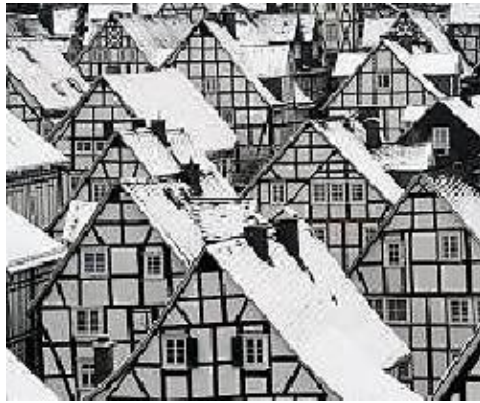


If Only Us...

If Only Us...

By : Tom Oldman

This is a story of very young lovers who refused to give up. It didn't happen this way, but 'if only'...



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Chapter 1: If Only Us... Chapter1

This account is told in the first-person manner of narration. It is something that *could* have happened, but didn't. It had a real genesis in Germany in early 1956 - around February. I had just arrived in Stadt the previous late fall and within a few weeks I'd met Virginia. We hit it off immediately and began seeing each other from then onwards. This is a fact. We 'went steady' for almost three complete years - a fact that astonished the teen population of Stadt at the time as normal romances very seldom lasted longer than three or four months. This made ours very unique. I have posted many entries concerning our romantic progress on my blog over at Wordpress. You can find them here at this URL: <http://tom1950.wordpress.com/>

Within the last year, Virginia and I have managed to find each other and start a dialog. She is happily married and has three children and three grandchildren. So, with the permission of my first real love and definitely the permission of my second, and permanent (50 years and counting) real love, I have used some incidents in our real life and melded them into what I hope is an engaging tale. She has reviewed my story and, more importantly, approved of it.

What follows is what could have happened; definite wishful thinking. Events didn't play out this way, although the two of us did talk about this very situation, we never actually carried it out. Not because we didn't want to. Oh, how we wanted to. But more because of the trouble we would bring on both sets of parents, and because of our age; neither one of us were ready for parenthood.

During my three-plus year stay in Stadt, there was a couple who did act as I suggest here and wanted to get married while seniors in high school. The boy was ultimately grounded by his parents (yes, they knew about that way back then), and the girl was immediately sent back to the States by her parents to live with a maternal grandmother and have her baby. This very effectively ended their romance. My story takes this rather sour circumstance, turns it around, and makes lemonade out of it.

Step into the way-back machine. It is now 1958! :

Virginia and I celebrated our one-year 'Anniversary of Going Steady' in downtown Stadt. The weather was rather rainy, but our spirits were soaring. We had walked hand-in-hand down the hill from the housing area and made a visit to our favorite little restaurant, "*Die kleine Prinzessin*", or, The Little Princess.

Our meal was wonderful and, after we mentioned to Herr Krause, the proprietor, that it was our first anniversary, he provided a very nice bottle of wine. We ate our meal, drank the wine, and after taking our leave, walked down towards the center of town.

This was the end of summer or, actually a little into fall, and the trees were shedding their first colored leaves. The wind swirled them around our feet as we walked. Eventually, we found our way down to the Gasthaus we used exclusively for our lovemaking.

We had been using this certain place for almost six months now. We didn't really, consciously, look for it, but one day we were shooting pictures and it just spoke to us. There was a little grotto bar inside, a large seating area with a fireplace, and low tables to hold drinks or even an occasional meal.

Since both of us spoke German fluently, we were able to converse with the owners. Possibly under the impression we were married (although very young) they made us feel welcome in the inn. That very first night, we reserved a room for the next weekend. Now, that was six months ago and we'd used the room at least once a month since then.

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I had a feeling that the owner, Franz August, and his rather stout wife, Angelina, had their suspicions, but neither of them made us feel uncomfortable. As far as our own parents were concerned, they had pretty much resigned themselves to the fact that Virginia and I were lovers - in every sense of the word.

It was for this reason, that they allowed us to spend weekends by ourselves. We were both cautioned that spending more than two nights was not allowed however - especially during school. We were both now seniors in high school. My father, after a rather embarrassing (for him) and painful (for me) session concerning the form of protection I was using, just accepted it as a fact and hoped for the best. My mother, bless her soul, was much more romantic and took things in stride.

Virginia's parents, however, were a bit more careful. We had to tell them at least a week in advance before we took off on any jaunts unless they were just day trips. This way, they at least knew where we were if they had to reach us right away. In Virginia's case, I think her father was more tolerant of our behavior than her mother. Strange, but true. Actually, I think he liked me even though I was an officer's kid and he was enlisted; senior enlisted, but still enlisted.

Between Virginia and I we tried hard to speak nothing but German. If she got stuck, she'd use the English word and ask me for the translation. She was getting much better now and we could hold long conversations entirely in German. Willi, my friend at the German-American club downtown claimed I spoke just like a native. I doubted that a little, but it made me confident I could mingle properly.

This afternoon was very crisp. The sun was a bright, hard point in the completely blue sky but gave little warmth. Virginia and I were in an area of town we were rather unfamiliar with. She wanted to find a particular church she'd read about in the town brochure. We'd set out at around two in the afternoon and, an hour later, still hadn't located it. After a lot of walking around we finally gave up and wandered into a shop to get our bearings. The shopkeeper was helpful and gave us directions to the church.

Virginia was very happy to finally see it up close. We could see the spires from a distance, but kept ending up in dead-end alleys at first. A quick conversation with a strolling policeman straightened us out. The church itself sat on a high piece of ground that projected out into the city. What we had to do was go up the hill above the church and then walk down a peninsula to cross over an old bridge into the courtyard. Technically speaking, I'd have called it a castle, but for over three hundred years it had been occupied by a sect of nuns. Between us, we shot four rolls of film.

Tired, but happy, we climbed back up the hill to the base and headed for my house for dinner.

* * *

A month later found us again walking down the hill from the housing area. This time, we were going to a movie, dinner, and an overnight at our little Inn. Everything I needed was in a small backpack I wore and Virginia kept all her stuff in a largish purse. We held hands to keep us from slipping on ice that had formed on the sidewalk because of a slow drizzle and below-freezing winds.

Virginia turned to me. "Tom, do you realize that we've been together much longer than Pearl and Jack?" Pearl and Jack, our closest friends, were graduates from the same high school Virginia and I attended, but stayed on after graduation to work as substitute teachers. They'd been together for almost three years.

"Yes. I do realize that, Honey. Next month is their anniversary. We need to think of something to give them."

"Well, true. But, I was thinking more about us - what will happen to us when we graduate?"

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I was silent for several steps; lost in thought. What *would* happen to us? Her dad was nearing rotation time and my father's wasn't that much further past that. For once in my young life I was almost sad that I was a military kid. Being such made it very difficult to put down any sort of roots or make long-term friendships because of orders that moved you away. This three-year tour of Germany was the longest tour of duty my dad had ever had before.

"I really don't know, Virginia." I said quietly. "I don't want to lose you â ever." I pulled her close as we walked.

"But, what..."

"Hush. We'll deal with things as they happen; not before. Besides, we could be invaded by Martians tomorrow."

Virginia looked up at me and wrinkled her nose. "Yeah, there certainly is the risk of that."

We arrived at the Inn and greeted our friends, the proprietor, and his wife. They ushered us into the lounge and signaled for the bartender to bring us a drink. The four of us sat facing one another over a low table and chatted for a while. Franz and Angelina had good news: their daughter had finally given birth to a son - after two girls. Virginia and I congratulated them both on being made grandparents for the third time. I waved the bartender over and ordered a small bottle of champagne.

The owners protested, but I just told them to add it to my bill. We toasted them both, and then proceeded to refill our glasses. Sipping at the very decent wine, we talked of other things. Finally, they both rose and excused themselves, saying it was time to supervise dinner. We were invited to join them.

The Inn did not have a formal dining room and, rarely, had guests eat with the family, but Virginia and I were considered special guests and joined them. The fare was excellent. First, we had small appetizers of rolled pastry filled with meats and cheeses; followed by a course of small potato pancakes and sausages. Everything was delicious. For desert we were given a cherry cobbler still piping hot from the oven. The fruit came courtesy of the two cherry trees in the rear courtyard of the Inn.

Chapter 2: If Only Us... Chapter 2

When we went back into the common room, we found that two American couples had arrived. I bent over to whisper into Virginia's ear. "Let's see if we can get away with speaking nothing but German and see if they can tell."

Virginia looked up at me and smiled. "That's a terrible thing to do." But her eyes twinkled. "Okay, let's do it."

So, bantering between ourselves in German, we entered the room proper. I nodded to the four of them sitting around a table and they nodded back. "*Guten Abend.*" I said, smiling. They responded, nodding their hello.

"*Verbringen Sie die Nacht?*" Asked Virginia, wanting to know if they were spending the night here.

They looked at each other and one of the men spoke, slowly. "*Ja. Wir Sind hier fÃ¼r das, um, Wochenende.*" Confirming they were here for the weekend.

I answered. "*Ah. Sie Sind Amerikaner?*" I ventured. "I speak English." I said, grinning like a proud student.

"Oh, wonderful. I'm afraid my German is none too good. My name is Bill and this is my wife, Toni. Over there is my good friend Samuel and his wife Bonnie. Would you care to join us for a drink?"

"I would be most happy to." I said in my best German accent, and put my hand on the small of Virginia's back. "I am called Thomas, and this is *mine Frau*, ah, my wife, Virginia," who nodded her greetings.

When we sat down on the couch I waved at the bartender, who came over after a moment. I fired off a drink order for Virginia and I, then asked if anyone else needed a refill. Both Bill and Samuel held up their nearly empty beer glasses. "*Und noch zwei Bier fÃ¼r die Herren auch.*" I added.

Denis, the bartender, hid his smile well and replied, "*Definitive, mien Herr. So fort, mien Herr!*" Bowing repeatedly as he backed away. Rats, he was wise to us.

The four Americans looked a bit bemused at Denis's apparent deference and turned back to me as I smiled broadly at them. I looked at Virginia, who nodded back. "I'm afraid we've been having a bit of fun," I said in my normal voice. Denis, the fink bartender, just gave it away. Virginia and I live on the base and just come down here once in a while to get away from it all. No offense intended."

Samuel was the first to recover. He began to chuckle and was soon joined by the other three. "Well, you sure had us going there, Thomas; or, can we call you Tom?"

"Tom will do. Sorry about that. Every once in a while, she and I do crazy stuff like that. Our parents think we're nuts."

"I can see why," Samuel chortled. "You're very good at it. Are you actually in the military?" He asked.

"No, not at all. I work at the PIO office, public affairs, as a writer and photographer. My wife and I live in my father's quarters on base; or, we will until he gets transferred. We're actually still in high school as seniors this year."

"Really! I never would have guessed." Said Toni. "I would have taken you as young German university students; and certainly not Americans."

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"Thank you," said Virginia. "Do you come down here often?" She asked Bonnie.

"No. This is our first time downtown actually. We've only arrived from the States a week ago. Bill and Toni were our sponsors and now we're repaying them for all their help."

"That's one thing the government got right - sponsors. Ours was a great help when we first got here. We were ready to move into our quarters the day we arrived."

"Really? We had to stay in the VOQ for a week until ours was ready. Where do you live?"

"Forty-nine, C, 1. It's the left half of my dad's quarters. When we got married the base housing office allowed us to move into it as dependents."

"Pretty slick." Said Bill. "Where's your dad work?"

"He's commander of the weather wing on base."

"Don't know him," said Samuel. "But we get briefed by his office before every flight we make. He and I are fighter pilots with the Wing." Indicating Bill with his thumb.

"That's something I could really get into. I'd love to fly but probably won't get much of a chance. I have weak eyesight."

"That's definitely a killer, although I've seen cargo pilots with glasses."

"Nah, I'd rather fly around with my hair on fire than plod along."

"I can imagine." Samuel said soberly. "You want another round?"

I looked at Virginia, who shook her head slightly. "No, I guess we've had our fill for tonight. About time for us to head upstairs to our room."

"You have a room here?"

Virginia answered. "We've been coming here for almost a year whenever we get the chance. Tonight's our one-year anniversary of being together. Franz and Angelina are friends of ours and they let us use one of the rooms that aren't being taken for the evening. If they fill up, we pay them for it."

"A nice arrangement, to be sure. Very nice meeting you."

All of us stood and shook hand around. I nodded to Denis, the fink, and twirled my finger over their table. He nodded and set up another round.

"Enjoy," I said as the two of us left the room.

"Maybe we'll see you in the morning," said Virginia. "Then we can all get a nice breakfast around the corner."

"Sounds good to me," said Bill. "See you around eight?"

I nodded and we left.

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It turned out to be a wonderful evening. The room was slightly overheated as so many German hotel rooms were, and we slept under just one fluffy down coverlet. Even though it was the middle of October, the night was only cool, not very cold at all. A big harvest moon shown through the partially open curtains of our window, lighting up our bed.

For some reason, neither one of us wanted to make love. We were content to just lie back in each other's arms and watch the slow progress of the moonbeams across the floor, keeping talk to a minimum. Finally, conversation slowed, then stopped, and we fell asleep.

Chapter 3: If Only Us... Chapter 3

On one beautiful autumn evening, three weeks later, as we lay in our bed at the Inn, she posed a question to me that gave me a lot to think about.

"Tommmmm, what if," she said in that childlike sing-song voice I loved so much, "I got pregnant?"

I stopped breathing for a moment, and then turned to face her, the unspoken question showing plainly on my face. "You know we've talked about this before, Baby" I started to explain to her, but she put her finger on my lips and shushed me each time I tried to speak. I fell silent.

"I know, I know," she said. "But I love you so much and I hope you love me even half as much, my darling. Please, let's make a baby."

"This is a huge step, honey. Are you absolutely sure this is what you want? Your parents and mine will be upset to say the least. One or both of them might even get sent home. This could hurt their careers."

She closed her eyes tight, tears leaking from them down and onto my shoulder. I turned to look at her and she opened them to look back. There was no guile or cross purposes in those eyes that I could detect. She really, truly, wanted me to impregnate her.

"Can we take the time to think about it? I know I need some time to see if I'm actually ready for a family. Lord knows I love you and would do anything for you but to do this is a huge leap into the unknown. I want to make sure I'm ready for it. How about forty-eight hours? Two days from right now. I'll give you a positive answer then."

"Okay," she said in a small voice. "I think I can wait that long."

She threw her arms around my waist, snuggled close to me, and wormed her face deep into the hollow of my shoulder. She sighed once, twice, and then settled into a deep sleep. I, on the other hand, stayed awake trying to get my mind around this development. I loved her - there was no denying that - but, what kind of love was it? Was there enough love to carry us through angry parents, hassles by numerous 'authorities', and endless counseling by everyone even remotely having anything to do with the 'troubles of teens'? My brain finally shut down and, with her soft snores in my ear, I dropped off to sleep.

The next morning, I woke first and headed to the bathroom to clean up. When I came out, she was standing at the window dressed in the filmy nightgown she wore to bed. The sunlight streaming through the window made the outline of her body in stark contrast to the light outside. I came over and slipped my arms around her from behind.

"Penny for your thoughts, Virginia."

She turned, threw her arms around me, and snuffled into my shoulder that I must think she was a bad girl. I told her that nothing like that had ever entered my mind. I professed nothing but love for her and that I'd walk through hell itself for her. I assured her that she was definitely not a bad girl - only a girl in love.

She dried her eyes, hugged me close, and kissed me slowly. I returned the favor until I felt the beginnings of an erection. She pulled even closer yet and rubbed her hips across mine while she purred in my ear.

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"Come; make love to me once more before we go. Please." She whispered to me, dropping her hand to caress my growing interest in her.

I pulled back, swooped down with one arm, and caught her right at the knees. I lifted her into my arms and carried her to the bed and laid her down. I knelt beside her and began kissing her starting at her chin, slowly, with no haste at all. She responded by arching her back and thrusting her breasts upward for me to kiss. When I moved down towards them, she sighed heavily, closed her eyes, and purred deep in her throat.

"I love you." She repeated over and over as I kissed each breast in turn.

I retained soft pressure on them with one hand and slid the other downward over her soft belly and into the deep vee between her thighs. I touched her gently several times and then followed it with my mouth; falling petal-soft kisses leaving a damp trail down her stomach. I finally reached my goal and kissed gently until she opened her legs for my waiting tongue. She sighed deeply, rearranged her hips a little, and then reached for the back of my head.

She pulled gently, guiding me into her intimate spots that only she and I knew. As I continued with my attentions, I felt her hand fall to the bed and grasp me. She slowly stroked me as I tended to her. She stilled my head with a hand. I looked up in surprise at her. She was staring directly at me with half-lidded eyes.

"Please make me a baby. Right here, right now."

I took in those earnest eyes and found I couldn't resist her. I positioned myself and began to slowly make love to her.

"Oh! This is so much different! I can feel you, the real you!" She exclaimed softly.

I admitted to myself that there was definitely a different 'feel' to things now. Things I had missed when using birth control were revealed to me as she wrapped her legs around my back. When she began her orgasm I actually felt it this time as she gently writhed in my embrace.

With no regrets, or hesitation at all, I felt my orgasm start down in my toes and work its way up to the center of my being. At the first jolt, she shouted once, a short bark of joy, but remained almost silent as I continued pouring my essence into her. She held me tight, tears leaking from her closed eyes, as I slowed; then stopped. The dice were cast now. Would they come up seven, or snake eyes?

We fell apart, gasping with our exertion. She carefully sat up and walked slowly to the bathroom door. I lay back and wondered if I had done the right thing. Should we have waited? Should I have declined? No matter what happened now, she and I were intertwined. If she became pregnant, I would hold my head high and take whatever came along - good or bad. I loved her like life itself and would allow nothing to harm her.

* * *

By mutual consent, we abstained from lovemaking for almost three weeks waiting to see what happened. She went one week past her normal menses, then two. We decided to wait one more week and then tell our parents. I promised I'd be there with her when she told her mom and dad. She was terribly scared but understood it had to be done.

We picked the moment carefully and, after dinner one evening with her mom and dad, she and I had asked to talk to them. We settled ourselves down in the living room and, after several starts and restarts I just came out and told them that I had gotten Virginia pregnant. Her dad blinked a couple of times but it was her mom that

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surprised me the most. She flew out of chair, gathered a weeping Virginia in her arms, and made soothing sounds.

Her dad looked oddly at me and then seemed to deflate a little. He motioned for me to follow him and went into another room. When he turned to me I stood ready to handle anything that he gave to me; I had every argument ready for him; I knew the answer to everything that he could possibly say; except what he actually did say.

"You're a hell of a fine boy, Tom. I know of your dad and I can tell he raised you to be a pretty square person. You and Virginia have been together now for what, almost two years now, isn't that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am told by the parents of other teenagers that for two kids to be together for two weeks is a very long time, let alone two years. I had a feeling a long time ago that you and she were right for each other. That's why her mom and I even let you go out together on unchaperoned dates and the like. We knew you would take care. That's why I'm at a disadvantage now. What happened?"

"Well, sir, Virginia and I talked more than once about you being up for orders very soon. When that happened we'd be separated for a long time - maybe permanently, and neither of us wanted that. We love each other, Sir. There's no getting around that. There was no pressure given by either one of us against the other at all. She and I decided this by mutual consent - and I â we â are prepared to follow through on it - no matter what."

His visage softened. "Well, I was due to get orders, but I got an extension for another year. I haven't told anyone because I just found out today. I was going to save it for after dinner, but you two trumped me with your news. But that's neither here nor there now. What matters now is Virginia's happiness. Have you told your parents yet?"

"No, not yet. That is coming up tomorrow. I just hope my dad doesn't think I've let him down."

"Well, if he does, I'll have to set him straight on that account. It took real fortitude to do what you did tonight. You could have denied it, or even let things get way out of hand. But, you didn't. I think you have the strength of character to see this through. You have my blessing."

I was astonished. I was prepared for enraged fatherhood. I was prepared for anything but what I got - acceptance. We both stood and solemnly shook hands. He walked to the sideboard, got out two glasses, poured two dabs from a bottle into each and offered me one of the glasses. It was Irish whiskey. I toasted him and downed it, struggling to not show a face at the strong liquor. I must have passed the test.

"We'd better go back and see how the other half is getting along hadn't we?"

"Yes, Sir. I think we should."

We walked back to the living room. Virginia was nestled in the crook of her mom's arms with her eyes closed. She snuffled from time to time, but when she opened her eyes and saw me she ran across the room, whooped into my shoulder, and held me tight. As I wrapped an arm around her, I could see wetness around the eyes of both her parents. I felt a million feet tall right then. All I had to do now was slay my own dragon.

Chapter 4: If Only Us... Chapter 4

The next day, Saturday, I invited Virginia over for lunch. My parents were home for the day and, as we chatted during lunch, my mom, with her all-seeing eye, knew something was up when Virginia and I didn't banter between the two of us.

"Okay, what's going on?" She asked. "You two are moping around like the sky is falling. Did your dad get his orders, Virginia?"

"No, ma'am. He just found out he got extended here for another year."

"Then why the long faces?"

I decided that the direct approach had worked before so I'd try it again.

"Mom, dad, I got Virginia pregnant." I began. Speaking rapidly, I filled them in. "We just couldn't leave each other, believing that she'd move away in such a short time, so we just weren't careful enough one night. I'm sorry I let the both of you down. It was a really juvenile thing to do, but I'm not ashamed we did it. I love Virginia. I want to be with her always. You know as well as I do that teenage romance rarely lasts for more than two or three months. We've been together for almost two years. This is the real thing."

It was the longest thing I think I had ever said to either of them. They sat back in their chairs and digested what I had just told them. My dad cleared his throat a couple of times, started to speak, and then sat back again. Finally, my mom found her voice.

"Well, I think you and I, Virginia, have a wedding to plan. Have you seen a doctor yet?"

"No Ma'am. My mom made an appointment for next Tuesday at the Ob/Gyn clinic."

My dad sat, stunned, by this news. I could see conflicting thoughts running across his face in rapid order: disbelief, anger, relief. He finally settled on calm.

"Virginia, have you given any thought as to where you two will live?"

"Well, no. Not really. With my parents or here maybe?" She said with a shy smile.

"We'd love to have you join our merry group Virginia. Welcome to the family." Said my mom.

She wrapped her arms around Virginia and they quietly wept a little until my dad cleared his throat again.

"Have you told your parents yet, Virginia?"

"Yes, sir. They cried a lot, but gave their permission for us to get married. We would like to have your permission also."

It was a simple, declarative statement. Virginia had a knack for coming right to the point. He thought about it quite some time, several eons went by, and then he gave his answer.

"You have it. Welcome to this slightly nutty household."

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She jumped up and hugged his shoulders tightly.

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." She chirped, brushing at tears. "I am so happy!"

"As for a place to live; we have a spare bedroom here in this house that I'm sure I can get housing to allow you to live in. They probably know how to deal with things like this. Let me call them on Monday."

"Thank you, dad." I said. "We won't be a burden at all."

"No, sir." Virginia added, with a huge grin on her face as we had passed the final hurdle.

"Maybe you could just call me 'Dad'"

"Sure â Dad." She said shyly, reddening slightly at the cheek and neck.

"Now, let's get on with this lunch." He said, addressing his ham sandwich.

I have pieced together the first conversation our two fathers had from recollections of the both of them in their later years. They met for the first time in my dad's office:

"Colonel, there's a sergeant from the motor pool here to see you. Do you have time?" His Exec asked.

