hiding little bodies. It took me forever to find nephew-godson Bobbie in a box on the top shelf of the cedar closet.

Those weeks of childcare made me truly appreciate living in that golden age of gay lib: with a loving family, beloved friends, glorious home, steady lover, and fabulous job with a gorgeous, friendly boss. Ecstatic yoga, exhilarating running, dear occasional bed-fellows, and a private jungle nurtured body and spirit in the sweet summer of my 38<sup>th</sup> year. Thanks be!

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