"Sure, send him in - and, no interruptions. I know what this is about."

"Yes, sir. No interruptions." The Executive Officer backed out and held the door for a really large Sergeant to enter.

The door closed behind him as he stood there in the office, just a little uneasy at what the protocol was for this type of thing. My dad put him at ease by coming out from behind his desk and shaking his hand.

"I gather we have a wedding to plan, Sir." Virginia's dad stated, breaking the silence. "Your son is a hell of a guy and I'd be proud to have him in my family."

"Funny you should say that. My wife said the same thing at lunch the other day about Virginia when they broke the news to us. Her name is Betty, and I'm Joe. Whatever we say here is between two fathers and nothing to do with the military. Is that okay?"

"Suits me fine, Joe. I'm called 'Bear', but my real name is Elwood."

"Bear will do fine I think. My XO seemed a little wary when you showed up. You are one big guy."

"Yeah. That's one reason I have a lot of respect for Tom. He stood right up to me and told us what happened. You raised a great young man."

"I sure hope so. They both have a lot of counseling to go through now. All of that doesn't amount to a hill of beans when you get right down to it. What counts is that both of us are going to be grandparents."

"Oh, shit, I hadn't even thought of that. That's a strange thought. Grandparent."

He rolled the name around a few times in his mouth, spoke it several ways, and then just nodded his head.

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"We're getting old aren't we?"

"That we are, Bear. That we are. They're young, but that's what will make this work I think. I'm told that most teenage love affairs last around two months. They've been together for almost two years. That, to me, means they just might have the commitment to hack through the bullshit and have a life together."

"Lord knows they're going to need it. I need a drink. I'd be honored if you'd come over to the NCO Club and hoist a beer to our two kids."

"It's nearing lunch anyway so let's go. I hear you guys have some really fine food over there."

"We do indeed, Joe."

They left for the Club walking side by side. An occasional salute was rendered and returned. Two dad's about to be joined as family as it should be forevermore and always.

* * *

We picked a wedding date fairly soon as we didn't want to embarrass anyone with her showing a baby bump. Her parents and mine got into high gear and rented a room in the Officer's Club for the festivities following the rehearsal. Her dad booked the NCO Club ballroom for the reception.

Of course we still had to go to school. Things were pretty much normal for the first couple of days until Virginia's best friend tumbled to the ring she was wearing. It wasn't in its normal place, on a chain around her neck and hidden under her blouse. Also, it wasn't a simple class ring. It was on her left ring finger - right in plain sight.

"Is that an *ENGAGEMENT* ring?" She warbled out loud right there in the hallway in front of her locker.

Heads turned and several of her friends gathered to look. Virginia held up her hand and waved it around. Her friends oohed and ahed at it, touching it for good luck, and generally carrying on. From my locker, which was just down the hall, I could see a growing knot of people and thought she might need some help. On my way up the hall, Bernie, my absolute best friend, knocked me on the shoulder a really good blast.

"What the hell, beanpole. You can't even tell *ME* about it?"

I couldn't very well tell anyone, even if I'd wanted to, the real reason we were engaged - and how short the engagement would be - so I didn't tell him. That may have been a mistake in judgment, but not insurmountable.

"Okay, Bernie. We're engaged to be married. Now you know."

There was much squealing, hopping, and clapping of hands to mouth as the girls continued to congratulate Virginia. I was in the background, but she was center stage, and enjoying it fully. She looked so damn happy about it. She finally begged off and barely made it to her next class.

By the time I made it to gym class, every one of my friends knew about it. I was back-slapped, hand-shook, and congratulated by all of them. Bernie told me that he'd known for some time that Virginia and I were special and that we'd be together for a long time. He ended with a heartfelt *'Mazeltof'*.

If Only Us...

Mr. Espana, our photo club leader, told me that he'd known from that trip to Paris that something great was happening between us. He asked when we were going to get married so I told him the day after graduation, which was only a month away. He told me that if there was anything he could do to help just ask. I thanked him.

Chapter 5: If Only Us... Chapter 5

We were caught up in the social whirlwind of planning, measuring, fitting, remeasuring, and all that went with preparation for a wedding. My grandmother even showed up from the States for the event. She took an immediate shine to Virginia and between her, my mother, and my father crested every wave of bureaucratic procedure that was thrown against us.

First, we were required to have counseling. This was from a Chaplain at the base church. He wasn't married so I began to wonder just what he could offer in the way of advice to young kids about to be married. We both decided he was giving a pro-forma talk just so he could check off the box marked 'counseled'. We already knew commitment, and told him so. We already knew the roadblocks, hassles, and red tape they would throw at us. There wasn't a single thing he said that helped us at all.

Next on the list was facing the housing office. This bureaucratic domain was run by a dour-faced elderly German that, when pressed, would revert into pretending to not understand or misinterpret what you were saying. I bypassed that by responding in German to his questions. Virginia did also. This considerably softened him and by the time we were finished, he had stamped his approval, in quadruplicate, for Virginia to move out of her parent's quarters and into my dad's quarters with me.

Fitting Virginia's wedding gown took a lot out of me. Every time I saw my beautiful bride-to-be in the gown I was struck dumb. She was beautiful, radiant, and glowed from within. The workers in the little downtown shop where she bought it all chipped in together to buy us a wedding gift. A huge feather comforter.

The wedding rehearsal went slowly, with each of us trying to remember what we had to go, and were we had to do when we got there. Finally, we were through and headed for the O-club for a rehearsal dinner. It was a very festive occasion and we even had a band. A large bunch of our friends showed up as guests and we all had fun; the girls over in one corner fussing over Virginia and the guys with me kidding a joshing about how we had managed it. I never once mentioned the real reason. That would have been poor form.

The music stopped and my dad went to the microphone and made a little speech. It was the most human I'd ever seen him. Usually he was pretty rigid and didn't show emotion very much, but tonight he was awash in emotion. He congratulated us on our upcoming wedding and called Virginia's dad up to the stage.

Her father did pretty much the same thing, but when he finished, a rolling table was pushed out from the kitchen loaded down with champagne glasses. We were invited to take one for a toast. Once we were all with glasses, he made the toast.

Bear, his nickname due to his size, spoke: "At first, I was somewhat opposed to this wedding. But in the past month, I've come to respect my son-in-law to be. He's a level headed young man that is certain to go far in this world. With my daughter at his side, how could he fail? Now, I want you all to join me in a toast: to Tom and Virginia."

"To Tom and Virginia," everyone repeated and drank their glasses down.

I gave a sign to Bernie and he nodded. The lights dimmed, and the opening bars of a wonderful Platters song began. I stood and offered my hand to Virginia. I told her it was a tradition for us to have a solo dance. She took it, flushed colorfully under her chin, and we went to center floor where I enfolded her in my arms.

(My Prayer, by the Platters)

If Only Us...

When the twilight is gone and no songbirds are singing
When the twilight is gone you come into my heart
And here in my heart you will stay while I pray

My prayer is to linger with you
At the end of the day in a dream that's divine
My prayer is a rapture in blue
With the world far away and your lips close to mine

Tonight while our hearts are aglow
Oh tell me the words that I'm longing to know

My prayer and the answer you give
May they still be the same for as long as we live
That you'll always be there at the end of my prayer

At the end of the song, I twirled her outward, caught her by cupped fingertips, and pulled her back into my arms; then I lowered her backwards and bent to kiss her as the last notes faded. It was perfect timing.

My mom told me later that it was a classy thing to do and there wasn't a dry eye at the entire table and most of Virginia's girlfriends were snuffling into napkins.

* * *

The school term eventually came to a close, which meant our wedding day was very close. As it approached, she and I got very nervous. She would grow silent as we sat in her living room, or became somber when out with friends. When I asked her what was troubling her, she would smile brightly and change the subject. When I mentioned this to her mom, she told me that Virginia had a touch of morning sickness and was uneasy at times. I was learning a whole new way of life and a vocabulary to boot.

She overcame her morning sickness and we began making the rounds of the places downtown we'd visited while this whole wonderful thing built up. Hans, the engineer and Gerd his fireman, our two friends from the train yard, were overjoyed by the news. I asked them if they would come to the wedding and they accepted. Franz and Angelina took the news in stride. They knew all along we weren't married but both of them weren't about to tell on us when we met and stayed at their Inn. Franz told me to name a date where they could host a small gathering of our families in their dining room. I told him I'd get back with a date. Angelina hugged both of us and wished us all the luck for the future.

Chapter 6: If Only Us... Chapter 6

Virginia and I continued to slip away whenever we could find the time just to be alone and outside the maelstrom of activity surrounding our wedding. One time we went back to Franz's inn and received our usual room, but as we prepared for bed, Virginia started crying. I put my arms around her but that didn't appear to help. She turned from me and told me not to look.

"Hey, honey, what do you mean 'don't look'? We're going to be seeing each other for a lot of years to come."

"Well, I'm just getting fat. I can see it - can't you?"

"Honey, you're going to have a baby. That's new life growing inside you. You are definitely not fat; you're beautiful. And, I love you very much. Come to bed and let me kiss your tears away."

She smiled briefly, dried her tears, and slid into bed beside me. I turned so she could spoon up against my front. I could feel her shoulders tremble once in a while, but soon she quieted down. When her breathing began to slow and a tiny snore appeared I knew she was sound asleep. As I also fell asleep, I knew that this was going to be a young marriage but would defy critics and last for a very long time.

During the night we had both turned over so that now she was curled up against my back. I woke slowly and stretched carefully so as to not wake her. She did wake though and kissed me on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry I'm such a crybaby, Tom. I seem to be getting weepy all the time. My mom tells me she would start crying for no reason at all when she was carrying me."

"Well, I don't mind at all. You can cry any time you want. I can handle it."

"Hey! Can I handle this?" She asked, closing her fingers tightly around my morning woody.

"You can handle anything of mine you heart desires my love. I am here to serve you."

"My mom says we can still make love right up into the end of the seventh month. Then, we'll have to stop. I think she was really embarrassed but she told me a couple of ways to help you along. I pretended not to know any of them. She said that if you stayed happy, things would go better."

"Being here with you, in bed, in a wonderful little old inn, makes me just about as happy as I can get. You mean there's more? Honey, if I were any happier I'd burst."

"Yeah, I can tell," she leaned forward to whisper in my ear while running her fingers up and down my manhood. "And here's what seems the tightest."

She lifted up on one elbow, pushed off with her lower arm and sat up with her knees against the small of my back. Once the covers were down around the bottom of the bed, she pulled on my shoulder until I lay back flat. My erection was once again the target of her ministrations; only this time she didn't use her fingers.

"Oh, baby, what you do to me," I gasped in a hoarse voice.

"I hope so, and that it never changes. I thought I'd never be able to do this, but once you did it to me I felt how much pleasure it gave me I had to know what it did to you. Do you like it, or am I just being a slut?"

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"Honey, I told you before that anyone who calls you a slut is in for a really brutal time. I love it."

She resumed her actions to the accompaniment of soft groans, mews, and grunts of pleasure from both of us. She stopped a moment, readjusted her hips a little, and resumed. Now that she was bent over me, I could detect a slightly larger heft to her breasts. Certainly nothing deforming them, but an intangible 'thing' that made them even more attractive. Her soft stomach had also tightened somewhat. She was beginning to show.

When the groaning ceased, and things calmed down somewhat, I sighed deeply.

"Oh, my baby. There now, doesn't that feel better?"

"Ohâ ¯ yeahâ ¯ that definitely feels better. And â ¯ now it's your turn!"

We rearranged ourselves so that I could give her pleasure. When I kissed her gently below her navel, she groaned and began breathing hard.

"Oh, God. You know how that affects me, Tom!"

I know; that's why I do it. To pleasure you. If you have to give up having me inside you for months, then the least I can do is show you what I'll do for you. Fair enough?"

"Oh, yessssssss." She hissed at me. "I feel far more sensitive than ever before. Do you suppose that happens to every pregnant girl?"

"I don't know. I do know that it happens to you and that's all I need to know. Now, shut up and enjoy."

She lay back against the pillow, closed her eyes, and began to really enjoy my ministrations. When she had reached the point I desired, she gave in to her release completely.

I rose up and flopped down beside her on the pillow. When she turned and pressed against me I could feel that her nipples were still hard little nubbins. I touched one and she jumped.

"Woweee! Those are really sensitive right now."

"I can understand why, it looks as if you're beginning to produce a tiny bit of milk."

"I am? Where?"

I pointed to her left nipple and, when she lifted the breast another tiny droplet of white appeared. She giggled and squeezed several more drops out. Then they stopped.

"No more. What'll the poor nipper dine on?" I teased.

"I'll have lots more from where that came from buster. You can bank on that. My mom said I'd probably have to wear pads to keep it from leaking out over my dresses and stuff."

"And, as long as I'm making observations, let me say I think everything is taking shape nicely my soon-to-be bride. I also think that when we get back from our honeymoon you'd better have a nice maternity dress to wear."

"What? Shaping up where?"

If Only Us...

"Very nicely," I repeated. "Right here."

I placed my palm against the swell of her lower breasts and moved it in a circular motion downwards and across her tummy. Her muscles rippled wherever my hand touched. She was getting sensitive there also. My mom had contributed that bit of lore one evening. She could also tell, when looking at her stomach at the angle we both were, that she was indeed 'getting fat'.

"Well, crap. I am filling out aren't I?"

"I wouldn't have it any other way my love. Now, let's shower and hit the road for home. While we're at it, we might see if there is any way we can make love and not be so damn noisy at it. My brother will be sleeping right next door to us soon."

"I hadn't thought of that," she said, reddening across the throat at the thought. Maybe he'll just think it's a bad dream."

"No chance of that. He may be young, but he's not that young. Besides, I think our most tender moments are slow and easy, not jumping and crashing together. Now, get up wench!"

I slapped her on the butt and she jumped out of bed almost horizontally with a yelp of feigned pain.

"You should be more careful of the merchandise you know."

"Yeah, but I've already decided to buy it."

"Smooth talker," she whispered as she closed the door to the bathroom.

Chapter 7: If Only Us... Chapter 7

When we got home, both sets of parents were at my house. Virginia's parents took charge and spirited her away from me. My parents took me to lunch. My dad told me he had asked the Public Affairs Office where I worked part time if they could come up with a little more for me to do. I'd already asked them and they said they'd look. I was kind of miffed at him for doing so, but decided that his help might just smooth over any rough spots that could pop up.

The two of us sat outside the base Pass and ID office for fifteen minutes while a conference was held in an enclosed room with a half-wall in frosted glass. Occasionally a voice could be heard, but nothing intelligent could be discerned. They were in the process of deciding what they would do about the dependent status of my wife. I was already my dad's dependent. Since I was underage until I was eighteen, and I was getting married, that should officially make Virginia his dependent also. Someone up the line had gotten cute and threw in an added monkey wrench.

What would that make OUR dependent: the little one yet to be born? He would, in effect, be a dependent of a dependent, and was that legal? They were in the midst of deciding that now. I paced. Not from nervousness, but simply to be doing something while others dickered with our fate.

The door opened and we were invited in. After much clearing of throats, a body-less voice from a speakerphone supposed to be in HQ USAFE, stated that Virginia would be listed under my dad, and be given a renewed dependent ID card. The card she held from her dad would be turned in and voided. The voice went on to state that if any children appeared (appeared? From where? A cabbage leaf?) They would also be a dependent of my dad. Problem solved. Well, shoot. It took them two hours to decide that?

Next we went to the PAO. The news there was just as good. I had been hired now as permanent, non-government service, staff. I was to be the official base civilian news photographer and once I graduated from school I would be allowed to take the Civil Service exam to see if I could become permanent GS staff. The rise in position made my pay jump around thirty-five percent. Jeez, I was going to really need that.

We went back to our new quarters and continued to move stuff around. I took the bed in my old room apart and reassembled it in 'our' room. Damn; that really sounded weird to me. Our room! Here I was moving a bed that Virginia and I would sleep in - together - right here in my parent's quarters. I felt very strange even thinking about it in front of them.

Around four, my dad took me to the O Club and while we walked down a hall a hand reached out and grabbed me by the back of my shirt.

"Oho! What have we here? A young, soon to be married young-type person?" A voice behind me said in an affected Yogi Bear accent. It was my dad's Executive Officer. He pulled me into the bar.

My dad followed me into the bar. I'd never been inside it before but was impressed by all the people who were there. Most of them were from my dad's outfit, the local weather squadron, but I also recognized some from the motor pool side of the marriage.

Amid backslappings, greetings, and congratulations, my dad leaned close and told me not to have more than two beers - and that he meant it. I nodded and started making the rounds.

* * *

If Only Us...

Back at the house later I was to discover that Virginia wouldn't be 'available' tonight. She was having a combination wedding and baby shower hosted by our two moms. I went out and rounded up some of my buddies at the teen club and we just hung around. While I was sitting at a table munching on a burger, a fellow named Gerald came by and sat down next to me.

Gerald was a big soccer star that Virginia had gone out with a couple of times right after we just started dating. She and he parted ways in about a week and that's when I moved in.

"Hey, Stud. How did you ever manage to pull this off?"

"What do you mean 'pull this off'?" I asked, a bit frostily.

"I was beginning to think old Virginia's legs were sewn together at the knees. How did a skinny guy like you manage so well?"

My anger flared white hot! But, one of the things my dad kept hounding me about was not to react so quickly to anything so I appeared to ponder an answer and then turned to face him slowly.

"Well - Gerald - I'd have to say: Elizabeth Barrett Browning did the trick nicely."

"What? Some dead poet?"

"Yes. Virginia likes poetry. If you'd taken the time to find that out you might have had a better chance. You'd should probably stay on the soccer pitch and away from class act women."

That steamed him a little. He glanced around at the several tables of friends watching us. They grinned back at both of us.

"Yeah, well I don't know from any pansy poetry, fancy guy, but I can whip your ass on the playing field any old time."

I paused to consider this remark. I had refrained from even trying out for the school team because, mostly, of this jerk sitting right in front of me. I didn't like him very much and I just didn't need the hassle. That also didn't alter the fact that I was sure I could take him five out of seven goals in open field play, half-court. I was also fairly sure he didn't know I'd learned to play with all the German, French, Belgian, and Dutch boy scouts I went to various camps with. I'd learned from the masters; kids that have been playing soccer since they could walk.

"Okay, Gerald (he hated being called that). Is the pitch free right now? Let's go see who has the moxie. I'll meet you there in," I glanced at my watch, "fifteen minutes. First one there lights the field."

"Done. I'm gonna raze your ass, twinkle toes."

I just smiled and went home to change.

By the time I reappeared at the field, there were almost a hundred people in the stands to watch us. Holy cow! Didn't they have anything else to do on a Tuesday night? Gerald and I discussed rules. We'd play by international rules, half-field. When one of us scored, the other got an in at what would normally be the mid-field stripe.

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We squared off and he came right at me with pretty deft foot work. He slammed a minor pass around me, jumped over my probing foot, and began stroking down the field. I came up behind him and swept under him with a foot, snagged the ball, and worked it around him. He became defensive and prevented my first scoring attempt.

In rapid order he dodged another of my spinning attacks and sank a long shot from the side. I wasn't fast enough to catch it and the ball eluded my fingertips to glide into the net. The crowd began to get noisy. From what I heard, he wasn't as popular as I was led to believe by the turnout. I distinctly heard my name being yelled too.

Our next round went to him also. He was now up 2-nil. It was time to get serious on him. In rapid order I sank one from twenty feet, one from the side at about fifteen feet, and another after a hard-fought last stand right at the penalty line. I was now up 3-2.

Sweat began to pour off him, so I held up a hand and we took five minutes to cool off. He went over and drank some water and I just sat fanning myself with a towel. Across the field I noticed the school soccer coach sitting in the stands. He was surrounded by most of the team. Maybe Gerald had been shooting his mouth off and they came to see how he did.

A whistle blew and we faced off again. He and I went back and forth, stealing the ball from each other at a furious pace. He finally sank a really great curving shot from almost twenty feet out. I congratulated him. We were now tied at 3-3. The next goal would be the decider.

In the midst of a furball, he accidentally tripped me. It was definitely an accident because my cleat got caught in his shoestring. I went down and a whistle blew. The coach stepped onto the field and walked to him. He said Gerry had tripped me (which I already knew) and I should take a penalty shot. Gerald reluctantly agreed. We walked to the proper spot and he stood as defender while I pondered how to play it. I caught his eye and rolled my eyes to his left - twice. He gave a short nod, looking slightly puzzled.

With a quick rush, I ran towards the ball, feinted with my shoulder, drove the ball with my off foot and it sailed directly to his left at around eight feet off the ground. He made a huge leap, caught the ball on his forearms, and made the save.

I stood while he took the ball out and back in. We battled for several more minutes until he faked me out to one side and slammed a beautiful shot right past me at hip height that hit the inside corner of the goal post - and popped inside. His game. We ended at 4-3. We shook hands and went over to the stands. Amid various 'well-done's' and 'close game's', I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was the coach.

"I saw that penalty shot. You gave it to him didn't you?"

"Well, sort of. I didn't know if he'd take it though. He can be pretty hard-headed at times."

"Where did you ever learn to play like that? He's the best I have and you clearly won on style and should have kicked his butt."

"Coach, I've played with and against the best teams the German boy scouts have to offer. I know how to play the game; I was just so busy with other stuff that I didn't try out."

"I wondered about that. Some of your moves I've only seen downtown. Do you go to the Foosball Club sometimes?"

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"Yes, I do. Mostly to watch, but I get caught up in a pickup game once in a while. Mostly, they make be a goal tender because I sometimes forget I can't touch the ball with fingers."

"Aren't you the guy getting married tomorrow that all the kids are fired up about?"

"Well, yes, I am." I practically dug a toe into the ground like an idiot.

"When you graduate next year, would you be interested in a coaching assistant's job? It doesn't pay much, but I really think you could help our game."

"I already have a job, Coach. I work at the PAO, but I'd be free to work on weekends and evenings when I could get off. My bride is soon to be having a baby." I looked up at his surprised face. "I âerâ would appreciate it that not getting out. Sorry I brought it up."

"Brought up what?" He smiled at me.

"Thanks, coach. I'll think about it."

On my way home, Gerald came from between two buildings and hailed me.

"Hey, Tom?"

"Yeah," I replied in a noncommittal voice.

"Why did you give me that penalty save? You had me whipped to a standstill."

"I'm not really sure, Gerry. I knew you're the star of the school team, and if you'd been beaten - by me - that would have made you look bad. My goal wasn't to make anyone look bad, just to let you know that arrogance doesn't always pay."

"Well," He smiled, rubbing a hand over his chin, "I'd say you proved that tonight. Much appreciated. And, congratulations. Virginia is a fine girl and deserves someone like you. Just ignore my big mouth."

"Done." I stuck out my hand and we shook solemnly. I thought that if I took the coaching job the first thing I'd like to do is teach him not to be surprised by some of the moves I'd made on him. He was a hell of a player, but could be better.

"Just be sure to watch your left side closer," I called out to his back.

I headed back home whistling. I figured I'd done a good deed here. Jerry was indeed a good player. He'd actually come very close to shutting me out, but I'd learned some great moves that, if I taught them to him, would make him nearly unbeatable. I'd have to give the Coach's proposal some careful consideration for sure.

Virginia and I spent the rest of the day fiddling around in the house, arranging our personal clothing and assigning drawers (she got the top ones so she wouldn't have to bend over). After dinner, she left for her house. We'd decided that it was one thing to be formally engaged out in the open, but to actually sleep together (even though we'd done that also) without being married might not come over so well with some people. Also, and most importantly, only a select few knew that Virginia was pregnant.

Chapter 8: If Only Us... Chapter 8

Dawn of 'The Big Day' broke bright and cheerful. A few clouds, a light breeze, and plenty of butterflies - in my stomach. I hadn't seen or even talked to Virginia since yesterday. My attempts to do so were firmly rebuffed by matron-types who had Taken Charge of Things. In every instance I was told it was bad luck. I guess in their minds it was.

The wedding was to start at noon, and it was nine-thirty already, I was startled to see. I rushed through my shower and shave, anointing myself with oils, and after-shave. I had a really nifty rental tux that took some getting used to. Fortunately, the bow tie was already made and snapped on. I couldn't have managed to tie it at all with my fumble-fingers.

Both our dad's had been given the option to wear their uniforms - both decided to do so. My dad, when decked out in his Class 'A' uniform looked really spiffy with all his ribbons and all. My mom was wearing a really nice off-white dress and just a string of pearls. Various brothers and sisters from both families were dressy also. My grandmother had her usual pale lavender outfit on. She wore it, or one like it, for every festive occasion.

My family gathered at the entrance to the chapel and meandered down the side aisles where most of the family took their seats. Virginia's family had arrived just a little before us. Bear looked simply splendid in his uniform. He had two more rows of ribbons than my dad, but he'd been in longer, and had chewed a lot more dirt than him. I went over to them and her mom and dad stood at my approach. I gave my new mom a big hug, which she returned tightly, and whispered, in my ear.

"Be good to my little girl, Tom. That's all I ask."

"I'll do my absolute best â Mom"

That started the tears flowing, but she got control of them. Her dad put out a big paw and engulfed mine, then covered it with the second one.

"Welcome, again, to the family, Tom."

Thanks, dad. I'd give my life for her and that's a no-shitter."

I heard a quiet little snuffle from mom again as I walked back towards the entrance, lifting a hand to friends of ours in the group. Virginia had a whole corps of teary-eyed girls sitting in almost three rows; handkerchiefs held tightly in their hands. I made a bet with myself that I'd be able to hear them during the ceremony. My male friends were a looser group, but still numbered quite a few. Bernie, my best man standing there in his dress yarmulke, gave me a big, silent 'Mazeltof' and beckoned for me to join him.

I went up and he ushered me back behind the altar through a little door I hadn't noticed. When we did, we found we were just in a storage room. The Chaplain was there and he started right in with who should do what. We'd covered all this in the rehearsal, but it didn't hurt to refresh my mushy brain.

"Bernie, when the music starts, you go through the door and take up position one step down and to my left. Tom, you do the same thing, but don't go down a step. Bernie, you have the ring?"

"Oy!" He exclaimed, slapping his forehead and then all his pockets. Bernie was a really funny guy. It broke us all up. Just what we needed.

If Only Us...

We waited in silence for what seemed like several days until, softly, The Wedding March began. The Chaplain tapped us on the shoulder and pushed us out the door.

In the time I'd been back there the entire church had filled almost all the way. A lot more of our friends had arrived. I followed Bernie and, when he stepped down one step, we both pivoted and stood there facing the Chaplain.

The rear doors opened and everyone stood up.

And there she was right after the two young flower girls. My Virginia. Dressed in blazing white, with her grey eyes downcast. She stood a moment to catch the slow cadence and then began floating down the aisle towards me. I didn't care, I had to turn fully and watch her. I choked up, swallowed huge lumps of cotton, blinked tears of joy from my eyes, and followed her every step. My bride was absolutely stunning in every way.

She had a firm grasp of her dad's arm and, as they reached the two of us, took her hand from his arm and passed it to my arm. It was as if we had never touched before. I felt it like a warm feather had been pressed into my wrist. Only then did she raise her eyes from the floor and look directly at me.

I felt dizzy from all the emotions that were flowing through me. I missed the Chaplain's question and he had to repeat it. Oh yeah. I was definitely ready.

The Ceremony:

Chaplain: We are gathered here today in friendship and happiness to witness Virginia and Tom pledge their love in a setting that can never be duplicated in this world.

The reality is that everyone's life is limited to only a certain amount of time. As Robert G. Ingersoll said, "The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here." Take the time to make your partner feel special. Never take each other for granted.

Take the time to listen and to share. Give each other the benefit of the doubt because communication will be different at times and misunderstandings are inevitable. It takes time, effort, courage, and commitment to make a successful marriage.

Take the time to negotiate, to talk about your fears, failures, and disappointments. Talk about each other's expectations, hopes, and dreams. Be flexible and willing to adapt well to changes and new circumstances. Above all, take the time to tell each other what you want. Take the risk of being vulnerable with each other.

Virginia and Tom take each other by the hand and exchange your vows. Virginia please go first.

Virginia: We are together now, we two; or haven't you noticed that we seem to spend a lot of time side by side. We wrote the kind of notes that people in love write, you walked me to class, and we looked into each other's eyes. Now I promise this day to love you as I did the day we met. As we grow older together, I will always love you and care for you. We must work through life together and I will always be by your side. Together we can do all that we have dreamed.

Tom: Today I will marry my friend: that one I laugh with, live for, and dream with. We knew we loved each other and no matter what our age, we knew that we were meant to be together. I promise I will love you forever. I will work hard all the days of my life to take care of you and if we have to grow older, we can do it together. I will love you more than anyone has ever loved you and I will take you away to a place that's just our place, and I will protect you all of your life.

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Chaplain: Tom, please repeat after me:

(Statement and response)

As your husband and your friend -

I promise that I will stand by you -

In sickness and in health -

For better and for worse -

For richer and for poorer -

For as long as we both shall live -

Chaplain: Do you, Tom take Virginia to be your wife and pledge to her your respect and faithful love from this day forward?

Tom: I do.

Chaplain: Tom, please place Virginia's ring on her finger.

(I turn, get the ring from Bernie, and VERY nervously slide it on Virginia's finger.)

Chaplain: Virginia, please repeat after me:

(Statement and response)

As your wife and your friend -

I promise that I will stand by you -

In sickness and in health -

For better and for worse -

For richer and for poorer -

For as long as we both shall live -

Do you Virginia, take Tom, to be your husband and pledge to him your respect and faithful love from this day forward?

Virginia: I do.

(A small, stifled sob from her mom behind us.)

Chaplain: Virginia, please place Tom's ring on his finger.

(She turns to the ring bearer, lifts it from the pillow, and eases it up my finger.)

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Chaplain: You will be reminded each day of your commitment to this marriage with the wearing of your wedding rings. Virginia and Tom, you have formalized in our presence the existence of the bond of love between you - vowing to be loyal and loving toward one another. In expressing your affirmations, you have pronounced yourself husband and wife.

I now pronounce Virginia and Tom to be husband and wife.

(Another small whimper, but this time from my mom.)

(The Chaplain looks up, raises his arms out towards us, and moves his hand together as if he were encompassing both of us.)

Please embrace and kiss for the first time as husband and wife.

(I needed no prompting for this one at all. I lifted her light veil, folded it carefully back over her shoulders, and bent forward.

(It was as if we had never kissed before. Her lips melted against mine, and, instead of partially closing her eyes, she looked steadily into my eyes as we held the kiss.)

Chaplain: If any guests wish, please gather at the outside entrance. The bride and groom and I have some signing to accomplish.

Everyone stood, some cheered, and I noticed four of Virginia's friends in a row were all hooting into tissues. I even noticed Gerald over against the far wall. In the middle distance was Hans and Gerd. Gerd gave me a very enthusiastic, clenched hands over head salute and a huge smile. I smiled back.

The Chaplain touched us on the shoulders and motioned towards his office at the side. We went in and there on a podium was all the paperwork we'd have to sign. I signed everything where he indicated, as did Virginia. She edged closer and closer to me until our hips were pressed together. She turned to look at me.

"Is this really true?"

"Aye, Virginia. There really is a Santa Claus." I said.

The Chaplain turned with a start and said that he simply loved that movie. We all broke up. Soon, the signing, stamping, and folding was done and we were free to go. I took her arm.

"Come, Wife, our chariot waits."

"Of course, husband mine. Let us not tarry lest we be late."

The Chaplain looked between the two of us, clearly trying to decide if he'd done the right thing, until we smirked, stifled a laugh, and then broke up again. He tittered, but with an uncertain smile on his face. I could hear his mind saying 'teenagers!'

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We left his office, turned to walk down the aisle, and went arm in arm through the front door. We stopped on the porch and then went slowly down the steps to find that Bear had managed to borrow the Commanding Officer's sedan for our trip to the NCO Club for the reception. When we arrived, everyone was waiting outside to usher us in. They clapped, yelled, and made such a fuss that people inside came out to see what was up and joined in the celebration.

Virginia was spirited away from my blind side while I was led into the room Bear had booked for our reception. Food was everywhere, as was punch, and an open bar. I thought it best for me to stay away from there for the time being. I foraged down the tables loading my plate with snacks while returning handshakes, smiles, and other forms of congratulations.

A quiet voice sounded at my elbow. "Boy am I ever sorry I let you go. You're the real thing, aren't you?"

I turned to meet the green eyes of Cleo. She and I had had a little fling right when I arrived at Stadt. It lasted three weeks and consisted of a few movies, a dinner or two and one very heavy, memorable, petting session. She held up her hand in a 'stop' gesture.

"I'm not here to make trouble - but to compliment you. I should have realized that when you made a commitment you meant it to be one hundred percent. I just couldn't handle that because I know I'm way too superficial. I'm so happy for both you and Virginia. Good luck."

She went to tiptoes and kissed me on the cheek then she pivoted and walked away. Well, son of a gun.

I took my filled plate over to the parents table and set it down at the head where the two of us were to sit. Gradually, everyone else sat down until we were all chatting merrily. Virginia finally made an appearance and, when she did, we were asked to stand. I stood tall beside her while they pushed a huge wedding cake into the room. It was enormous and covered a whole sheet that was easily four feet square. Two knives, tied up with ribbons, were handed to us and we each cut a sliver off to feed to the other.

No hanky panky took place as we crossed arms and fed it to the other awkwardly. Clapping and cheering followed as the rest of the cake was divided up in short order for the masses.

The evening began to wind down after dancing, toasting, and general bedlam. The 'younger set' had much more staying powers than the older set but finally we had to go. Virginia and I had made arrangements to go down and stay at Franz and Angelina's Inn for the night so we made preparations to leave.

As we went outside to locate my car, all four of our parents were grouped; they stopped us.

"We, the four of us, want you kids to have this." Said my dad solemnly as he handed over a large buff envelope.

I held it while Virginia opened it. Her eyes got wide and she gasped as she turned so I could see what was in it. The first thing I saw were two green railway tickets stamped "Amsterdam" with a departure date of tomorrow at eleven hours.

"It's called 'The Tulip Express' and only runs three times a year." Said Bear.

"There's more," my mom added, tapping her finger against the envelope.

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I looked in again and saw what turned out to be almost six hundred dollars and quite a few Deutschemarks.

"We want you to have a real honeymoon. Your office was happy to let you go for a week, Tom. Their instructions were to take a lot of pictures and they would run a weekend spread on your trip."

I choked up, but Virginia came to my rescue by throwing her arms wide and capturing everyone for a big hug. All I could manage was an almost strangled 'thank you all' before I teared up again. That money represented a lot of money in any language.

I hugged each of my parents, and then Virginia did. I turned to Myra, Virginia's mom, and kissed her on the cheek. I held out my hand to Bear and again he encompassed it with both of his hands. We shook.

"Take good care of my girl, Tom." He repeated.

"I will, sir, I will with all my heart."

He opened his mouth as he turned back to Virginia and then got a strange look on his face. He began to laugh until he shook his head and explained.

"I was about to ask Virginia if she wanted a ride home with us. Now, how dumb does that sound?"

We all wailed at that one as we broke up to find our cars. Mine was parked at the bottom of the front steps. As I got closer, I could see it was literally covered with hundreds of tulips and bundles of straw tied to the door handles and hood ornament. The tulips for the trip, no doubt; and the straw a traditional German good luck token.

Our suitcases were loaded (so that's why I couldn't find some of my casual clothes - they'd packed them for us). I started the car, flipped on the lights and off we went to the accompaniment of what seemed like a complete brass band. Horns of every tone began sounding as we left the Club and followed us down towards the main gate. Cars would peel off and head home leaving just the two parents cars behind us.

We passed through the gate and went down the street towards the Inn. None of our parents had ever been there before and now they were going to see where Virginia and I spent a lot of our time. It seemed strange to know that we were now married and could stay there with them knowing for sure. The thought must have occurred to Virginia at the same time because she looked at me with a strange expression.

"This is going to sound weird, butâ " "

"â you feel uncomfortable at the inn with your folks being there?"

"Oh, I forgot! You're a mind reader. Are we going to be one of those couples that finish each other's sentences?"

"I sure hope not. Once in a while is fine, but if we both think exactly the same way we'd get bored in no time."

"Well, I can guarantee you right now you're never going to get bored, buster. Two drinks and up the stairs we go. I've been horny for the last hour."

"And you think I haven't? Check it out."

She put her hand in my lap and encountered the extent of my interest.

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"That's what I like to see - anticipation. I have a nightgown that Janice bought me in a sex shop downtown. I get to wear it don't I?"

"Sure you do, honey. You wear that, and I'll get out the whips and chains my brother bought me. If we can get the trapeze set up, we'll have a grand time."

She looked at me for a half-second and then broke up, shaking her head all the time.

"Sometimes I just don't know when you're kidding."

I lifted my eyebrows and let them fall several times while pretending to hold a cigar to my mouth a la Groucho Marx without saying a word. She bopped my on the shoulder.

We arrived, parked in the lot, and went inside. Franz was at the Maitre'd station but when he saw us he called to an assistant to take over. He bustled up and took charge of our check in. He appeared to be beside himself with happiness and when Angelina came out from the kitchen, he gave her a blast of local German that I had trouble understanding. I think he was warning her to be careful what she said in front of our parents.

Finally, Franz handed me the key with a flourish and put his arms out wide to herd all of us into the Inn's sitting room. It was a little warm for a fire, but the rest of it was all dark wood, smoke, and soft pillows on overstuffed chairs. We sank into a small sitting area that had a Schnapps decanter, and a tray of glasses. He carefully measured out equal amounts, after twice counting to make sure, and recapped the decanter. I could tell that this was some of his absolute private, top of the line, stock. He offered a toast to the two of us and we lifted glasses. I was right; it was nectar of the Gods on the way down. I revised my estimate of two drinks down to one but that didn't happen. We ended up with three toasts on two glasses each.

Otto pretended not to see my dad reach for his wallet, and when I nudged his knee and shook my head minutely he gave up trying to pay. He looked at me and then nodded - now fully aware that this was our 'home away from home' and that Franz would be insulted.

We all stood, hugged again, and our parents left us standing, looking out the window to the back yard and the old mill. I put my arm around Virginia's shoulder, pulled her close, and kissed the top of her head. Without losing hardly any contact, she twisted around to take the rest of my kiss full on the mouth. We tapped each other's teeth with our tongues like we'd been doing since our very first kiss. This time it seemed to have much more significance.

"I love you, my husband," she murmured.

"And I love you, my wife."

We put the glasses down on the tray, waved to the innkeepers as we passed the main desk and climbed the stairs for the first time as a real man and wife; we had two very shiny rings to prove it.

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At the threshold to the room I stopped and kissed the nape of her neck and then I unlocked the door and stepped back so I could bend to lift her. She giggled and allowed herself to be carried into the room. I walked over to the bed and set her gently down.

I closed the door and turned to her once more. She held her arms out to me and I kissed her yet again; a long, lingering kiss so gentle I hardly felt it. She responded hungrily, as if we had been apart for years. I knelt in front of her and lay my head in her lap. She rubbed my shoulders and whispered to me.

"You're the only one who might even guess how happy I am right at this moment. No matter what may come in the future we will have this; this room, this Inn, this life and this happiness. I love you so much it's almost painful. Undress me, slowly."

I reached for the row of buttons down the front of her traveling suit and unfastened the top button. My hands were shaking for crying out loud. I told her it was ridiculous, but I was nervous. We'd made love many times, right up until three days ago, and I wasn't this nervous.

I managed to get all of them undone and pulled the little jacket off her shoulders and folded it carefully beside her. She wore an ivory blouse tucked into a pleated navy skirt. I unfastened the tiny little bone buttons on the blouse next. Her breathing became slower but heavier as I pulled the tail of the blouse free from the skirt waistband, slid it off her shoulders, and folded it next to the top.

Still on my knees, I pulled her to her feet, unclasped her belt, and unsnapped the waistband of the skirt which dropped to the floor. I folded it also. I put my cheek against the deep warmth of her stomach and wrapped my arms around her hips tightly. She signed once, deeply, and pulled at my shoulders to make me turn my head.

I looked up at her and watched both her breasts straining against her lacy bra. With each breath she took, it pushed the satin outward. I loosened the elastic of her half-slip and stretched it over her hips and down her legs. She lifted each leg once so I could take it completely off.

"Tom, please hurry"

"We have all the time in the world right now. There is just the two of us and nothing else." I said with my cheek next to her navel.

"I know, my love, but if you don't hurry I'm gonna scream."

I picked up the pace a little. I knew how she felt. I had become very excited even as we came through the door and it was making itself known to me very insistently. I took a moment to adjust things into a comfortable position and continued to undress Virginia - slowly. She had bought a new garter belt and the clasps were giving me trouble. She looked down, undid them for me, and gave little groans of pleasure as I rolled each of her nylons down her leg. She seemed to give off more and more heat each time I touched her.

I stood, reached behind her, and unfastened her bra. It fell forward and revealed her in full beauty. I gently laid a kiss in the valley between her breasts. I heard a sharp intake of breath. Her knees were trembling again as I worked my way back down her body with my lips.

"Oh, God! Oh, God!" she whispered - her eyes tightly closed.

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I continued to use my tongue and nip at her with my lips. She began a side-to-side shaking of her head and making a very light keening sound now.

"Please. Please. Please," She began to chant.

Finally, she could stand it no more. With a huge groan of passion, she pulled at my shoulders until I stood before her. With deft fingers she made short work of my clothing. All pretense of doing things slowly had flown away on the wings of urgency.

I swiftly pulled the rest of my clothes off and joined her on top of the bed. Her head fell back on the pillow as I knelt as if praying; which, in some ways was exactly what I was doing. We made earthshaking love. The kind of love that only three people know: you, your partner, and God.

"Oooh, honey!" She whispered hoarsely as we arrived at mutual pleasure.

Still joined, I kissed the hollow of her neck. We made no further movement at all. Instead, I just hovered over her, drinking in her glowing beauty. I lowered myself gently until my chest was just grazing her and our stomachs were pressed firmly together. I exhaled softly into her golden hair.

"Oh, baby. That was incredible. We are so good for each other." I whispered to her as I fell to one side and rolled on my back. If you weren't pregnant already that would have done the deed for sure. Can I get you anything from the bathroom?"

"Oxygen, maybe," she gasped. "We will not be able to sustain this level of lovemaking all our lives."

"That's the beauty of it all Virginia. We don't *have* to. We will always be just a short distance away from each other. We can make love whenever and wherever we want to, within reason of course." I smiled at the thought of making love in inappropriate places. "We don't have to dodge parents, sneak out, or get frustrated in movies any more. Some of our sex will be great, some will be average, and some might even be not so hot, but the fact is we can do it any time."

"Until right now I never thought of it that way. You're right. If we don't feel like any more tonight, we just won't. There's always tomorrow."

"Yep." I bounded out of bed and went into the bathroom. I came out with a warm washcloth that we used to clean up. Virginia gave a slight shiver. I stood again. "Do you want a nightie to sleep in tonight?"

"You know, the only time I haven't slept in some sort of night clothes is when I sleep with you. I like the soft feeling of the nylon or silk as I move my arms and legs. It sounds odd, but silk has both smoothness and roughness. I guess that's what I love about sleeping in it."

"I didn't know that. Can I get you anything right now?"

"Open the brown suitcase and tip it up so I can see into it. I'm so warm and comfortable that I just don't want to move if I don't have to."

I did as asked and she chose a pure white pair of silk pajamas. The pants flared out from the waist but were tied with elastic at each leg. The top buttoned down the middle with three huge buttons. She slid out of bed, stood, and allowed me to hold the pants for her. She turned her back and I held the top while she put it on also. I must admit I fiddled around, a lot, making sure she was comfortable before buttoning it up. She leaned back against me as I enclosed her in a huge hug and kissed her neck right behind her ear. I helped her back

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into bed.

I got out my alarm clock, wound it, and set the time.

"I've never needed an alarm clock in my life," I said. "I've always been able to wake up within five minutes of a target time. But, I guess we don't want to be late for our trip tomorrow do we? I set it for eight."

"Nope. That sounds good to me. Come to bed my love." She patted the bed beside her.

I snapped off the light, padded over and got into bed. She snuggled up and into the crook of my arm - wetting her finger and rasping it across my chest hair; what little there was. It felt like it was being hit with electricity. Her hand settled down to a steady circular motion across my chest, down over my stomach, and back up the other side.

What was good for me should be good for her I thought so I ran the flat of my hand along her rib cage, down to the narrow waist and over the flair of her hip. She gave out with tiny groans of pleasure as I stroked her. In no time, she was very lightly snoring. She must have been really worn out.

The thought had hardly crossed my mind, when a great feeling of fatigue overcame me also and my eyes drooped and my breathing slowed. I went under.

* * *

During the night, we had rolled so that we were spooning; me against her back. I think what woke me initially was a little cough from her. I listened for another, but nothing more was heard except that endearing little buzz. I realized now that the cough wasn't the only reason I had woken up. The silk of her pajama bottoms felt incredibly smooth and sensual against the bare skin of my hips.

I knew she was bone tired, so I was carefully trying to move back and give her some room. When I moved, a little cold air swept down between us. She moaned in her sleep and pushed backwards trying to meet me again. Once she felt herself up against me she stopped moving and settled down. I gave up and gingerly put my arm over her ribs and let it fall until it was flat against her tummy. She hummed once, took my hand, and folded it under her arm so she could kiss it. I must have woken her.

"Don't move from right there. I am so comfortable like this. Are you?"

"Except for the obvious, I am."

"What time is it?" She asked.

"Do you really care?"

"Not really," she said dreamily.

"It'sâ 'immmmâ 'four forty-seven," I answered, looking at the clock's luminous dial.

"Ohhhh. Far too early for me." She hummed softly. "I'm so warm. Are you always that warm?"

"Who wouldn't be? Snuggled up next to you would light any guy's fire."

"You're not 'any guy' though and you have a right to be there."

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"Well then, we'll just have to go to sleep now won't we?"

I saw absolutely no reason not to. Just snuggling up tightly against her was all the reassurance I needed that this wasn't a dream. "Nightlyânight." I touched my lips to her shoulder.

In the stillness, and at a great distance, I heard the large clock downstairs bong out the five AM hour. She said something I didn't catch and subsided into a muted buzz again. She had fallen asleep. Was this okay with me? Damn straight it was. I drifted back to sleep myself.

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This time, seven minutes before the alarm went off, I cracked an eye open. The alarm would go off soon so I clicked it off. I was still pressed up against her back. She apparently hadn't moved all night. As my ardor increased, Virginia turned her head towards me and smiled.

"Hello, darling. Quickie?" She smiled.

"It'll have to be a quickie I'm afraid. Sorry I fell asleep earlier."

"I fell asleep first remember. I was just so comfortable with your arms wrapped around me. I'm awake now though; and so are you." She snickered softly.

We made slow love. This time there was no sense of urgency as last night. This time, we took our time. The crescendo, when it came, seemed to last for hours. Breathlessly, we came to a halt and broke apart.

"We've got to stop meeting like this. What will the neighbors say?" She asked me with a grin.

"They'd say 'Gawd, I wish I'd done that'"

She laughed outright, sat up, and slid off the bed to walk to the bathroom.

"No helping this morning. We need to get ready for the trip. Okay?"

"Yep. I agree, dammit." I said with a smile.

As she showered, I contemplated how much more relaxed our lovemaking had become in just the one day as a married couple. I analyzed it until I came to the realization that it was as I had said before: there *was* no sense of urgency or of time limit. We literally had the rest of our lives to love each other.

We ate breakfast in the large private kitchen with Franz and Angelina. They kept beaming at us the whole time. When we were finished and ready to head for the train station, Angelina passed us a small envelope and motioned for Virginia to tuck it into her pocket. "*Für später*", she explained; for later. Otto hailed us a cab and we had a round of handshakes and hugs, got into the cab, and left for the rest of our honeymoon.

We arrived amid the bustle of a train station readying for a major arrival. This particular train, called the Tulip Special, originated in Zurich, Switzerland, swept up the southwest bit of Germany stopping only in three places, and then continued northwards through Bonn, Düsseldorf, Arnhem to finally terminate in Amsterdam.

Since it would only halt for six minutes in Stadt, we had to have our hand-carried luggage ready to go. Our one larger suitcase was already with the pile on a cart and would be put into the baggage car. Virginia began looking nervously around for anyone she knew and finally, two of her friends appeared shouting and yoo-hooing to her. She looked relieved and wept happy tears as they hugged us both.

Her parents arrived next, out of breath because they'd had to park a distance away. Mine arrived on their heels. We stood to the side and exchanged small talk. My mom tugged at my shoulder and motioned me aside.

"I, we, all of us, are so very proud of you, you know. Virginia is a great girl and we love her dearly. We can hardly wait to be grandparents. Enjoy yourself to the fullest on your honeymoon." She kissed me on the

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cheek.

My dad started to shake hands and then pulled me close into a one-armed hug. My new parents, Myra and Bear, turned Virginia loose to my mom and dad so they could hug me. Myra was the first to speak.

"Thank you for taking care of my little girl, Tom. Regardless of how we got here, we're here now and much happier for it. Be kind to her, she sometimes lets little things get larger than life so help her over them. She'll get emotional as her time nears. Be patient and show her your love."

"Every moment of my life, mom. I won't let you down - either of you." I said as I turned to her father.

He also started to shake my hand, but this time it was I that hugged him. He slapped my back and pulled away again. Amid general hubbub, a distant whistle sounded. The Express was coming down the river.

Virginia and I walked back to our two small cases and prepared to board. Everyone else formed a semi-circle around us as the train ground to a screeching air brake halt. A porter popped out of the vestibule, dropped a small stool to the ground, and helped an old lady off. They then began boarding new passengers.

We reached the top of the stairs, and, after the attendant looked at our tickets, pointed aft and held up one finger.

"Next car? Suite 7?" I asked in German.

Her face brightened noticeably and she nodded and wished us a good trip. We walked rapidly back to the next car, located compartment 7, and Virginia slid the door open with a gasp.

"Oh goodness, look at all the flowers!"

When I got inside and set the bags down I turned a full circle. Every flat surface had at least one small bowl of flowers on it. A large gift-wrapped package lay on the coach seat. We went to the window, lowered the top portion, and leaned out to catch our group's eye. My brother was the first to spot me and shouted to the rest. They all trooped down the platform to talk and wave at us.

Arm in arm we stood, kissed for cameras, and smiled broad smiles. The whistle whooped twice, the conductor blew his whistle, and with a clank we slowly moved off. We watched as long as we could, but the wind began whipping at Virginia's hair so I put the window back up. We turned to the present to see what it was.

A large card was attached to the box, which was only about a quarter-inch deep and the size of a letter. I opened the card and read.

"It's from Hans and Gerd," I explained. "It says not to worry about any food on the train coming or going. He and all our friends at the stationhouse have prepaid them."

"Oh my God. That must have been expensive."

"Probably a bit, but they really wanted to help in some way."

I opened the box and there were quite a few letter-sized coupons with perforated sections to them. They were definitely what they stated they were: vouchers for the meal service on the Tulip Express both outgoing and return.

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"How wonderful," Virginia snuffled. "We've got to find something very nice for both of them. Now, what are we going to do about all the flowers?"

I surveyed the compartment and said, "I wonder if they could use them in the dining car or the lounge?"

"Great idea. Let's ask the porter."

"In a little bit. First, we need to take a moment for ourselves, beloved wife."

"I so love it when I hear that, my husband." She said, pulling me down on the seat. "Remember the train to Paris? It seems so long ago and yet I remember every moment of it. We were so nervous - or, at least I was."

"Don't even for a moment think I wasn't nervous. My hair was even nervous; wondering what you would do if I even touched you. When we kissed the first time, standing in that darkened compartment, my heart was thumping so hard I was sure you could hear it."

"I was the same way. I waited for you to put your arms around me and I thought I'd go crazy until you finally did. When I felt your, er, reaction to my closeness, I knew you felt the same way. It was as if a huge weight had been lifted from me. It seemed that I would float to the ceiling if you let go. Then, you kissed me again and it didn't matter at all anymore."

I enfolded her in my arms again, bent and kissed the tip of her nose. She wrinkled it, and kissed me back. When she pulled at my hips she again felt my reaction to her closeness; but, this time, she just pressed harder against me. I smiled, and bumped hips against hers.

"According to the timetable, we have a three hour delay in Bonn waiting for another section to come up from Munich. Do you think we could find something to do? Read, perhaps?"

"Oh, I think we can find something more interesting than that," she said, touching the front of my pants. "This seems noteworthy."

I dropped my head and pushed it under her chin to nuzzle the soft skin between her breasts with my lips.

"Your idea has merit, madam. We'd better knock it off now or I'll have to stay in the cabin here for the whole trip until this goes away."

I reluctantly released her and went into the tiny washroom. She was busily sorting things out and tidying up the gift wrappings as I closed the door. I drank three glasses of cold water before my passion subsided then I used a washcloth to wipe my face. It took five minutes before I was fully presentable. I left the washroom.

"I was wondering if you were okay." Virginia grinned at me. "The porter hasn't come for our tickets yet and you have them."

I patted my suit coat guiltily. "Yeah. You're right. I forgot that."

We went over and sat on the day seat so we could watch the scenery passing by. It was such a moment of DÃ©jÃ vu that I remarked on it.

"Didn't you just say that?" She countered.

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We began to laugh. There was a tapping on the door. When I opened it, the conductor asked for our tickets. I passed them over and she punched the top portion. She explained that the second page was for use after we left Bonn. I thanked her and she went on down the passageway to knock at the next compartment.

Chapter 12: If Only Us... Chapter 12

We were sitting on the compartment's day seat with Virginia lying back against my chest when the conductor knocked and announced himself. We told him to enter. He was all smiles, and began in halting English to tell us he had finished his duties for the moment and would like to have a word with us.

"*Wir sprechen beide Deutsch, Mein Herr,*" I said, in German, informing him we both spoke German. This put him visibly at ease.

His smile got broader as he explained what had happened at the Stadt train station. He knew Hans and Gerd personally and they had told him of our upcoming honeymoon and that if he could help us at all they would be very grateful. He told us that Hans was the one who had put the coupon box in our compartment just before we boarded and that the flowers were put aboard when the train was in the yard down south.

"If there is anything I can do to make your trip more pleasant, please call for me. Herr Trippler, your steward has been informed of your 'just married' status and will help keep your privacy. Bon voyage." He tipped his hat, turned, and gently closed the door behind him.

I pushed the steward's call button and stood to open the door. He appeared in a moment and I asked if the dining room would be interested in the flower arrangements. I added that the set of blue cornflowers would be very nice at our table; pausing to ask at which serving and what table we'd be located. He seemed a bit surprised that I was familiar with traveling by train, but recovered nicely. He consulted his list, and told us table 22, at the nineteen hundred sitting. He asked if that would be acceptable. I told him that was fine.

He left but returned in about five minutes with three younger men in tow wearing starched white waiter jackets. They took charge and carried the flower arrangements out. The porter bowed his way out by telling us that the Dining car Concierge was pleased with our offer and that he would take pleasure having our table set with the arrangement I wished.

I had done some checking into this trip. What would normally take about five hours by car, would take the train almost twelve hours. This wasn't due to any fault of the railroad system, which was superb, but more towards the arrival of this special train in a city and waiting for connecting trains to arrive before moving onwards. We were to wait in Bonn for over two hours and another two hours in Düsseldorf. Our longest delay was in Arnhem. None of this bothered us in the least because we already had many things to do while waiting.

"First things first," I declared. "Let's go have a drink in the bar car. Ready?"

"You go ahead. I'll be down in a little bit. I need to freshen up a little."

"Alas; 'parting is such sweet sorrow'!"

"Baloney. But very nice Shakespearian baloney," she snickered at me and kissed me on the cheek before I closed the door.

I arrived in the bar car apparently before the afternoon crowd. There were a few couples sitting in lounge chairs, a foursome at a card table, and a very tweedy-looking gentleman speaking British English at the bar. He was trying to tell the bartender how to create a drink - without much success.

"May I be of help?" I asked the gentleman. "I speak German and maybe I can explain easier."

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"I'd be ever so grateful if you would. I'm just not sure how to get this over to the chap."

He went on to describe a mixed drink that required careful measuring, shaking, and pouring. I nodded and relayed this to the bartender, who looked exceedingly grateful. He built the drink and waited expectantly for the response as to its taste.

"Excellent! Just like home. Thank you my boy." He said to the bartender. "May I offer you something in return?" He asked me.

I turned to the bartender and asked for a popular Swiss beer. He beamed and had it wreathed in cool vapors on the bar in seconds. The gentleman paid for both and we wandered back towards a matronly-looking woman who was holding forth to two captive couples on an opposing couch. She was almost ranting about something which, until I listened for a while, I didn't realize it was probably Virginia and I she was carrying on about.

"I tell you it is shocking, shocking. Of course they have to be Ameddican don't they? Always doing impulsive things. The poor girl is barely seventeen and he is not much older."

She carried on in the background as the old gentleman leaned towards me.

"Oh, Lord. She's off on another morality toot. She just heard about this couple from the porter and now she's made up her mind they are impulsive, silly, rash, and, above all, American."

The woman continued: "I doubt very much if they have even a decent education between them. Ameddican schools are so permissive as to be almost useless. Nothing worthwhile is taught but the barest essentials needed to get along in this world. They probably haven't the table manners of servants."

I was absolutely fascinated listening to this woman tearing at Virginia and me this way. I must have shown my amusement because the gentleman looked at me and asked if anything was wrong. I assured him I was fine and that maybe we should sit down.

"Good show. That's my wife, but the way. Sometimes she can be a frightful bore, but she means well."

"I understand, Sir"

He took my elbow, pointed me to a chair next to the one couple and I sat down. He waited for a break in the barrage of words and stepped in to introduce me. I stood, affected a very slight English tone, and gave my name. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the gentleman swallow a sip of his drink and almost choke it back up at my accent. He wiped the smile off his face with his napkin.

"Enchanted, sir. Very happy to meet you. I am Lady Rathford."

I bowed slightly, said "Your Grace", and sat back down to sip my beer. "You were enlightening us on American schools were you not?"

"Where was I? Oh yes; it isn't hard to visualize what these two children must be like. How could their parents send them on a trip like this with not even a chaperone along?"

"I would imagine that perhaps they already may know how to behave in public, ma'am. And, they *are* married; isn't that a consideration? Until you see them you would never know for sure at any rate. I have heard that they first fell in love just over two years ago. Imagine how young they were even then. I might also say that it was he who pushed her wheelchair around for two months when she broke her leg in three places skiing

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in Garmisch-Bertchesgarden. When he was hit by a fouled baseball and put into a coma for a day it was her who cried at his side for that entire day. I am further told that they both are taking college courses in school and will be graduating - together - next spring at the top of their class of over two hundred. I could go on madam, butâ!"

I stopped, looked at the door to spot Virginia smiling and walking towards me through the vestibule. I stood and dramatically threw out my hand towards her. She halted. I continued, using my stage voice:

"But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon
who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou her maid art far more fair than she.
Be not her maid, since she is envious.
Her vestal livery is but sick and green

And none but fools do wear it. Cast it off!

It is my lady! O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!
She speaks, yet she says nothing.
What of that? Her eye discourses; I will answer it.
I am too bold; 'tis not to me she speaks.

Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven

Having some business, do entreat her eyes

To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!"

"Aye, me." Virginia, a quick learner, picked up her cue line with no hesitation.

"She speaks!" I reached for her hand and bowed over it.

Everyone in the car exploded with applause and Virginia colored nicely with a flush that ran up her neck to touch her cheeks.

I turned to Lady Rathford. "That, madam, was the beginning of Act two, Scene two, known as the balcony scene, from Romeo and Juliet; written by one of your countrymen - a Mister Shakespeare I believe. I guess I am one half of that unwashed, uncouth, pair of Americans you were so sour on before. My wife, Virginia, ma'am. Virginia, this is Lady Rathford, and her husband Lord Rathford. To not put too fine a point on it your grace, I can also repeat that little speech in German and halting French. I am sorry if this embarrasses you, but one thing I cannot stand by and listen to is someone espousing ill about someone else they know nothing

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about. Please, may I buy you another sherry?"

She opened her mouth several times while, behind me, I heard choking sounds from Lord Rathford who was doing his best not to explode with mirth. Lady Rathford went through many facial changes until she settled on what I thought was a very good, upper crust, 'thank yew veddy much'.

This was too much for Lord Rathford. He finally could contain his laughter any longer and broke out with a loud haw-haw that echoed around the lounge.

"Well said, sir. Jolly well said. Janice, I've told you time and again that you'd get in trouble some time holding court and now you have."

She nodded ruefully and, by way of apology, motioned for Virginia to sit next to her on the couch. I rose and got the sherry and a glass of schnapps for Virginia. When I returned she and Janice were in deep conversation.

"I'm known as Harry, my boy," said Lord Rathford. "That was a heady quote you know. You have a very good grasp of Shakespeare. Have you delivered the Bard?"

"Last year, sir. I wasn't lucky enough to play Romeo against Virginia's Juliet, but I was understudy. I accepted the part of Petruchio."

"That meant you had to learn both parts didn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lord, what stamina. I could barely make it through Lear as a third nobleman. My hat is off to you my boy."

We sat for another hour sipping our drinks and talking about pretty much anything that entered our minds. Janis had completed her readjustment towards 'Ameddicans' and allowed Virginia and I under her radar. The two of them were fast friends before long. Harry sent a note to the dining car Concierge to have us included in his dinner party which came as a very nice surprise to the both of us. We gratefully accepted and offered to have my flower arrangement moved to his table - which he accepted.

"My goodness, just married yesterday. How extraordinary. Maybe I'm just getting too old."

"Not at all, maybe just a tiny bit out of touch. Are you an MP, sir?" I asked quietly.

"Yes, I am." He said, slightly startled. "Why do you ask?"

"Have you ever been out to meet and really get to know your constituents? People who support you may not be able to pay a hundred pounds for a meal, but they eat just as well, if not better, than you might think. It is the young people of the world that will inherit what you give to us. Go places where they congregate and just listen. I don't mean a loud rock club, or beer hall, but places where you will find them more receptive to what you offer them. Ballrooms are good, but small dance clubs may give you more of a feel for what is actually motivating us. And I include myself and Virginia in that 'us'. I don't consider myself loftier than any of my peers. I am terribly eager to make a mark in the world, but I want to first observe and see where I can make that mark. Leadership like yours is where I could turn if I felt it would respond to my questions. Give it a try and you will be rewarded I'm sure."

"Surely Janice got it wrong when she said you were barely eighteen. You sound much older than your years my boy. Have you ever had any political leanings?"

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"I will be officially eighteen next month; actually, on the day after the signing of our little statement of Independence. Virginia will turn eighteen three months later and, fortunately, be eighteen when our child is born. My only ambition now is to take care of my family the best way I know how."

His eyebrows climbed as his eyes widened.

"That little slip of a girl is with child?" He murmured to me.

"Nobody but our parents and, of course, us, know that though. Please keep it under your hat."

"Under my - hat - you say? I love you Americans; you're so refreshing to an old stick like me. I'll have to remember that one - under my hat." He chortled to himself.

The steward appeared and announced the dining car was open for the nineteen hours sitting. We rose and wandered forward to the dining car.

Chapter 13: If Only Us... Chapter 13

Virginia and I were ushered into a dining room with a table set for eight. Waiters bustled around placing napkins in our laps and filling water glasses. I was very impressed with the service Lord and Lady Rathford commanded. Virginia had murmured to me in the passageway that she really liked Janice now that she'd had her 'attytood adjusted'. I had to agree.

Two other couples arrived and were seated at our table. The first was Harry's son, Peter and his current girlfriend Sylvia. Peter was a definite snob and kept trying to look down Virginia's blouse at every opportunity. This, even while paying attention to Sylvia. I took an instant dislike to him. Sylvia was almost a total caricature of a windblown, upper class, privately schooled English twit. She laughed when nothing was particularly funny, and failed to laugh when everyone else did. She showed a lot of teeth and spoke with a nasal whine.

The second couple were very interesting. He couldn't have been much older than Peter, but miles different in attitude and demeanor. His name was Robert and he introduced his girlfriend as Francine. Where Sylvia was outspoken on pretty much every subject, Francine withheld her opinion until asked. She never said anything she didn't mean, nor did she embellish any statement with more than enough to convey meaning. Sometimes it seemed as if her jaw was wired shut.

Once we were joined by the Rathford's, the meal progressed at a casual pace. Since we were isolated from the rest of the diners by tall dividers we could linger on our courses a little more. About halfway through dinner, I excused myself to go to the washroom. I'd been there for a few minutes until Harry pushed the door open to enter. He stepped to a sink and lathered up his hands.

"I gather you don't like young Peter's wandering eye, Tom. I've told him time and time again that someone is going to take exception to that one of these days and want do something about it."

"I've tried very hard to shrug it off, sir, but I'm afraid the next time he drops his napkin, or reaches for another butter pat and bumps my wife's breast I'm going to call him out."

"That would be unwise, dear boy. Peter is a master fencer and would probably challenge you to a duel. A far better method would be to simply ignore him to death. He cannot stand not being the center of attention. Being kept to the outskirts would drive him mad for certain."

"Noted, Harry. That sounds like a plan then. Thank you."

"Where are you and your bride staying in Amsterdam, Tom?"

"We are booked at the Apollo Hotel, wherever that is."

"I know it well. We are staying with friends, but I do hope you will allow Janice and me to call at least once and take you out for dinner."

"I'd love that very much. In behalf of Virginia I accept. We'd better be getting back or there will be talk of us, eh what?" I added, affecting a really poor English accent.

"Capital idea, old boy. Capital!" He boomed, chuckling deeply.

I really liked this guy. He could parody himself and love doing it. Hell, I'd vote for him if I could.

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The rest of dinner slipped by as rapidly as the miles. Deep afternoon merged into evening and lights along the trackbed began to flash by. We reached Bonn during dessert and had to remain in the dining car so they could tack on a replacement power car. Something had gone wrong with one of the generators and it had to be replaced. We endured gentle bumps and pushes as the new car was shunted into the train. Then the entire train was moved to a holding track for safekeeping until two more cars would join us from another train coming up from the south.

Virginia and I left the group amid smiling handshakes and air kisses between the girls. Ever since my chat with Harry in the washroom, Peter had toned down his wandering eye. Maybe Harry had had a talk with him. I voiced this to Virginia, who chuckled and told me she'd caught him ogling her and managed to stick a celery stalk in his eye. I stared at her and began to chuckle. Then it became a louder until I had to hold on to the corridor wall to keep from falling down.

"Oops. Terribly sorry Peter' I told him," said Virginia. "I do like to keep my conversations above my neckline. So much more pleasurable that way'. He seemed to agree. I hope the salt did some good."

"Oh, no! You didn't?"

"Oh, yes, I did!"

That started me all over again and we chuckled all the way up towards our compartment. The porter met us at the door and asked if we wished our compartment to be set up for night, or to wait a while.

"Night, please. We'll go take a stroll for half an hour or so. Will that be sufficient?" Virginia said in German.

"Quite so, *FrÃ¶ulein. Danke.*"

She dimpled a smile at him and we continued to stroll up the passageway. We walked the length of four more cars but were blocked from the fifth by a chain across the door. A dangling sign proclaimed in three languages that "Entrance is strictly forbidden". It looked to me as if it was the baggage car. We turned and ambled back the way we had come. I nodded at one of the couples I had entertained in the bar car and they smiled back at the two of us.

"So young." One of them said. I have ears like an eagle sometimes.

We arrived back at our compartment at almost exactly half an hour later. The porter had done himself well. The seat had been transformed into a somewhat wide lower berth and a narrower upper berth. A small night light - blue, as before on our last memorable train trip - burned near the door to the lavatory. I leaned out and managed to catch the porter's eye down the passageway. '*Wunderbar*' I mouthed to him. He grinned and tipped his hat. I closed the door and turned the lock.

This time I had not one butterfly anywhere about me. I came up behind Virginia who was hugging herself in front of the big window watching the very last of the setting sun.

"Beautiful, isn't it, Tom? I love the night."

"I love you." I nuzzled her behind the ear and kissed the nape of her neck.

She gave a little shudder and leaned back into my arms. I folded my arms around her and we just stood there, swaying slightly with the movement; lost in our own thoughts for long moments.

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"Tom? Do you think we'll be able to take trips from time to time? Maybe not long ones, but I'd even settle for day trips. I love to travel."

"Mmmm, I do also, love. Anywhere with you is heaven to me." Long pause. "Do you want the washroom first?"

"No. You go first and I'll join you afterwards. Do you suppose there's enough room for us on the lower?"

"No, but it sure would be interesting to try."

She dug me a good one in the ribs, but chuckled just the same. I lifted my sleeping shorts out of our suitcase and went into the cramped WC. Wash off, brush teeth, light shave, just a touch of after-shave and I was ready. I cleaned up after myself and called to her in the darkness that it was her turn.

She sidled past me clutching a cloth of some sort in her hands. I kissed her cheek in passing and closed the door after her. I pulled down the sheets and slipped in to the berth. It felt luxurious to lean back against the thick pillow and digest all that had happened to us today. A real Lord and Lady; how about that.

I listened to us clacking irregularly over points at some crossing followed by the rhythmic clicking of rail joints. A roadway warning bell clanged its way past us and receded into the night. So restful. So very restful. *!pzzzzzzp.*

Chapter 14: If Only Us... Chapter 14

When I woke, I really wasn't sure how long I'd been asleep or if I even was really asleep. It must have been the clack of the WC door seating itself against the clip on the wall that woke me. Thank goodness I hadn't fallen asleep for Virginia's return. She ghosted across the room and slid under the covers I held up for her.

She nestled her head up on my chest and folded a knee over my stomach. She was very warm. When I flipped the sheet back over her, she tossed it back open and told me to turn on the little night light over the table. When I did, she rose and took a model's pose in a tiny scrap of material which did nothing to hide much of anything above or below her waist.

It appeared to be a frosty pink in color with a large band of lace across the bodice and with more lace trim along the top of a little G-string covering up between her legs. I gave a moan of approval, pulled her back into bed, and lowered my head to her mouth for a kiss; which she returned hungrily.

Her hand found my shorts and completed bringing me to attention with little pats, gropes, and tickles. I responded immediately by producing the results she desired. I lowered my head and kissed a little lower. I encountered the top row of lace across her breasts and stopped. I had tasted something; peppermint?

"What the hellâ!" I said. "Peppermint?"

"This is what my friend gave me at the wedding shower - edible underwear. I have peppermint, lime, and strawberry. If I remember right, you like strawberries very much don't you?"

"Oh, yeah, right - Paris. The strawberry bath salt. Yes, I do so love strawberries."

"Can I tell her this was a success?"

"Definitelyâ!" munch, "for sureâ!" munch, "Uhhmmmm - tastyâ!" slurp.

"Hey! That's not part of the outfit kiddo - that's me!"

"Yeah, I know. Heh, heh. Tasty though."

I chewed my way through the little band of lace and made strides towards removing the 'material' over one breast. All the while Virginia was moaning and mewling like a kitten. She redoubled her fondling of my shorts but didn't bare anything yet. I finished one side and began nibbling at the other. One strap fell away, followed soon by the other.

I followed a trailing ribbon downwards to finally reach the satin-finished triangle barely covering her pubis. I tasted it with my tongue, which drew a moan from deep inside her throat. I lifted an edge of it with my teeth and slid my tongue under to touch the fine hairs it hid.

Virginia reached for the back of my head with her free hand and pulled me closer so I could examine the covering in more detail. I used my tongue to dampen the confection enough to wear a hole in it. This was the opening I needed. With great care, I nipped at it with my lips until I could tear a larger hole with my teeth. I chewed and swallowed a large portion.

When I probed deeper under the covering, Virginia moaned again, deeply, and pulled at my head to ensure I wouldn't stop. This, I decided, needed closer examination.

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I sat up, which drew a protest from Virginia until she realized that I was just repositioning along her lengthwise, but with my head at her feet. This would only be the third time I've ever done this to her. The other two times were rousing successes so this couldn't miss. I had also moved so I was outside her and she was against the back of the bunk. I lifted her top leg and placed it gently over my shoulder. The tattered 'cloth' was askew between her legs and I made fast work of it by pulling at it with my teeth until it tugged free. I pulled it from my mouth, dropped it to the floor, and regained my former position but with much more access.

I began kissing her gently while she slowly slid her fingers along the length of my erection.

"Mmmm, lover. I do like it when you get hard." She murmured. "Take these old shorts off, please?"

One handed, I lifted my hips and carefully pulled my shorts off. I had a little help so they went fast. I had to admit that things felt better when the pressure of the shorts got to be too much for me.

I resumed my quest for the grail. Virginia surprised me sometimes. One time she would be all aglow and want to begin lovemaking immediately and other times she would slowly come to the realization she was being turned on. She hungrily accepted my kisses and began moving her hips to follow my wandering tongue.

She began kissing my stomach and worked her way down to and took me into her warm mouth. I matched her ministrations as we each began moaning with inner desires. Moving in our own little worlds, we brought each other to a peak.

I sensed, rather than felt, she was about to start a climax as her legs stiffened slightly and she gave a little choked scream. She took a deep breath as she did indeed begin an orgasm. Her hips pushed into my face as I welcomed her nectar onto my waiting tongue. She was rendered almost immovable by her strong orgasm and began gasping for air. Her climactic struggle eased; she continued as before with me. She whimpered slightly when my climax began.

She had once told me that when her friend Joanie told her about boys and what happened when they made love, she told Joanie then that she didn't think she could ever take a boy into her mouth. That was something that had changed in the years we'd been making love. She would now do it without a second thought. I was oh so grateful for that.

Virginia had also told me that she was always a shy girl and to let anyone see her naked sounded horrible. That definitely had changed in our time together. I was one damn lucky guy to be the one who first got her naked though. It took a lot of tenderness, some very slow kisses, a gentle touch or two, and a number of dates in which I ended up back home tossing restlessly in bed.

Now, thank goodness, we even had a license to enjoy what we had taught each other.

With heaving chests and amid gasps of air, I reversed myself while we cooled down; lying back on the sheets.

"Oh â my. I am really going to miss these sessions when I get bigger and closer to delivery. The nurse told me we have to stop at about seven months you know?"

"Yeah, you told me. Did she say anything about other methods?"

"Well, no. Not really. She did say that when she had her baby, her husband was a wreck for three months."

"Three months! Oh, I see. You have to have time for recovery too don't you? Will you miss me?"

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"You're not going anywhere buster I can tell you that right now. I'll keep you happy if we have to do this every hour on the hour."

"I love it when you talk dirty to me."

"I am bad, aren't it?" She giggled. "Come up here and hold me tight and don't let the bed bugs bite."

She pushed herself up into a half-sitting position on the pillow and allowed my head to fall on her stomach. I turned and kissed her navel and then kissed each nipple in turn.

"You are a real man, my husband. Certainly not one of those cardboard heroes that run around school beating their breasts and trying to impress girls. You know, I loved you the minute I first saw you in the teen club that night we met. I told my best friend I was going to marry you and so I did."

"And, so you did. I hope you won't think I'm rude, but I'm about asleep right now. Your warm belly, the sound of the rails, and the hum and buzz of voice atonals are putting me to sleep."

"Goodnight my love."

She kissed the top of my head and we intertwined our fingers. We drifted to sleep.

Chapter 15: If Only Us... Chapter 15

At some point we noisily banged our way through Düsseldorf, paused for a bit, and then went upon our way to Arnhem. We were held up, not moving, several times during the night for some reason and when my little travel clock chimed seven our morning began. I found myself the possessor of a super great morning erection but, as sometimes happens when I pee, it fades to nothingness. I toyed with the idea of waking Virginia, but decided not to. Instead, I closed the door to the little WC and did my morning routines.

As I lathered up for shaving, the door opened behind me and Virginia eeled in behind me. She sat on the pot and then slid behind me to watch as I sliced away my three-day growth. Zip, zip, and it was done.

"This sounds like bad movie dialog, but I could stand here and watch you shave all day."

"I'd be pretty clean-shaven then love."

"You know what I mean, smartie!" She poked me in the kidney, knowing I was highly ticklish.

"Yeah, I guess I do." I said as I whirled around and touched the tip of her nose with a dollop of shaving cream.

She rubbed it off and wrinkled her nose at me. I wrinkled back. We'd seen this in the television series *Dobie Gillis* and thought it was cute. I supplied the punch line. "Now, cut that out!" I patted her on the butt as I left, slapping after shave to my cheeks.

We dressed swiftly, with minimal 'accidental bumping'. She gave a small sound of dismay and turned to show me her favorite bra was getting rather tight and wouldn't hold the fullness of her breasts now. I surveyed the situation with manual dexterity, causing her to giggle, and pronounced that she was filling up, something she was already fully aware of. That drew a wicked snort of derision and an apology from me. One tender kiss at the top of each breast.

"These are going to be enormous, aren't they?" She mused, almost to herself.

"Time will tell, honey. Time will tell."

Once dressed, we ambled down the corridor and paused at the steward's cubicle. He asked how we slept and, with a straight face, I replied that we slept just fine and hardly felt the shunting in Düsseldorf. He beamed and said he'd make up our compartment in a moment. I told him not to hurry as we were going to have breakfast now. He nodded.

The dining car was rather full, so we were seated across the table from a very nice mother and daughter pair. We introduced ourselves and the mom introduced her daughter and herself. They were traveling back to Amsterdam after having visited friends in Zurich. As breakfast progressed she hesitantly asked if we were the young American newlyweds.

Holy cow! Did everyone on this train know about us? I replied that we were indeed, showing a load of teeth and a happy smile. Her daughter piped up and asked me if we were really only seventeen years old. When I replied that she was and I wasn't, she turned to her mom and began wheedling at her.

"See, there. She's only seventeen, Mama. I'm eighteen now and I just can't see why you won't let Rolf and I get married. He's twenty, for goodness sake!"

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"We'll discuss this later, dear. I suspect that there may be other circumstances at play that we aren't privy to." She smiled at Virginia, who showed a bit of color at her throat.

"Oh, look! A castle!" I pointed out of the window at a huge towering stone edifice perched on top of a substantial hillside across a river.

As we took our last cup of coffee, we slowed for the border and crossed over into the Netherlands. Virginia and I had driven to Arnhem a year ago to see the sights, and now we were going to just pass through. We entered a huge classification yard, clanking over the points almost continuously. Through the noise of the bogies, Virginia and I stood and took our leave. As we left the car, I could hear her daughter begin whining again about marriage. I smiled to myself; the old lady had taken one look at Virginia and knew why we'd gotten married so young. The Concierge accepted my voucher and tip with a smile.

Our compartment had been returned to the day coach setup. The beds were folded up and made back into a bench seat. The small table was screwed to the floor fitting and a bud vase of fresh flowers was attached to the window sill. A very nice touch.

We sat in the yards for almost two hours. Virginia got restless and, I must admit, I did also, so we wandered back to the bar car. The bar itself was closed for liquor since this was a Sunday and wouldn't open until noon. We could sit in the lounge chairs though and did.

Through the huge windows surrounding us we watched little puffing engines shunting cars around, track crews tending to a stuck turnout, and several work trains passing by slowly. It was fascinating and made me think of Hans and Gerd. I asked Virginia to remind me to talk to Hans when I got back.

"Why?"

"I think he's a bigger fish in the pond that he lets on. Look at the way he had all those flowers sent to our compartment. Look at the vouchers, and the reception we've gotten from the train crew. I think he may be pretty high up in the totem pole at Stadt."

"You think so? He's such a sweet guy but he and Gerd just run that little switch engine in the yard don't they?"

"Maybe. Heck; he may run it as a hobby for all we know. He seems to be able to take off whenever he wants."

"Yeah, maybe so. Are you too comfortable here, or do you want to go back to the compartment and fool around?"

I swiftly glanced around to see if anyone heard her.

"Relax, I already looked, lover."

"Ah. Okay then. Let's go back and see what pops up."

"I already know the 'what'. The question is: what will we do about it?"

"Indeed."

We strolled back several cars to our compartment, nodding at the porter as we passed. He told us we'd be making Amsterdam at fourteen hours - about an hour late - and apologized. I told him not to worry and that we'd just go to our compartment and wait. He smiled again, tapped his nose with a forefinger, and winked. He

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was a true romantic, that one. I had a feeling that nothing short of an attack by rampaging Goths would force him to bother us.

We reached the door, slid it open, entered, and closed it. I clicked the lock on. Virginia went to the big picture window and lowered the blinds. The sun was shining into the roomette anyway, so this just put a slight green haze on everything in the compartment. She turned to me, put her arms around my neck, and nuzzled my shoulder. I did the same and we just held each other for a while.

I could feel her heartbeat pulsing through her wrists against my shoulderblade. It was slow and steady; thump - bump, thump - bump. It sped up slightly when I slid my hands down to her waist and pulled her tightly against me.

"God, Tom. I love you so much." She breathed in my ear. "Oh, what you do to me. I feel like I've run a horse race - and I was the horse. I'm all out of breath now."

"Not in any stretch of my imagination would I compare you to a horse, my love. Too short of leg, and short two legs also."

She pulled away from me, turned for the WC, looked over her shoulder, and nickered at me like a horse would. She continued into the WC and stayed for a bit. When she came out, she had a dark cloud over her head.

"What's up, honey?" I asked.

"I just looked at myself sideways in the mirror. My tummy is sticking way out."

I looked at her tummy covered in the silky sheen of panties, put my hand out, and rubbed it slowly.

"Just fine. And, just about time I expect. You're continuing to show, my love. When we get back, you're going to have to begin wearing light maternity clothes. Did you even buy any yet?"

"Oh, nooo. Not yet! I want to be a bride before I become a mom." A single tear traveled down each cheek.

I folded her into my arms, kissed the tears away, and told her she'd always be a bride, but being a mom was special. She looked up at me, smiled, snuffled a couple of times, and finished dressing. When we were back to normal, we raised the blinds again and just sat to watch the yard activity. In half an hour we began moving again. Our final leg into Amsterdam.

Chapter 16: If Only Us... Chapter 16

We pulled into the main station at Utrecht only twenty minutes behind our scheduled arrival. Apparently, we'd made up some time. There were quite a few porters outside looking into windows so I signaled one and, moments later, he tapped on our door. We started out in English, which he had to struggle through and ended up in German which he spoke well. I told him we were headed to the Apollo Hotel.

He grabbed our bags, led us off the train, and parked us temporarily near a bank of telephones. I handed him a coin and he made the call to the hotel. Virginia and I sat and chatted for a moment until he came back and said the hotel would send a car over right away. He took us through the front entrance of the station to wait. We talked with him about some of the sights close by and he indicated them on a small map I had of Amsterdam. He said the best way to get into the city proper was to take the local trains that came to the opposite side of the platform we'd arrived on. The best was a number 14 tram which would take us to city center.

A small van arrived with the hotel name on the side. I signaled to the driver to stop and he pulled to the curb. The porter and I loaded up the suitcases, I gave him a great tip which made his day probably, and we got into the van. The trip didn't last very long, but the driver chattered the whole time in mostly understandable English. His first words after greeting us were 'You are just married, yes'?

I turned to Virginia and whispered in her ear that I bet someone at the base booking office told everyone we were on our honeymoon. She whispered back that she thought so also. I shrugged my shoulders and grinned. What the hell, I might as well get some mileage out of it. I kissed her on the cheek with a loud smack. She kissed me back. The young guy grinned into his rear-view mirror at us.

We arrived at the hotel and pulled to the curb. It seemed like an army of pages descended on the van and stripped our baggage out in seconds. We followed it into the hotel and went to the registration desk to give our names. The desk agent welcomed us to the Apollo, pushed a registration form at me, and held out his hand for our passports. I gave them to him, he wrote down pertinent information on a form, and handed them back to me.

I was surprised. In Germany, the hotel keeps your passport until you check out. In Amsterdam, apparently, they don't. A good arrangement if you ever need to identify yourself when away from the hotel.

The clerk addressed me. "Welcome to the Apollo, sir. I hope your stay with us will be a happy occasion. There is a bottle of wine cooling in the suite compliments of the management to the newlyweds. Dinner starts at seventeen hundred and continue until twenty-three hundred."

He bobbed his head when we thanked him and indicated the floor for room 47 was two and the elevator was across the lobby. We turned, picked up our little carrying bags, and left for the elevator. It was a warmly paneled elevator that held a large mirror. I reflected how domesticated we both looked standing there together. I knew we were young, but we certainly looked a lot older - to me anyway.

I still had a faint feeling that my parents were going to pop around a corner and catch us doing something wrong. I'd tried to kick the wariness, but failed. When I snickered, Virginia asked me what was so funny. I told her to wait until we got to the room.

The page opened the door and gestured for us to enter. We did and immediately the size overwhelmed me. It was a huge room and, as I turned and looked through a door, I could see a small sitting room. When the page handed me the key I surreptitiously looked at the number and then at the door. They matched so we must have the right room. I had expected something a little less opulent.

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I tipped the page and closed the door behind him. Virginia closed on me and wrapped her arms around my waist tightly.

"Now, what were you snickering about in the elevator?"

"I was just thinking that my dad was going to pop around a corner and yell at me that young ladies shouldn't be seen with young men in a hotel. Funny, huh?"

She laughed out loud.

"I have that very same feeling! Somewhere in this room is my mom waiting to say something like 'Virginia! What are you doing?' It's unnerving."

I gave her a long, lingering kiss that took a count of at least twenty. She laid her head on my shoulder and nuzzled my neck.

"Let's have some wine. Looks like a good one," she said, pulling it out of the cooler and wiping the label with the towel.

She held it up to me. Now, I'm not really a great wine connoisseur but even I can tell a good wine when I see it. This one looked good. I peeled the top, screwed the opener into the cork, and pulled. It popped open and I poured a little in my glass. I tasted it, and highly approved. I poured us both a glass and we went to the sofa and sat down.

I put my feet up on the little ottoman and relaxed. She sat next to me, turned, and laid her head in my lap with her legs hanging over the arm. I reached into my bag on the floor and pulled out a small book. She looked up at me and tried to read it upside down.

"What's that?"

"Elizabeth Barrett Browning, my love. Shall I read?"

"Oh, please do. I shall listen intently, sip my wine, and probably drift off to sleep."

"I beginâ"

I read to her for about ten minutes as she continued to sip at the wine. She laid her palm flat on my chest because she liked to feel the resonance my voice caused. Whenever we went into poetry mode, we sounded like eighteenth century lovers. We spoke in rounded tones and flowery language. Those who might have overheard us would think we were probably nuts, but we didn't care.

A soft buzz signaled her appearance at the door of sleep. I gently took the empty glass, set it on the table, and followed it with mine after downing the last. I slowly reduced the volume of my voice until I was barely above a whisper. She moved softly against me, tucked her hand under her head, and began to breathe slowly. She was asleep.

As she slept, I watched the shadows move on the building across the street. They slid downwards and presumably crossed the street to ride up our building. Dusk fell and still she slept. I kissed her forehead and she moaned in her sleep, but smiled.

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I lay my head back and closed my eyes. I didn't fall asleep, but was simply at rest and very, very happy. Happy with my life so far. I knew I was not even eighteen yet, but that was coming next month. I was married to a wonderful girl that, between us, we decided that getting pregnant was the only way we could stay together. I was devoted to her and, I fervently hoped, she was devoted to me. I could have turned into a rotten teenager but she had saved me two years ago. She wouldn't let me do things that would hurt me. She kept me straight and narrow. She was my wife and my life.

Later, in the half-light of dusk she woke. Not with a start, but with a languorous overhead stretch that highlighted her breasts under her blouse. As she stretched, I placed a palm under a breast. She cracked one eyelid and smiled up at me; her hair framing her face.

"Hi, lover." I said.

"Hi, yourself." She answered. "Is that an invitation resting on my chest?"

"It could be, if you want it to be. Otherwise, it's just a happy fondle."

"Well, fondle to your heart's content, but please unhook me. This bra's too tight for me now."

She sat up a little so I could reach under and unfasten it. When the hooks parted, she gave a delicious shudder and lay back down. She giggled when she encountered my lap.

"Let me make love to you, honey. You've been so wonderful to me I should give some back."

"Not necessary, love. I'm fine."

"I know that because I can feel it, but you've been so patient and reassuring me I'm desirable even though I'm getting fat."

"You're not getting fat; you're getting pregnant with our baby. It is a loving growth that will continue to give us love the rest of our life. But I like to see you happy!"

Afterwards: "There. All better now. Want to help me take a bath?"

"Does Anthony desire Cleopatra? Does Clyde want Bonnie? Does Tom wash Virginia's back? You bet!"

We adjourned to the bathroom and filled the tub. No hanky panky this time - just a straight back wash. I did slip in some strawberry powder though. She smelled it and asked where it was. I told her I'd stashed some in my bag for moments like this. She wrinkled her nose and smiled at me. I wrinkled back.

"Now, cut that out!"

Chapter 17: If Only Us... Chapter 17

We went to dinner that evening down in the hotel dining room. The service was decent, but nothing to get excited about. We were treated as Americans get treated just about anywhere in Europe - with somewhat polite indifference. About mid-meal I decided to see if our waiter, Ulf, was faking his accent and asked him, *auf Deutsch*, where he was from.

A huge change came over him. At first, he just stared at me like I'd spoken Sanskrit or something like that then he realized I'd spoken to him in German. When he responded, I asked another question - where in Wiesbaden he was from - *SÄ!dost*, near the *Hauptbahnhof*? I wasn't very up to date on local dialects but the shot I'd taken hit home.

He beamed with delight and broke into a torrent of German that I was hard pressed to follow. By the time he wound down, he had told me his entire family was from a small housing complex about four blocks from the train station and how the hell did I know that. I just slyly winked and told him that Americans know everything.

That brought a hearty laugh from him and the fish eye from the Maitre'd. He stifled it, rearranged his feature to haughty disdain, fell into a snicker, and recovered again. He turned and went back into the kitchen.

"What was that all about? I could hardly understand him."

"Ulf is from Wiesbaden and I happened to hit pay dirt when I told him where he was from. A great guess by the way. He is suitably impressed and will probably fight for our table the rest of the time we're here."

"Well, good; I was beginning to wonder if we had stepped in something on the way down here."

"No matter where we step, my love, we always come out smelling like strawberries," I smirked.

She smiled back at me and puckered her lips to blow me a kiss. I puckered back.

We were a bit tired from our trip so our decision to stay in the room this evening after a light dinner at seven was a good one. We took separate baths, changed into some really comfortable night clothing and just lounged around reading. I had one of my usual science fiction books and Virginia had a baby book. Every once in a while she'd get my attention and read something aloud from her book. If it sounded strange, I'd tell her. On more than one occasion, she herself thought it was a bit weird.

"It says here that 'your child may start to walk as early as twelve or fourteen months'. My mom told me I was standing next to chairs at nine months and walking at ten."

"Me too. I was walking very early. By the time I was eighteen months my mom had to put a harness on me whenever we went out so she could keep me from wandering."

"A harness! You mean like a dog or something?"

"Well, sorta. This was the early forties and kids wore them all the time. I have a picture of me in a harness somewhere. I looked cute."

"I just bet you did. I'm not going to put a harness on any kid of mine that's for sure."

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"Mm-mm."

She kept popping up with odd little facts that sounded pretty nutty to me, or maybe just plain wrong. According to the author, we should practically gown and mask ourselves just to heat baby bottles; that is just not gonna happen. She continued to read in silence punctuated by an occasional 'hah' or a snicker.

Finally, she clapped the book shut, tossed it onto the table, and snorted. She'd had enough education for one night. She launched herself across the floor on hands and knees to push her head into my lap like a rather large, cute dog. When I reached down and scratched her behind the ears she broke up.

"Come on, Tommmm." She wheedled. "Let's read some poetry, HmMMM?"

I slipped a bookmark into my book, closed it, and nodded my head. She clapped her hands and dove into our suitcase for our Browning book. Once it was in hand, she slid into the couch next to me, wiggled her hips to get comfortable, and lay back with her head in my lap. She indicated she'd start first and began to read.

I closed my eyes and listened to her soft voice as she read a poem. I could listen to her all night and, we had actually done that once. We were then in our self-imposed sex ban right after my impregnation attempt and to help us through the night we read to each other until dawn on several occasions.

As she read, I dropped a hand to her stomach and lay my palm flat against her diaphragm. I could feel her voice more than I could hear it. She stopped at the end of it and looked up at me. I opened my eyes and smiled at her. She handed me the book.

I began to read the next poem to her. She pushed her ear up against my tummy so she could listen to the buzz of my speech also. As I read, she began to carefully untie the belt on my robe. I was distracted and read the same two lines twice. She never heard me though as concentrated as she was on pulling that cord loose.

Her warm fingers slid inside the opening and touched the skin of my stomach very lightly. Her nails scratched across and created ripples in my muscles that set her giggling. The more she scratched, the more my stomach jumped. She had found one spot that really made me jump.

Fair was fair, I thought, so I did the same to her. As I read, I tugged at the knot on her robe until it opened. Since her robe was made of silk, it just slid open and my palm went flat against the taut fabric of her underwear. She was very warm.

I lifted my hand so I could turn a page and she whimpered lightly until I put my palm back where it started. As I rotated it flat across her lower stomach I could feel the irregularities that were forming inside that would keep expanding as she continued to carry our baby.

There was a distinct bulge over the waistband of her panties now. I traced it using two of my fingers. She hummed tunelessly with her eyes closed as I fondled the growing bump.

The book forgotten, she opened her eyes and asked me if I were hoping for a boy or a girl. I thought about it for almost a full minute and then told her - a girl. She looked a little surprised and told me that she would have bet I'd want a boy. I said that a girl would be just fine - especially if she turned out a great as her.

She smiled, closed the book, and reached up to hold me around the neck. I bent down and kissed her very slowly, using a little tongue, which she likes. When she double-tapped my teeth like we started doing a while back, I did the same to her. We hadn't used that signal in a long time. We first invented it as a way of saying 'I love you' without anyone being the wiser. It was great when we were with our parents or someplace we could

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be overheard.

We broke our lingering kiss but she continued to hold me. I slumped down just a little more so she was lying more comfortably across my legs. I continued to slowly rub my palm around and around over her stomach. She purred like a cat and stretched her arms over her head. This pushed her breasts upwards and made one of them visible when her robe slid open.

I immediately shifted my palm to ride higher until I was circling this breast very lightly. Her skin began to dimple with goose bumps. She drew in a breath and blew it out slowly when she finished her stretch. Very slowly, she used one hand to open the robe the rest of the way.

"This one is lonesome too. Can I get some attention for it?" She wheedled at me.

"Certainly, my love. I think that can be arranged. Here, you keep this one warm and I'll warm the other."

I took her hand and placed it over the full breast I'd been stroking and moved my attentions to her other breast. As I continued my ministrations, she began lightly pinching her breast between thumb and forefinger. She paused a moment, touched her finger to her tongue, and told me she tasted her own milk.

"Really? Let me taste."

I dropped my head downward and gently took the nipple I was attending to into my mouth and squeezed carefully with my lips. A tiny drop of liquid seeped out and spread over my tongue. It did indeed taste like milk. Very sweet and very thin.

"Wonderful! Is this about time for that to start?" I asked.

"According to my mom, it can start anytime now. She says it gets annoying, but pleasurable when making love. When you did that just now, I got all wiggly inside."

"Wiggly? How?"

"Sort of tingly and my chest muscles jumped a little. I'm very sensitive right now and when you kissed me just now, the sensation was wild."

I kissed her other nipple and got the same reaction; a slight dribble of fluid. I made a mental note to be much more careful handling her breasts now because she told me they began to hurt sometimes. The book I read said that light massages helped. I was definitely up for that at any time.

She smiled and said something like 'Mmmmpf'. This, I had learned, was a pleasant sound she made. She was idly tracing her fingertips from breast to breast making her nipples stand up tautly.

"I am definitely larger here now. Do you think they'll go back down after the baby is weaned?"

"I hope so, but not all the way down. Your breasts are beautiful, no doubt about that, but a cup size larger would be nice. Anything more than that makes you look top heavy what with your narrow waist."

"Well, my waist isn't very narrow right now is it?"

"You're coming along just fine my love."

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"Remember the very first time you put your hand down there? I was so nervous."

"*You* were nervous? I was so afraid that you'd clout me that I almost didn't try it. It took me ten minutes just to build up the nerve to do it. I was a sweat-soaked wreck!"

She chuckled deep in her throat and smiled up at me.

"If you hadn't tried it, I would have just kept kissing you until you did. I was so hot that night. I bet my temperature went up five degrees in that movie."

"I know. I could feel the heat rising from your open blouse. When I first touched your breast, it was really warm. Between my touching you and the lack of resistance to my other wandering hand I finally convinced myself to try and at least put my hand in your lap. You have no idea how much perspiration was streaming off me when I touched down on your thigh."

"The second you touched my thigh, I had a little mini orgasm. Could you feel me jump?"

"No, not really. I was far more conscious of how hard I was at the time. I didn't dare to even try to adjust it for fear of what you'd think."

"It all seems so silly now doesn't it?"

"Yeah, in a way. But not so silly when you think about all the tales I'd heard of 'easy girls'. You resisted me pretty well you know. I loved you more each time I tried and you stopped me."

"Well, every time I stopped you I was terribly afraid you wouldn't try again. I wanted so bad to make love to you that night."

"And I wanted so bad to make love to you that night. Strange, isn't it?"

"Mm-mm. Here we both wanted the exact same thing but I was too scared to offer it because we might think badly of each other."

"And I was too scared that I might seem so aggressive that it would chase you away."

"And now we're married and we can do anything we want."

"That we can. We're probably giving people in the hotel across the street a really good show you know. The curtains are open."

"Who cares? We're probably too small so what the heck?"

"True. You know, Amsterdam is the sex capital of the world. More sex products are shipped from here than anywhere else in the world."

She looked at me directly and asked me how I knew that. I told her I read it in a brochure on the train. I guess it helps to advertise. I added that maybe we should buy some joke stuff for our friends. She thought a moment and smiled an affirmative vote. A great idea she said.

"Nothing too big though. We don't have a lot of space in our baggage. Something very special for Joanie though." I said thoughtfully.

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"Now, there's a great idea. She'd go nuts over it I bet since it came from Amsterdam."

We continued to fondle one another until we gave in to passion. Afterwards, sated from our efforts, we rested.

"There. Now we can get to bed and sleep for at least a little while." She said with a grin.

"I love you so much. Boy, what you do for me."

"And I love you too you big, horny, guy. Long may your banner wave."

"You are one very satisfying married broad. You know that?"

"I bet you say that to all your wives don't you?"

"Nah, just the ones that play ball."

She bopped my on the chin with her fist and told me there'd better never be any other's besides her. I pledged that there weren't. She suddenly sat up, swing her legs off the couch, and pulled me to my feet. She marched to the window, allowed her robe to fall open, and did a very nice curtsy. Not to be outdone, I bowed a couple of times, we kissed passionately, and then I pulled the shades closed.

"That probably gave the old guy in room 312 across the way a heart attack."

She giggled, nodded her head, and ran for the bed only to launch her body at it from five feet away. She hit the pillow, folded the coverlet back, and held out a hand with crooked finger.

"Come on, lover. Let's get some sleep here."

I laughed and walked to the bed. When I slipped in next to her, she threw a leg over my thighs, nuzzled her head into the crook of my neck, and tickled me with her eyelashes on the underside of my chin. She had great eyelashes.

I kissed her again, deeply, shut off the table lamp and we cuddled ourselves to sleep.

Chapter 18: If Only Us... Chapter 18

We spent the whole time next day wandering around central Amsterdam. I took scores of pictures of anything and everything. There seemed to be thousands of bridges over the canals and most of them were not meant for vehicular traffic. They rose so steeply at times that horizontal slats had been nailed to use like a ladder. Virginia didn't like them so we kept to the more traditional bridges.

We stopped atop one of them and took pictures of the barge traffic passing below us. She waved at every one and they waved back. One grizzled old guy pulled his horn lanyard right under the bridge and we both jumped a foot. I could hear him laughing diabolically with echoes from under the bridge lending a spooky sound. We rushed to the other side and waved at him. Quickly, Virginia pulled a small apple from the bag I'd bought her and tossed it to him. He deftly caught it, took a bite, and waved up at her.

Lunch time found us in a huge cobbled square under cover of trees listening to a big band organ. There were only three tunes it played so after hearing each one of them for what seemed the tenth time we got up and left. Clear down the block we could hear that thing booming away.

Everyone seemed so friendly. We were smiled at, waved at, and greeted in a lot of different languages. Strangely enough, nobody spoke any English to us the whole day. German was pretty much the universal language it seemed - along with Dutch, that is- so we used it exclusively.

Trams seemed to run everywhere, but only on the main streets. With so many canals, it was probably hard to maintain rail lines when the bridges had to be opened so much during the day. It only took just a little silver for a ride that could last all the way across town. We would consult our guidebook, pick a destination, and figure out how to get there by tram. We may have walked some extra distance, but it was easier that way.

That evening Virginia got a little nauseous. We reviewed what we'd eaten and thought it might have been just a touch of too much rich food. I asked her when she was supposed to stop drinking alcohol and she looked a little downcast. She'd forgotten that she'd had a draught of my beer at lunch. The doctor had warned her that at some point soon she'd have to stop drinking anything alcoholic so it wouldn't harm the baby. We were young, but we were learning. I was not looking forward to a few months of enforced celibacy. Well, maybe oral sex wouldn't count.

She didn't want to have any dinner so I went down to the dining room and ate alone. Our waiter, Ulf, now considerably friendlier, asked about Virginia so I told him she'd had a hard day and didn't want to eat tonight. He proclaimed that 'not a good thing' and promised to have something wrapped for me to take back up to her. He added that 'she need to keep her strength for the baby'. Apparently, she was beginning to show to others also.

She was asleep on the couch when I got back. Her head resting on one thrown back arm and the other lying down along her side. Our book of poems was turned face down in front of her. I gently kissed her forehead and, when she cracked an eye, I told her I'd come bearing gifts of food. I held the paper bag containing the little pasteboard boxes of food that Ulf had had prepared in the kitchen for her.

I set her dinner out on the table, lifted her from her nest, and sat her in the chair. She smiled wanly, sniffed, and looked a little more interested. I took the covers off and she began to sample everything. She settled on a whole carton of soup, a piece of broiled veal, and some green beans. She had apparently decided she was hungry after all.

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The phone rang. It was Lord Rathford, Harry, inviting us to go out on a barge trip the next day. I asked Virginia if she felt up to it and she nodded so I told him we'd be delighted. He told us there would be a taxi at the entrance to the hotel at ten the next morning. I thanked him and we hung up.

It was late now and we were very tired so I helped Virginia over to the bed and pulled her slippers off. I massaged her feet while she moaned in pleasure. She scooted back a little so I could take her pants off. When I unbuttoned her blouse, she shrugged out of it. I went to our suitcase and held up several nightgowns until she nodded. I brought it to her and she held her hands up to let me drop it over her head. She reached back and unsnapped her bra, which I folded and put on the chair next to the bed.

I think she was asleep before her head hit the pillow. A small snore sounded loud in the room. I touched her cheek with my fingers and she moved a little but didn't wake. As I looked down I considered myself a pretty lucky guy to have wooed and won her.

Chapter 19: If Only Us... Chapter 19

We awoke to the muted sounds of traffic filtering through the curtains. It was eight in the morning of a beautiful blue day outside. Virginia woke slowly, stretching languorously, and turned to me as she did. Her breasts poked me in the chest. She flinched a little.

"A little sore this morning, Honey?"

"Yeah. Just the nipples though. The rest is just super sensitive to the touch."

"Oh, you poor thing. Let me kiss and make feel better."

I bent forward and gently kissed each pink tipped breast.

"Now, all better?"

She slapped me on the shoulder in response. Then she discovered my morning woody. This seemed to interest her even more.

"Joanie told me that guys get this way almost every morning. Is there a reason?"

"You tell me. I've been spooning a very warm, sexy girl for eight hours, something like that?"

"You know what I mean."

"Yeah, it happens a lot of mornings - for me anyway. I started doing this around the time I went through puberty. At first I couldn't figure out why it happened until I asked my dad. He was evasive, and all he would tell me was it had something to do with when I got older. It was another year before he actually told me why guys got hard. He was pretty embarrassed about it too."

"My mom was the same way. I asked her why guys kept pushing and pulling at their pants during a date. The answer was that guys get something called an erection and it made them get bigger and harder than normal. I was supposed to not encourage any guy when he got that way. Until you came along, I didn't either. When I dropped my hand that time on the train and felt how hard you were I knew the time had come to find out for sure."

"Really? I thought I'd embarrassed you because of the flush under your chin."

"I flushed when I thought about how I was going to encourage you even more. Turned out, I didn't need to try did I?"

"Well, no. But I sure was nervous that night."

"Me too. You have no idea."

She kissed me deeply, rose up on her elbow, and slid off the bed. Grabbing up her nightgown, she went into the bathroom and closed the door. I heard water running into the tub.

I got up and tapped on the door to remind her of our meeting with Harry and Janice at ten this morning. It was now eight forty-five. She rushed through her morning routines and allowed me to enter the steamy bathroom.

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The delicate scent of vanilla drifted around me as I brushed teeth, shaved, and applied after shave.

Soon we were both ready to go. We stopped briefly in the lobby for a cup of coffee and some wonderful pastry and then went outside into a cool day to wait for the Rathford's.

The barge trip was very enjoyable. The Rathford's had chartered a tourist barge with a covered afterdeck that used to be the aft hold. The covers had been removed and the hold fitted with bench seats and a table. The table was loaded with all kinds of snacks and several wine bottles sat in a rack attached to the port side. Virginia stayed away from the wine and got a nodded approval from Janice.

After our first encounter in the lounge car of the train, Janice began to warm up to us - to Virginia more than me, I think. The two of them sat off to one side and talked quietly while Harry and I stood on the deck and took pictures. It was from a different perspective to see people waving from the bridges we passed under.

We slowly motored up one canal and down another while snacking on the food. I had several glasses of wine, and made Virginia a small sandwich filled with ham slices and cheese. She pronounced it delicious. I fixed myself one and used a very potent smelling hot mustard that very nearly brought tears to my eyes. As it was, my sinus's cleared right out.

In time, the late afternoon overtook us and we pulled back to the pier we had originally departed from. Janice and Virginia reluctantly parted with a heartfelt hug; Harry and I shook hands. Janice pressed a paper into Virginia's hands telling her it was their address in Surrey and to please write when she found time. She turned to me.

"Take care of your young wife Tom. She is most delightful. Harry and I have been married for over forty years now and perhaps we have become a bit stodgy. Having you two near us spiffed up what might have become just another vacation for us. By all means, send us pictures of the young one."

"I will, milady, I shall probably overwhelm everyone with pictures if given my head."

She laughed and waved goodbye as they got into their taxi. Virginia and I hailed another one to take us back to the hotel.

The next two days passed swiftly at times and slowly at others. The citizens of the city were wonderful to us as we wandered through shops and cobbled streets. At night, back in the hotel, we would make slow, lazy, love or just hold each other until we fell asleep. We were so happy together now that we were married. Before that wonderful event, there was always a looming shadow of urgency to everything we did together. Now, the urgency had been erased and we had almost adjusted to being together for the rest of our life. I fervently hoped we would never get fully adjusted. That would take all the fun and adventure out of it.

In one of the innumerable little squares located through the city, we watched a very good magician ply his trade. Among other things, he drew a member of the audience out and asked her to tie a blindfold over his eyes. When she did, he did a little comedic scene in which he stumbled around looking for his box of tricks. When he fell over it, the audience laughed. They made even more noise when he reached into the young woman's backpack and pulled a rabbit out of it. I tossed a few guilders into the tall hat he'd thoughtfully placed in front of his makeshift stage.

Our final day dawned grey and overcast. No rain, but the promise of it was in the air. We bantered with each other a little as we packed and then called down to the desk for a porter. We followed him down, stopped at the desk, and paid our bill. It was a little more than I'd planned, but I'd forgotten the city tax. No matter though as we still had almost a third of what we were given left. I noticed that it had started to drizzle outside the

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front entrance.

It began to rain a little harder as the taxi slopped through the puddles on the way to the train station. Once inside, we went out to the gate of the platform and asked if we could board. The guard told us we'd have to wait for yet another ten minutes. We sat on benches and talked until he motioned that we could go through. I passed him our tickets, which he glanced at, and we walked down the platform to locate our car.

Once aboard - we were the first to board - the porter led us to our compartment. It was almost the same layout as our first compartment, but there were no flowers and smelled like cigar smoke. He saw Virginia wrinkle her nose and asked if everything was correct. I told him that stale smoke made her nauseous. He professed distress that there were no empty compartments this trip but promised to bring some air freshener to help. In the meantime, he opened the window and showed us that if we turned on the WC fan we'd create a cross-draft.

I thanked him and asked if we'd be leaving on time. He assured us we would and departed. We sat on the seat and looked disconsolately out the window at the grey skies and the falling rain.

"A sad way to end our honeymoon isn't it?" Virginia sighed.

"Oh, I don't know. We had a wonderful time, made some really steamy sex, got taken out by a Lord and Lady; what more would you want?"

"God! That's why I love you so much," she smiled at me. "You always look on the bright side of things."

"You've got to stop being a gloomy puss kiddo. Smile and everyone wonders what you're up to!"

She face brightened and she laughed.

"You're right. Want something to eat? I squirreled away some of those pastries on the barge."

"Oh, yum. Let me at them. You didn't happen to store away some coffee did you?"

"Nope, but I did take two of those little bottles of milk. They're right here." She said, digging at her small bag.

She pulled two pint bottles of milk out and we toasted each other with a clink and gobbled down the pastry. It was sweet and delicious.

At precisely eleven-seventeen the engineer tooted twice and we clanked into motion to start out the maze of tracks making up the Utrecht yards. After a seemingly endless sound of crossing points, we hit the last set and entered the main. There, we picked up speed rapidly. Our car was quite a ways back from the engine so when we went around a right curve we could look out and see the head engine. A huge plume of smoke belched out from the stack and lay flat along the ground as we passed.

This trip wouldn't take near as long as the trip north. Instead of waiting in yards for a connecting train, we would just stop briefly for sections to be cut out and left for pickup. Our section would continue onwards towards Germany and, eventually, Switzerland. The porter arrived and asked us which seating for dinner we would like. We discussed it and chose the early seating at seven in the evening. He nodded and left us for a moment then came back with the conductor who verified and punched our tickets.

"Please have a very good trip," was all he said when he handed us back our tickets.

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Virginia took them and folded them into our book of poems for safekeeping. She was determined to keep everything relating to our honeymoon so she could put them into a scrapbook. I never really got into scrapbooking, but she'd had several of them lying around in her room. I supposed they would now end up in 'our' room at my house. That sounded strange - 'our room'. It finally, at that moment, really hit me that I was going to be living with Virginia under my dad's roof in a single bedroom. What a rush.

Chapter 20: If Only Us... Chapter 20

The trip was uneventful except for a fine dinner in the dining car. The Maitre'd sat us at a table for four and as we were ordering, another couple were ushered to our table. The woman spoke nothing but German but the guy had a smattering of English. Startling me slightly, it was Virginia that spoke to the girl first - in German. She asked if they were on vacation.

The girl looked very embarrassed and turned to her companion. He shrugged his shoulders and told us that they'd decided to elope and were coming back to - as they put it - face their parents after having second thoughts in Amsterdam. They were a bit puzzled by our smiles but once we told them we'd just gotten married ourselves they understood.

After dinner the four of us went back to the bar car and sat for about an hour. I bought drinks for the three of us and a small apple cider for Virginia. The girl, Wilhelmina, looked at Virginia and asked if she was 'with child'. Her boyfriend, Stanni, looked at her with shock on his face that she would be so direct, but Virginia simply nodded and held up four fingers.

That triggered a girl to girl conversation that left Stanni and I out in the cold. We went over to the bar and ordered two beers. We chatted about things in general and when I told him we were from Stadt he brightened considerably. It turned out they were from a town about thirty kilometers from Stadt. We exchanged addresses and when he looked at mine he raised his eyebrows. Then he told me with a grin he thought I was a native German.

I laughed and said that no, I wasn't; just that I'd spent a lot of time out in town and with a lot of contact with German boy scouts. He told me he was in scouting also. He was in charge of a group of seventeen scouts. We discovered that he and I had been to most of the same camps but never met each other.

Virginia came up to me and begged off for the evening saying she had a small headache from all the smoke in the car. I had to agree so we took our leave of Wilhelmina and Stanni and wandered our way back to our compartment.

The porter nodded as we passed and told us he'd made up the room for night, but we would be arriving in Stadt at very close to six in the morning so he could awaken us at five-fifteen if we desired. I groaned, but agreed that perhaps he should make sure we were up. He smiled and made a notation in his desk notebook. We said our good nights and closed the door to our compartment.

I slipped Virginia's clothes off, and she held up her arms for her nightgown. I dropped it over her head and almost carried her to the berth. She was asleep before her head hit the pillow. I joined her in sleep almost immediately.

We woke briefly as we were shunted around in the Bonn yards. I got up and used the WC while Virginia went back to sleep. The next morning my alarm buzzed relentlessly until I sat up and shut it off.

"Morning already?" Asked Virginia sleepily.

"Afraid so, my love. Time to wakey, wakey," I said, pulling the covers off her.

"Oh, God! I've married a sadist. Do you do this every morning?"

"Naw. Only when I want to tease my wife. When you've been married as long as we have it's to be expected."

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"Not by me. You're too damn cheerful. What time is it?"

"Five-ten. We arrive at six. Better get a move on if we want breakfast."

Moments later, the porter tapped at our door. I told him we were awake and thanked him. We stumbled through our morning routines and made ourselves presentable. As we passed the porter's office, he asked if he could set up the compartment. I told him to go ahead - and thanks. We continued back to the dining car.

Breakfast at this early hour consisted of coffee and pastry only. Apparently, the full breakfast was only when the train continued throughout the next evening. I couldn't eat very much anyway. For some strange reason, I was getting nervous. When I voiced my concern to Virginia she told me she felt that way also. Together, we managed to narrow it down to just getting back home to more familiar surroundings and having to blend back into our routines.

"But now, we're married aren't we? That's going to make it seem different when we start school this fall." Virginia said.

"Well, yeah. Especially since you're going to be wearing maternity clothes right at the start."

Oh, no! I guess I'd forgotten that. I will won't I?"

"Definitely. And you will look wonderful in them."

"Oh, I hope so. I don't want to be frumpy."

"Honey, you'll never in a million years be frumpy."

We watched the scenery whiz past as we ate. Cows stood in fields, birds took wing, the winds blew, and all was right in our world.

Speaking of a clear blue sky: "Tom? How does the name 'Marie' strike you?"

I repeated the name slowly several times, rolling it off my tongue and pronounced it a very nice name. "Is there a reason for asking me?" As if I didn't know.

"Yes. If I have a girl, I'd like to name her Marie. Would that be okay with you?"

"Anything you desire if fine with me. Marie is a wonderful name. I've always liked the name Alexandra too. Maybe a middle name?"

"Alexandra? That a good name too. Marie Alexandra Oldman. It hangs together very nicely. What if it's a boy?"

"I haven't given that any thought because I've decided I want a girl. But I do like the name Bill; not William though, just Bill. William's get called Bill anyway so why not just short circuit the nickname and name him Bill?"

"That's a wonderful idea! I like it."

We left the dining car and went back to the compartment. The porter had made it up for day use so we just sat on the seat and watched the countryside again. We were on the opposite side from the sunrise so it wasn't

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washing out the colors.

As six o'clock neared, we gathered our stuff and lugged it down to the end vestibule. The porter stood with us and indicated he'd call for a little help when we arrived. He pulled out an impressive old watch and noted the time. He said we'd be three minutes late - and we were.

We pulled into Stadt's main train station at six oh-three. Hurriedly we passed our baggage down to the waiting wagon held by a smiling porter. We turned to the compartment porter and thanked him profusely for his help. I passed him a larger than normal tip which brought a smile.

"*Viel Glück!*" He called out to us as we walked away. I raised my hand in salute. We threaded our way through the crowded station and went out the front entrance. We were supposed to wait for someone to pick us up but didn't see anyone we knew. Down the block I spied my dad's red and black Volkswagen bus zipping through traffic. He pulled up right in front of us and bailed out. Virginia's dad was in the passenger seat and he got out also.

We pounded each other's backs and they squeezed Virginia several times and then we piled the luggage into the rear compartment over the engine. When we were situated inside, my dad fired up and we headed up to the housing area.

Home coming was a joyous event. Both of our families were there at my house and we all tried to talk at once. My brother dug me in the ribs and asked if I'd had fun. He wiggled his eyebrows up and down at me. I poked him on the shoulder for an answer.

Virginia was busy showing off all the stuff we'd bought in Amsterdam. Her mom asked about the brown parcel, but she deftly slid it deeper under her clothes. It was the present we'd come up with for Joanie and probably wouldn't be well received right now. Everyone was talking at the same time and the din was unbelievable.

Amid cups of coffee, we settled down in the living room and started to relate all the things we'd done. After an hour, my dad stood and asked if we'd like to see what they'd done to our room. I said that I'd like that a lot and we all trooped down the hall. He had moved my brother out of the end room, which was way bigger than my old room, and between he and Bear, they'd added furniture from Virginia's room to mine and created a very nice place for us to live.

Virginia sat on the bed and put her feet up. This signaled concern in her mom's eyes until she told her that just her feet were tired. Relief washed over her mom. We got taken on a tour of what my family called the 'other half' of our quarters. Since my dad was a Light Colonel, he had two apartments on the same floor. What the housing office had done for higher ranking types was to bore a hole in the wall between two apartments so that they were connected by a short archway.

This meant that there were two complete kitchens, three bedrooms on one side and two on ours, three bathrooms, two living rooms, and two utility rooms. My parents had cleaned out all the junk in the spare kitchen and stocked it for Virginia and me. The living room held even more items from my room and Virginia's. They were practically giving us the entire half of the quarters. My brother was the only one living with us.

"And, here's the keys to your new home," my dad said, handing me a key ring with several keys on it. Enjoy!"

We shook hands and then I turned to Bear and shook his hand also.

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"Thanks so much, all of you. We really appreciate everyone's effort. Once we get settled down, we intend to have everyone over for dinner. We haven't picked a day yet, but we will."

Virginia and her mom took off for some mysterious errand and my dad and Bear went back to work. I was at loose ends so I just went into our room and unpacked. I found that most of my clothing and stuff was in the lower two drawers of the chest of drawers. As we'd figured, Virginia soon wouldn't be able to bend over very well. Thus, she had the top drawers

I went to the bathroom and laid out my shaving kit and toothbrush. I symbolically added Virginia's right next to mine. Damn, it felt really strange to be thinking of being here with Virginia in the same house and room - attached to my parent's apartment. I remembered way back when we used to worry about them coming upon us in surprise and now we would be living together right here.

Virginia returned and came into the living room where my mom and I were sipping coffee. The moment I saw her I could see her practically glowing with an inner light. She twirled around in front of me so I could see her new maternity skirt and top. She didn't fill it out much yet, but she readily took to the wearing of it with no shyness.

I did a quick mental calculation. We'd gotten pregnant (I didn't think of it as just me who'd gotten her pregnant) back in early March. It was now the end of June. Four months. I could see her jaw line had smoothed somewhat, her breasts had filled out nicely, and a small bulge at her waist was showing.

"Do you like it, Tom?" She asked.

"I love it, honey. Let's go to the club for lunch and show it off."

"Now! What if someone sees us - me?"

"So what. Let them be envious as hell."

She blushed delicately, smiled, and told me she'd get ready. I cleaned up from our trip and we left for the club. Out in the car, I told her I meant the Teen Club. She shot me a look, but then smiled and told me she'd have to get used to it anyway so it might as well be now.

Holding hands, we tried to slip into the club unobtrusively, but caught the eye of both Cleo and Joanie who jumped up and rushed at us squealing.

Cleo stopped dead about ten feet from us and Joanie narrowly missed crashing into her. Joanie looked at Cleo for an explanation and then followed Cleo's pointing finger which was indicating Virginia's maternity skirt.

"Is that what I think it is?" Opened Joanie.

Virginia nodded.

"That must have been some honeymoon guys. Really! Iâ 'lohâ 'now I understand the urgency. How silly of me. Sorry."

Joanie subsided into quiet silence.

"Come on Joanie. Don't be sorry, feel happy for us," I said. "We can handle it."

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"I know YOU can, but how about ME? I now have a best friend that's going to have a baby. I've got to go out and buy stuff, I have to sew stuff; I have to plan a shower!"

"Wait, wait, Joanie. Take a deep breath and don't hyperventilate," said Virginia. "We'll still be here in a couple of months. We're not going anywhere. My dad got extended here and Tom's dad isn't leaving for another year either."

"Wellâgreat then! I still want to plan and host the shower though. Tell me when we should have it."

"Okay, I'll do that. Now, let's eat. I'm hungry."

We entered the snack bar area and I immediately saw quite a few of my friends scattered around with their girlfriends. I was unprepared for a huge slap on my back from Gerald though. He greeted me like an old friend.

"Tom! How was the honeymoon? Take some good pictures?"

"Uh, yes I did Jerry." Apparently, our past differences were forgotten.

"Great to hear that. I've been working on my shots and guarding to my left like you said. Coach thinks I might be better used as a midfielder instead of a forward. What do you think?"

"Jerry, you are a hell of a player and do a lot of scoring, but the key to any team is field work. If you get moved to midfielder, you'll have a lot of opportunities to feed the ball just where it's needed. Who are they moving into your place?"

"David. He's scored just a few more times than me and he has the more powerful kick. I think the move would be a good thing. Have you decided to coach this year?"

"I don't know yet. I'm pretty busy at the PAO, so I'd only be available on weekends, but I'll give it a try."

"Great! Wonderful! I'll tell the team then." He wandered off.

We found a table and were immediately surrounded by girls of all shapes and sizes gabbling at Virginia. I felt left out of the conversation so I just slid out of my chair and went to get a burger and coke. When I turned back, Virginia smiled at me and held up a finger and mimed eating a burger. I gave her a nod and went to the grill.

By the time we'd finished our lunch pretty much every teen on the base had come by and congratulated us on our marriage, Virginia's pregnancy, and everything in between. Virginia certainly wasn't going to lack for babysitters; that was certain.

Chapter 21: If Only Us... Chapter 21

Our first evening back at 'our' house was pretty chaotic. We came home from the Teen Club around seven and collapsed into easy chairs in our living room. My brother and sisters filtered into the room and asked all kinds of questions. Probably the biggest one was asked by my little sister.

"Are you my sister now too Virginia?" She asked in a tiny voice.

"Yes, Honey, I am," she said softly, hugging her.

"Then you're going to live here now in my brother's room?"

"Yes."

"Then where is he going to stay?"

I took over quickly and tried to explain to her that Virginia and I were married now just like mom and dad. That meant we stayed in the same bedroom. She nodded solemnly and climbed into my lap.

"Mom says we have to knock now when we come down the hall. She says that's so we don't em-bar-ass you. I think it's because you might be hugging and kissing and stuff like that."

Well, that certainly put things in perspective. I looked at Virginia and turned away immediately. She was having a very hard time trying not to laugh. Out of the mouths of babes.

Finally, everyone drifted out and we closed the door in the connecting arch. My brother had informed us that he was staying the night over at a friend's house so we would have the whole apartment to ourselves. We sat back in the easy chairs and vegetated for about half an hour until Virginia sat up and quietly informed me she was going to take a bath.

"Need any help?"

"Not now, but maybe later you can scrub my back?"

"Anytime. Just give a whistle."

She smiled at me and stood. With a whisper of skirt and nylons she disappeared into our room and began humming as she undressed. I realized it was the tune the band organ was playing in the square in Amsterdam. I closed my eyes and listened. She would start and stop at irregular intervals as she took off clothes. The closet door rumbled and I heard her unhook her robe from the hanger.

She reappeared at the arch of the living room with her hair down, her makeup scrubbed off, and her robe belted around her waist.

"Give me five minutes and then bring your scrub brush."

"I'll count the seconds; three-hundred, two-ninety-nine, two-ninety eightâ!"

She snickered and walked away. She didn't hear me when I skipped from two hundred to one hundred and fifty. She had gone by then into the bathroom where I heard the water flowing into the tub. My imagination

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ran wild and I had a vivid mind's eye view of her slipping into a hot tub filled with bubbles. I'd seen that before, in Paris, and every time the thought replayed I reacted predictably. Suddenly, my pants seemed a bit tight.

I glanced at my watch and saw that I had yet another ninety seconds. More than enough time to do some undressing of my own. I rose, walked swiftly to our room, and stripped. My own robe was the one she'd given me in Paris. It was soft, clingy, and she said I looked very sexy in it. She also told me that she'd better be the only one that saw me in it too. I belted it up and went down the hall to tap on the bathroom door.

"Who is it?" She called. "And what's the password?"

Ah, she was in a playful mood. That always got my attention. When she got that way, we almost always had a very good night of intimacy.

"It is I, my love. The one who loves you. The password is 'horny'."

"Ah, which lover might that be? And how horny?"

"The one who has wedded and bedded you. Very much so."

"Password accepted. Advance, and be recognized."

I slipped the door open and saw that she had candles lit at the four corners of the tub. She was lying back with bubbles barely hiding her breasts. The scent of strawberries wafted towards me. I can never smell strawberries now without thinking of our very first bath together in Paris. She'd found the powder in a drawer the very first day and used a little almost every following day. She'd even tasted of strawberries.

"Oh, God, you're beautiful Virginia. Every time I see you I fall deeper in love with you." I said as I knelt beside the tub.

"Take that robe off and sit with me."

In a flash, I doffed the robe and carefully slipped into the tub at the opposite end from her. I eased my legs down beside her hips and she lifted her legs so that they fell across my thighs. Then she scooted towards me until our hips were scant inches from each other.

"Hi there."

"Hi there, yourself."

She and I bent forward and kissed. A deeply satisfying kiss with no urgency but a promise of things to come. Her arms went around my neck and she pulled until her head fell into the hollow of my neck. She kissed my earlobe. She know what that does to me; and it did.

She sighed deeply and the candles guttered with her breath. Her skin took on a honey-colored glow in the yellow light from them. Multiple miniature flames dance in her eyes as I looked from one to the other.

"I love you with all my heart." She whispered.

"And I you, my wife. The water is getting cool, and the bed will warm quickly. Let me scrub your back and then we'll dry each other off."

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She carefully turned her back to me and I slipped the hand brush strap over my knuckles. Up her rib cage, across her shoulders, and down the other side I went. She bent over to offer her entire back to me. Little knobs of vertebra rose slightly and I leaned forward to kiss each one. She groaned and told me that we'd never get out of the tub if I kept doing that. I continued scrubbing.

As I ran that brush over her back, I scooted a bit closer until I was pressed against her from behind. She giggled softly.

"Patience, my love, patience."

"HMMMM," I responded.

She announced that her back was well scrubbed and that we should get out. I steadied her hips as she rose and put a leg over the edge of the tub. As she did, my hand slipped a little and flitted across her belly. She turned back to look at me and blew me a kiss before wrapping up in a huge fluffy towel. Then she wrapped a smaller towel like a turban around her hair and left the bathroom.

I let the water out, dried off, and threw my robe around my shoulders. Giving the tub a final rinse, I went into our bedroom to find her under the covers with her arms held out to me.

"Our first night in our room. Come make love to me."

I needed no second invitation for that at all so I pulled my robe off, turned out the overhead light, and slid into bed next to her. The only illumination was one candle on her nightstand. It cast deep shadows as Virginia moved closer to me and put her head in the hollow of my shoulder. Her leg slid over mine and trapped me against my stomach. She nibbled on my ear and pressed her breasts into my rib cage.

"Our first time, in our own bed, as husband and wife. We seem to keep on doing firsts don't we?"

"Mmm-umm," I replied, kissing the tips of her fingers as they idly stroked my cheeks and chin. "I am so ready tonight for some reason. Maybe it's the strawberries, do you think?"

"I could be, or maybe it's just the relaxation of having our own space instead of having to find it. Mmmm, you're certainly ready, that's for sure," She said, rubbing her knee up and down my stomach - and below. "Let's take this nice and slow; we have all night."

I turned partly towards her and put a kiss on a rib. She hummed deep in her throat.

"Oh, that feels so very good. I'm very sensitive right now. Every touch you make sets off sparks."

"They're meant to, my love. Tonight is for you," I said softly, my palm resting on her hip.

With slow, carefully orchestrated strokes we made love. Her breasts became firmer against my chest and her nipples reduced to hard points lost among the few chest hairs I had. She pulled her head upwards against my neck and gave me an open-mouthed kiss on my throat. I bent my head and received her next kiss with open mouth. Our tongues and our warm breath intertwined as we continued in our lover's embrace.

"You do excite me each and every time, my love. We are so right for each other. We fit together like hand and glove; your hand and my glove." She sighed to me.

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As I rolled off to the side, she rolled to face away from me. I moved to spoon her. I draped my arm across her rib cage and cupped a breast very carefully as she took me inside.

"Hmmmmm, you do know how to please me don't you?" She said softly.

"I certainly hope so. We're going to be together for a long time."

We drifted off into a very satisfied sleep. I was barely aware of her breathing changing from post-coital rapid to deep sleep slowness before I fell asleep myself. My last conscious thought was that of the fragrance of strawberries from her soft hair against my nose.

Chapter 22: If Only Us... Chapter 22

Life continued for Virginia and me. We attended dinners at our parent's and friend's houses, went shopping downtown, and continued to make very quiet love. I went back to my job at the PAO where I was given extra duties and a small raise in pay. Virginia began to get more babysitting jobs also which brought in even more money. We opened savings and checking accounts at the base bank with an eye towards saving as much as we could. We were going to need it very shortly.

Virginia began to revel in being pregnant. Her eyes would shine every time someone new noticed it and stopped to chat. All summer long she grew larger in both stomach and breasts. Her second visit to the gynecologist set the date for our baby to be born very close to Christmas in December. She had become pregnant in mid-March so December it would be.

We had to modify our lovemaking when she became too large. We did a lot of spooning with me behind her, but she found out that she could lie behind me and reach over to hold me easily.

I had to be very careful with her breasts as they became more sensitive as they expanded with milk. She bought a special bra that had thick pads to absorb leakage.

September arrived and we entered our final year of high school. Special rules were enacted to let us have most of our classes together and gym was waived in Virginia's case as being too strenuous. I began to coach the boys' soccer team on weekends. Coach seemed impressed by my abilities to motivate the team and asked me if I would come to all the weekend games. I told him I would be happy to unless Virginia needed me for something.

We won our first seven matches. Gerald played very well in his new position and exhibited none of his prior tendencies to be a hot dog. He would fake the defense out, pass adroitly to another forward, and let him make the score. I made sure he got credit for assists - and there were a lot.

For Halloween, Virginia and her two moms made her a pumpkin costume. She lowered it over her head and let it rest on her shoulders with two straps. From the neck down she ballooned out and back to be tight around her knees. It was perfect to hide her swollen belly. I dressed as a farmer complete with straw hat, pitchfork, and bibbed denim jeans. We won first prize. I was difficult to dance with her, but we made it more of a comedy routine than a dance. Everyone howled at our antics on the dance floor.

By Thanksgiving, Virginia was really getting discouraged. When asked how long she'd been pregnant she started responding with answer like 'three years'. Her back began to hurt and I spent many a night sitting up with her and rubbing it until she drifted off to an uneasy sleep.

Dinner that Thanksgiving held special blessings for both our families for the life ready to come forth from Virginia. Neither of our families were especially religious but a pre-dinner prayer brought tears to everyone's eyes.

We started December with relief. Virginia sighed one evening that it would soon be over. I held her in my arms, kissed the tip of her nose, and told her she would do fine. I had done a lot of reassuring over the last couple of months, but never tired of it.

On December seventeenth Virginia and I were sitting in the back of our Civics class when she leaned towards me and grimaced. She began massaging her stomach with tears in her eyes. She was in pain. The scrape of my chair as I got up to kneel beside her caught the ear of the instructor who was writing on the chalkboard. When

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she turned around, she stopped talking and rushed back to us. Virginia was doubled over and gasping for air. She nodded to my question of her being in pain but whispered that she was beginning to feel better. Soon, she was sitting up and the entire class relaxed a bit. We wrote down our homework assignment and then the bell rang ending the period.

Virginia went into the girl's room while I waited outside. Mr. Espana passed by, slowed, and then stopped. Just as he opened his mouth to say something there was a shriek from within the girl's room. Two girls ran out yelling that Virginia had cried out from a stall. After making sure there was nobody else in the restroom, and asking one of the girls to keep others out, Arlo and I rushed inside.

Virginia was on her knees hugging her stomach. There was an odorous fluid on the floor under her. Her water had broken. Arlo helped her to her feet carefully while I used a great amount of paper towels to clean her legs up. When I finished, he turned to me with a huge smile.

"You'd better call the office and tell them to send an ambulance over Tom. She's going into labor. You're about to become a father."

My eyes teared up with joy as I rushed out and grabbed the first person I came to. I told him to get to the office and have them call the hospital for an ambulance and tell them that someone was ready to give birth right NOW!

He shot down the hall along with several others that heard my instructions. Fortunately, Wayne happened by and when I told him he did his best to calm me down. I was in full-tilt panic mode.

"Tom! Dammit! You're not going to help her by going nuts here. Calm down! Deep breathing, guy!"

I took several breaths and held each one until my heart stopped thumping in my chest. My face regained some color and I thanked him. More and more kids were arriving at the scene and Wayne informed them what was happening. When I went back into the rest room, several girls followed me in. Among them was Cleo, a rock-steady influence if there ever was one.

Cleo took charge and helped Virginia sit down in one of the chairs along the wall. She pulled her feet out so that she could lay back a little to ease pressure on her stomach.

Cleo turned to us and waved her hand towards the door. "Now, you guys get the hell out of here. Nina and I can manage until the medics get here. Go on! Get out!"

We got. Outside even more kids were hovering around the door. Arlo and I cleared a path so that the medical team could get through when they got here. A thin wail announced their arrival and soon two guys and a female doctor ran down the hall. The guys were pushing a gurney.

"Where is she?" The doctor asked.

I pointed to the open door and she went inside. Her voice floated out and she called for the two guys to bring the gurney. I followed them in. With great care, they lifted Virginia and put her on the gurney, tucked her in under a blanket, and put two straps across her to steady her for the trip to the ambulance.

The doctor established I was the father and told me to follow her. Arlo clapped me on the shoulder, gave me a big smile, and said that he'd personally take care of the red tape so I could leave school now. I grabbed his hand and shook it heartily before racing out of the room and down the hall.

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We arrived at the hospital seven minutes later. Virginia was rushed inside and whisked away out of sight. I was directed to go sit in the 'dad's lounge'. The duty nurse told me that there were telephones I could use to call anyone I needed to call. I reached the lounge and picked up the phone. It was just before three in the afternoon so our dad's would be at work - call the moms first, dummy, or there would be hell to pay.

A nurse interrupted my train of thought and told me that Virginia was resting quietly now, and her contractions were about ten minutes apart. Plenty of time.

I called her mom first. She gave a big squeal, dropped the phone, and picked it up only to drop it again. She finally recovered enough to stammer that she'd be right over. I told her not to hurry because the doc said Virginia's pains were ten minutes apart. She practically shouted that that could change very fast because she'd done the very same thing.

I called my mom and gave her the news. She took it with a little more aplomb, but stammered a little when she said she'd be over too. Two down, two to go.

Her dad was out in the motor pool yard somewhere and a very earnest sergeant told me he would run and find him. I gave him the phone number to call me back. My dad was giving a briefing to the bosses of the fighter wing and wouldn't be free for at least an hour. Lieutenant Thompson, Ron, to whom I had talked to many times, told me he would pass the word just as soon as he came out of the conference room. I hung up and started walking in circles. A perfect cartoon expectant father. All I needed was three cigarettes burning: one in each hand and one in my mouth.

My mom blew through the door ten minutes later with Virginia's mom running a close second. They threw their arms around me and we had a good cry for a few minutes. Then they tried to divert my attentions with trivial stuff. I worried, and worried some more.

The phone rang and I jumped a foot. My mom answered it and mouthed 'your dad' to me as she talked into the phone. She looked annoyed, but softened up when he said he'd be over in about half an hour. Ten minutes later Bear arrived in breathless haste.

"How is she? What's happening? Any news yet? Come on, someone; talk to me!"

"Well, give me a minute, Dad," I said. "She's off over there in one of the labor rooms according to a very nice nurse that comes in here every half hour or so. She's about due right now in fact. She'll have news."

"Well, I hope so. Damn, I'm a bundle of nerves now so I can imagine what you feel like," he said to me.

"I've lost most of my nervousness now, Bear. It's been replaced with more adrenaline than I can handle. I'm actually sleepy right now from it."

We all sat down on various pieces of furniture and figuratively gnawed our fingernails. The squeak of the swinging door and the bang as it hit the backstop startled us. The nurse arrived and said that Virginia wanted to see me - just me. I stood and followed her into the inner sanctum.

Virginia was lying back on a huge pillow with an IV tube in her arm hooked to a plastic bag on a stand. The nurse assured me it was standard procedure to add fluids. A small machine over on the table next to her had an oscilloscope pattern on it with what was unmistakably a heartbeat. The nurse followed my gaze and said quietly that this was my baby's heartbeat. I watched its rapid rise and fall with tears in my eyes.

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Virginia opened her eyes, saw me standing there, and lifted her free arm towards me. I rushed over and kissed her on the forehead, nose, and finally on her lips.

"I love you," I whispered. "More now than ever before. You have our future ready to enter the world." I don't know where I'd heard that line, probably in a movie, but it fit perfectly.

Virginia reached to the back of my head and pulled me closer.

"You'd better believe it husband. And I think she wants to come out soon."

"She?"

"Yep, I've decided she's a she."

"Wonderful. That would be perfect. You try to rest now as best as you can."

A huge contraction hit her at that moment. She cried out, leaned forward until the nurse stopped her, and began gasping for breath. I stood helplessly by until she calmed down again with the nurse's help.

"Only six minutes that time, Virginia. You're getting closer." The nurse pointed at me and then to the door. "Now, you get out of here and let us women get serious." I got - again.

My dad had arrived in my absence. He solemnly shook my hand and then hugged me. Tears in his eyes told me how much this meant to him too.

Two hours later, I was still nervously pacing the floor despite repeated requests to calm down. I was a wreck. Perspiration had broken out all over. I could feel it as it soaked my undershirt. My stomach began grumbling. Bear heard it and said he'd go rustle up some grub as he headed out the door.

The nurse appeared once again and told us that Virginia had been moved to the operating room. I must have looked very concerned but she told me it was what they did in every instance 'just in case'. She didn't tell me 'just in case' of what.

More waiting. I got tenser. The cheeseburger I had eaten sat like a bowling ball in my stomach. I'd drunk seven cups of dispenser coffee and was wired like a pinball machine. What the HELL was taking so long? Bear started a long yarn about taking the Commanding General's jeep for a joyride many years ago but never got to finish it.

A new nurse appeared at the door and stopped to hold it open. From down the hall the piercing wail of a newborn baby sounded.

She turned and pointed to me. "That's your daughter you hear crying. Give us five minutes and you can visit very briefly with mother and daughter - who are doing just fine." Huge smile. She tapped me on the chest. "Congratulations, Daddy!"

"Woohoo! I'm a Daddy! It's a girl!" I cried out loud.

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Everyone jumped up and began hugging me and pounding me on the back. I felt dizzy for a moment, and then a huge wave of pent-up emotion washed over me. I was now responsible for the lives of two people - my wife and our baby girl. I wept silently with a hand over my eyes and my head bowed thanking the big guy upstairs for this miracle.

In the middle of our celebration, the first nurse came, tapped my on the shoulder, and motioned me to follow. We went down the corridor and turned a corner to enter a small room. Virginia was lying again on a pillow, but with more color in her cheeks than before. She had her eyes closed, but opened them when I came in and touched her hand.

"We have a girl," she said, beginning to cloud up with joy.

"I heard her," and then my stoicism broke and I joined her in tears.

We held each other as best as we could for long moments until the nurse asked if I'd like to see my daughter. All I could do was nod as I couldn't trust my voice. She left the room.

I pulled a chair over and sat next to Virginia's bed. We held hands and smiled at each other. The door opened and the nurse came in with a tiny bundle of pink blanket in her arms. She asked who goes first and Virginia pointed to me. I stood and very carefully took my daughter from the nurse's hands. When I sat back down, I cradled her so that Virginia could see also. I pulled the tip of the blanket away from her pink face and held her to the light.

"Our creation, Tom." Virginia said. "She has blue eyes, your nose, ten fingers, ten toes, and is perfect. I didn't think it was possible to love you more than the day we got married, but I do now just looking at our baby."

I couldn't speak but simply nodded and bent to kiss my daughter's wrinkled forehead. She squirmed, blinked, and closed her eyes again. She *was* perfect.

The nurse put her in Virginia's arms and shooed me out again to let both of them rest. Virginia was already opening her gown to expose a breast for feeding and I was just a third wheel right now. I went back out to the waiting room.

I entered and made my announcement. "Marie Alexandra Oldman has entered the world, and she is perfect!"

My two moms began sniffing, and my dad and Bear tried manfully to not tear up but failed. We all had misty eyes for a while.

Bear cleared his throat and turned to my father. "Well, granddad, maybe we'd better go spread the news, eh?"

"Your club or mine?" My dad responded.

"What the hell, let's hit both of them, Colonel."

"Sounds like a plan to me. Let's go!"

They pronounced their congratulations again and left. My mom and Myra stayed a few moments longer until the nurse came and told me to come back around nine and I could visit longer. That sounded final, so the three of us left.

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The two moms got into their cars and drove off. They asked me if I wanted a lift, but I told them I just wanted to walk (walk, hell, I wanted to fly!) so they drove off. I felt emotionally drained, but strangely energized at the same time. I was a father! I kept repeating that mantra to myself over and over as I crossed the frozen grass of the square at the center of the housing area. I shouted out loud.

"I AM A FATHER!"

Half a block away, some of my friends were skating on the frozen tennis court. Their heads turned towards me and looked. They had heard me yell. They quit skating and moved towards me shouting. When I met them at the edge of rink, they clustered around and clamored for the details. I told them Virginia had given birth to a girl, seven pounds, six ounces and thirteen inches tall.

Amid cries of congratulations, hooray, and even a Mazeltof, genuine concerns were voiced that Virginia had had complications. Not true I assured them. Actually, the nurse had said it was an easy birth. Someone suggested we head for the Teen Club and that sounded like a good idea to me as I was totally famished. I rode over with one of the guys.

Even before we got there, the word had already passed, somehow, about our little girl. Girls I hardly knew came up and kissed me; guys I only knew by name shook my hand. I was on top of the world right now. I ended up eating three burgers and two orders of fries before I headed home to clean up and change out of my sweaty clothes.

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Virginia was discharged from the hospital three days later. We carefully swaddled Marie into her blankets and tucked her into her carrying bassinet. The December wind was whipping snow around, but none had stuck to the ground yet. I opened the door to our car and settled Virginia down in the passenger seat. We managed to put Marie's basket in the back seat. It fit just right wedged against the front seat. She slept soundly all the way home with Virginia swiveling all the time to watch her. I drove very slowly.

I arrived home to yet another surprise. My two sisters decided to move in together and my brother moved into one of their rooms. This left us in the two bedroom side with a room for Marie. When we saw how the room was fixed up we both couldn't thank everyone enough. My sisters had pooled some money and bought a very nice expandable German crib for Marie. One that started out for a newborn and then changed into a larger one for later. New curtains were hung on the window and a small settee along one wall added in case Virginia or I wanted to stay in the room. All the comforts we would need.

I lay Marie in her new crib carefully as my mom watched me. She put her hand in the middle of my back. "I am so proud of you, Tom. The two of you are going to do all right."

Since it was so close to the Christmas vacation, they let Virginia out of school until after the New Year. I brought her assignments home and kept up my work at the PAO. One evening I came home and found Virginia and Marie cuddled up in the big armchair in the living room. They had blankets tucked around them. Virginia was feeding Marie. It was a most touching scene to watch those tiny blue eyes drift open and close again. When open, Marie made faces while sucking on the nipple.

Virginia was asleep or at least dozing heavily, when I came in. The angle was just right so it looked as if they were sleeping under the Christmas tree. I quietly went and got my camera. I'd loaded it with color film so that I could be ready for any pictures for posterity. This was definitely a keeper.

I used a cover over the flash attachment so that it wouldn't hit them directly but only as a reflection. I took three pictures before Virginia opened her eyes and smiled at me. We looked down at this tiny person suckling at her breast. Marie's eyes were open now and appeared to be watching me. They didn't track yet though. I was not about to try and take a flash picture of her. Too much danger of startling her.

Virginia pulled Marie off her right breast and opened the blanket so she could be moved to the left. Without hesitation, the little one latched back on and we watched her tiny throat muscles as she swallowed nutrient. Her eyes got dreamy and lost focus again. She fell asleep still sucking.

"This is going to be hard on me, Tom. You know what just licking my nipples does, so you can imagine what having her sucking and occasionally biting them is doing. The doctor told me that we can't have any relations for up to six weeks. I'm not sure I can make it, not to mention you; poor thing!"

"I can take it, honey. We can just lie in bed and hold each other, or we can take turns sleeping in Marie's room. Whatever it takes. You know as well as I do that there are things I can do to relieve my stress that don't involve you - other than in my mind's eye, that is."

She gave me a concerned look. "Oh, I don't want you to do that. We'll just have to work something out won't we?"

"But, baby, I don't want you to be in pain or pull stitches." She looked up at me wide-eyed. "Yeah, the doc told me about that. Four of them. That's why we have to be careful. And I will be careful not to do anything

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that might jeopardize your health."

"Boy, that's going to be really tough then, she's really turning me on." She snickered, and then laughed. "I feel better now."

"I'm changing into grubbies and fixing supper tonight. Want anything special?"

"How about just some soft-boiled eggs and a couple pieces of toast. It's about all I can manage right now."

"Coming up very soon."

I changed into my old sweat pants and shirt and then headed into the kitchen to rustle up dinner. Toast and eggs sounded pretty good, but I was going to scramble mine and add some chopped veggies and a little heat from a jar of salsa. A tasty western omelet.

Virginia roused herself and put Marie in her crib before joining me in the kitchen at the small dinette table. We ate in silence until she turned to me.

"I'll never make six weeks."

"Neither will I, my love."

We did, however. It was hard - to say the least and no pun intended - but we managed. Before the sixth week was up, Virginia and I held a brief conversation in bed one morning.

"Tom?"

"Hmmm, Baby?"

"We have to talk about something." she said seriously. "We'd better get back to some birth control or we'll be knee-deep in babies in no time," she added with a smile.

"Yeah, you're right about that. I'll make a trip to the BX tomorrow and buy a box of condoms. Damn good thing I turned eighteen in July isn't it? I can see myself asking my dad to buy them for me. What a hoot!"

"Yeah." She snickered.

"Go take your shower."

I nodded and went to do my morning routine.

A couple of afternoons later, we bundled Marie in a huge blanket and put her in the traveling bassinet in the back seat of our car. We were on our way downtown to see Frantz and Angelina at their Inn. I'd called in the morning to see if they were going to be there and was reassured that they were. I didn't tell them of our surprise though.

We drove out the gate, down the hill, and angled over towards the train station. We parked down a quiet cul-de-sac and I lifted Marie's carrier out. Virginia put a thin blanket over the basket to keep the wind from chilling her. She was also wearing a really cute pink skull cap that my grandmother had knitted for her.

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Virginia entered the Inn first and Angelina bustled around the edge of the counter to throw her arms around Virginia's shoulders. They hugged tightly as Angelina called for Frantz to come see who was here.

I came into the Inn about the time Frantz arrived from a back room. When they saw what I was carrying they rushed over. I flipped the blanket back and Frantz looked at Angelina and told her that he had suspected something like this. Angelina pooh-poohed that and said he'd done no such thing and asked Virginia if she could hold Marie.

"Sure. She reached into the carrier and carefully lifted Marie out to hand her to Angelina. Her old eyes watered as she began to coo at her in German baby talk.

"Such a beautiful baby, Virginia. You are forgiven for not coming to visit in a long time. I think maybe you make the baby here, eh?"

"Angelina!" Boomed Frantz. "Such a thing to say."

"I know, I know. But you two have such love for each other. I know how such things happen." Angelina laughed and elbowed Frantz in the ribs so hard he 'oofed'. "Come, we go into the family house."

She led us into the kitchen of their home attached to the Inn. She indicated that we were to sit at the table and began bustling around the kitchen scooping bits of this and that onto plates.

"You need food, Virginia. Look how skinny you are. You must eat good food for two now."

I laughed at that, but stopped when Angelina turned to me and said the same thing.

"You both must be good Germans and stay healthy."

Most Germans considered a little layer of fat to be a healthy thing. I didn't happen to believe that, but there was no way I was going to say so right in Angelina's kitchen. I ate what was on my plate. She'd dropped a huge wurst, a big forkful of sauerkraut, another scoop of fried potatoes and added a big glass of milk.

"Hah! No *bier* for you, eh?" She said, pointing to me. "Only milk to gain strength."

Marie woke up when we were almost finished. Angelina led Virginia off to the living room so she could feed her while Frantz walked me back into the great room of the Inn. A roaring fire was in the hearth that warmed the entire room. There were several couples sitting around who turned when we entered.

Frantz introduced me around and added that I had just become a father. The woman from one of the couples looked at me with surprise and asked if that were true. When I replied that it indeed was true she told me I was much too young. She really looked shocked when I told her that Virginia was six months younger than me.

"*Ach*. Youth today are much too anxious to be adults. You should take more time to be young and free."

"I do feel young, and free, but now there is just the three of us sharing that feeling." I said, bowing to her.

She laughed a great laugh and patted me on the shoulder.

"You will do. You will do, I think."

"*Danke*," I replied.

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One of the guys told me I spoke an almost accent-less German. He asked me how long I'd lived here. I'm sure he was expecting me to say I'd been here for many years, but when I told him I'd only been here for just under three years he lifted his eyebrows.

"*Ach, so!* That is such a short time to speak as a good Luxemburgish should. Quite an accomplishment. Frantz! I think a round of schnapps might be in order, eh?"

"I quite agree, Herr Schneider. Let me get the glasses."

He turned to the sideboard, opened the door where he kept the special glasses and removed a number of them. Then he bent down and pulled open another door to his special reserve of fine liquors. We were going to get the full treatment.

He filled the glasses with care, then turned and passed them out. They lifted them in toast towards me. I toasted last. We drank. Everyone set their glasses back on the counter and shook my hand. We sat back down in the conversation area and chatted.

Virginia came through the door about ten minutes later with Marie on her shoulder. All the men jumped to their feet and bowed as I introduced her to them. The women simply gathered around her to see. Virginia held her up to everyone. At the moment she opened her big eyes, everyone did an involuntary 'ooh'.

"Such beautiful eyes. She will be a lover, that one."

"I certainly hope so," Virginia replied. "I found mine, so she should find hers."

The man who had complimented me on my German caught my eye and nodded emphatically. We all sat back down and just talked for what seemed like hours until Angelina asked us if we would stay for dinner. I jumped to my feet, looked at my watch, and told her I would love to, but we had promised to eat at Virginia's house tonight - and we were almost late. She scolded us, but smiled as she did. We had to promise to come back soon for dinner.

"Be sure to bring the little one!" She boomed at us.

"We will, Angelina, we will," Virginia answered.

We wrapped Marie up in her traveling blanket and put her into her carrier. Saying our goodbyes to everyone, we went out to the car and drove back home. Hastily, but not exceeding any speed limits by any measure. We arrived at Virginia's parent's house precisely on time, give, or take fifteen minutes.

Chapter 25: If Only Us... Chapter 25

Seven weeks later, neither Virginia nor I could stand it any longer. It seemed as if every night and every morning I would wake up almost in pain. She did her best to help me along, kissing and fondling, but that's as far as she could go without feeling twinges of pain herself. Sometimes I just took a cold shower, or went out for a walk; it seemed to help.

We were in bed one evening after putting Marie down for the night when Virginia rolled over to meet me as I sat on the edge of the bed. She put her arms around me, kissed me in the middle of my back, and nuzzled my shoulder. Ah, damn! This was getting harder and harder (literally) to resist.

"Please, Honey. Won't you at least try?" She said in a mock whine.

My resolve weakened, but didn't evaporate. "Nope. I don't want to rush things, Babe. If we can wait the full length of time you'll enjoy it much more. I know I will because I won't feel like I'm hurting you."

"But you don't hurt me. At least not very much."

"I know, but it's the 'not much' that bothers me."

"Okay, can we at least do some cuddling?"

I lay back and swung my legs under the covers. She fluffed the big down comforter over the two of us and laid her head in the hollow of my shoulder. She linked fingers with my hand, raised them to her lips, and kissed each of my knuckles.

"Oh, how I love you," she whispered. "You are so strong for me when you need to be and yet so very tender when we make love. I pray we stay this way for the rest of our lives."

"We will, Honey. We will. Now close those pretty eyes and go to sleep."

"Tom, recite to me, please."

"How do I love you, let me count the waysâ!" I planned on reciting the entire poem, but by the time I got about halfway through, she was breathing softly and exhaling steadily across my chest. She was asleep.

The next morning I awoke slowly from a vivid dream into the reality of Virginia gliding her fingers slowly and carefully up and down my thigh. She had apparently been doing it for a while because I'd incorporated it into my dream: the part where I was reliving portions of our adventure in Paris - with touches from the Paris train. Some of it was real, and some of it was fancy, but all of it caused the expected reaction for Virginia.

I opened my eyes, finally, to see her face only inches away from mine. She blinked once, twice, and then kissed me tenderly. All the while, she kept up stroking my thigh.

"Oh, did I wake you up?" She smirked at me.

"You know damn well you did, you sneaky thing."

She giggled, closed her hand around my erection and began to hum softly as she applied herself to her pleasant task. I was so primed from the remnants of my dream that it seemed like just a few seconds before I

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groaned in climax.

"My goodness! You have a lot stored up don't you?"

"Fortunately, an infinite supply. Thank you hardly addresses the pleasure you've given me, Babe. It was greatly appreciated and I love you very much." I said, planting a kiss directly on the tip of her nose.

She wrinkled her nose at me and kissed me back. It was one of those kisses that, if we didn't terminate it soon, would grow into something much more serious. I pulled my lips off hers, gasping for breath.

"Holy cow. What was that all about?"

"Just that I love you - and we have seven days left of our imposed torture."

"That long, eh? Seems much longer than that."

"Well, it certainly isn't long now is it?" She laughed, looking significantly below my waist.

"Oh, ha-ha and ho-ho. It is to laugh." I said, quoting Daffy Duck.

"Oh, go take your shower, you nut!" She said as she swing her feet up and planted them right on my rib cage.

I shot out of bed almost horizontally because her feet are probably the coldest thing on the planet. I've spent many a night trying to warm them up but for some reason they just keep getting cold again. I headed for the bathroom.

Chapter 26: If Only Us... Chapter 26

Ten days later, after Virginia had seen her Gynecologist again, she came home that afternoon all smiles. I had just arrived from work and was greeted by her in a diaphanous nightgown, unbound hair to her shoulders, and a big glass of wine. I knew I wouldn't get much sleep tonight.

She sidled up to me, set the wine glass down on a table in front of me, and wrapped her arms around my waist. When she planted a huge kiss on my neck, adding just enough suction to at least leave a faint red mark, I dropped my briefcase on the floor and hugged her back.

"To what do I owe this honor, fair lady?"

"Come, my knight, take up your lance and make love to me in yon bower."

"Yon bower? We have a bower?"

"You idiot! You can be so exasperating sometimes." She said, but with a very coquettish smile and a wink.

"Oh! You meanâ!"

"Yes! She said I was all better now. She did advise care and tenderness though. She wanted to see me back in three months - not three days."

For an answer, I slipped one arm behind her legs and the other under her arms and picked her up.

"Pick up the glass, wench, and let us hie to our bower."

She giggled mightily as I carried her to the bedroom. As I passed Marie's room, I glanced in and then turned to wrinkle my brow in a nonverbal question at Virginia.

"She's over at your parent's place tonight. We have the house all to ourselves. All. To. Ourselves." She repeated with a slow wink.

I gave a mock groan and faked dropping her. She squealed with delight and clung to my neck in a grip of iron. I laid her down carefully on top of the bed and took a good look in the dim light shining through the shades from a streetlight across the road. She was wearing absolutely nothing but that very sheer night cover and a black velvet ribbon around her neck; the one with the fake diamond at her throat. My eyes began to leak at the sheer beauty of her body.

She had spent untold hours toning it back up after childbirth and now, a couple of months after Marie had been born; she was even more buff than before. I bent forward and kissed her just below the diamond at her neck, lingered a moment, and then began kissing downward into the valley between her breasts. As I watched, her 'excitement indicators' began to come alive.

The coverlet was fastened with three simple bow ties across her chest and stomach. I toyed with the top knot, pulled at it, stopped, and then pulled some more. She moaned when I finally tugged the knot so that it slipped open. I moved to the second knot.

""Oh, don't tease me, Tom! It's been way too long since we've made love. Come on out and play."

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She reached down and rubbed her palm on the front of my pants. I groaned softly and took a moment to unfasten my shirt, slip it off my shoulders, and drop it on the floor. She lost no time bringing her fingers up to run them across my chest and giggled as I began to react the same as her. My breath caught in my throat.

"Ahh, Baby. You know what that does to me."

"I do, and I'll keep it up until you're lying here naked next to me."

"Oh, I'm ready for you but the question is: are you ready for me?"

"The doc gave me full marks and told me I had no restrictions other than to just take it easy the first few times."

"That's going to be a bit difficult to do, Honey. I don't know if I can control myself. I could go off at any time."

"Well, as long as you go off inside me I'll be very happy. I even brought you something to go off into." She held up a whole string of ten condoms and let them cascade downward from her hand.

"Oh, lordy, Honey! I can see I'm in for a hell of a night."

"That you are, Doll. That you are. Now take off those pants and get into bed right now!"

"I obey." I said, whipping my pants off and yanking down my underwear.

I swiftly untied the third knot and her coverlet fell open. Her breasts pointed downwards as she bent over. I reached out and ran my palms over their swell. She moaned with delight as I put my arm across her back and pushed gently on her shoulder to make her lie flat. She tossed her head enough so that her hair spread out to almost cover the softness of the pillow beneath her. I just lay there for a moment and watched her breasts rise and fall with her breathing. When she asked me what I was doing I told her I was just drinking her in. Then I bent and touched the tip of my tongue to one of her nipples and flicked it. She sighed deeply and offered the other one by holding it up to my lips.

"Kiss this one too. It's lonely."

"I see, and obey milady."

I began kissing and running my tongue lightly across the expanse of her chest. With each traverse, I kissed harder and lingered just a little longer at each end point. A tiny bit of milk, part of her supply for Marie, appeared which I licked up with my tongue.

"Ummm, tasty." I said, smacking my lips. "No wonder Marie is growing like a weed."

"She takes after you. I think she'll be tall."

"We'll certainly have to warn her about boys who doâ thisâ then." I said, sliding my hand further down her taut belly.

"Oh, damn. I've missed that so much it's like it was the very first time you ever touched me down there."

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"I'm going to do a little more than touch you down there tonight though," I said as I bent down and stuck my tongue into her navel.

She screeched and her stomach jumped reflexively. I kissed her again but a bit lower. She hummed deep in her throat and put her arms behind her head so she could watch me. I began a series of gentle kisses aimed in the general direction of the vee of her thighs. I was in no hurry. I kissed the very spot where they had taken three stitches.

"Ohhhh!"

"Have I hurt you?" I asked, stricken.

"Oh, nooo. Kiss me there again. If anything, I am even more sensitive than before."

I resumed random kisses. She squirmed under my touch and sucked in a huge breath only to let it out in an extended hiss through clenched teeth.

"Oh, God! Oh God! I feel it. I can feel it. No pain, no pain at all; just pleasure."

I maintained my ministrations until she succumbed to internal pressures and gave herself fully to the moment.

"Oh, no more; no more." She gasped. "This was supposed to be your night."

"And it will be my love."

Swiftly donning our agreed protection, we arranged ourselves in a classic pose and continued. It was indeed my turn for pleasure. We went slowly, with me checking often to see if I'd hurt her. Suddenly, my long-awaited release took place. Virginia matched me, pressure against pressure, until we both lay side by side gasping for breath.

"Oh, goodness! You've been denied much too long, my love. That stops right now. We are back in business!"

"Music to my ears, Honey."

"I am so very satisfied, and so very sleepy. Finish your wine and lie next to me."

I reached for the wine, finished the last of it, and set the glass down on the table. She held the covers open for me and I lay down on my back. She snuggled up against me, threw a leg over my hips, and kissed the hollow of my neck.

"Oh, I do love you so very much."

"And I love you even more, mother of my child."

"Mmmm. I'm so very glad we made that decision. It seems so long ago."

"In our past now. Not to be forgotten, but to be cherished."

"You always know just what to say that makes me go all gooey inside."

"Hmmm. I aim to please." I said softly into her hair as I planted a kiss on the top of her head.

We drifted off slowly to sleep.

Chapter 27: If Only Us... Chapter 27

Life moved on. The three of us settled down into a routine where alternate mornings either Virginia or I would get up and see to Marie's needs. Once she was able to take nourishment from a bottle, I could even feed her and let Virginia sleep in; which she appreciated. In the time since she'd given birth, her weight had dropped. Not drastically, but enough to be noticeable. I tried to feed her protein-laden meals but sometimes she just didn't want anything 'heavy'. When her mom read her the riot act she started taking better care of herself.

We added a little extra money to the amount my parents were paying their maid and she began watching Marie when we went to school. School was now almost totally different for the two of us. She and I still horsed around with friends, but there was always an undertone that we couldn't put a finger on. We discussed it one night and I think Virginia was able to correctly figure out what was happening. We were now the 'old married couple'. We had crossed over from being simply teenagers and moved into a world that teens kept partially blocked. Virginia's best friend, Paula, said it best one evening at dinner at our house.

"It's like you guys aren't with us anymore. Every one of us has fears and hang-ups but you two have made them almost go away. Take dating, for instance. There isn't a guy in school that doesn't sweat out asking a girl or even his girlfriend out to a dance, but you two have that built in now. And you," she said, turning to Virginia. "You don't have to keep worrying about where and how much you'll let Tom touch you. He has range rights now and can roam anywhere. Maybe I'm not being very clear about it, but it's almost like you've grown five years in the last year."

"I think you're expressing yourself very well, Paula." I said. "Maybe we have grown up mentally, but we're still just eighteen. I see what you're saying though. And, you're right. If I get a little, um, tense, at a movie or dance I know I can just wait until we get home. Other guys don't have that option and that generates anxiety. Right?"

"Putting it basically, yeah. You're right. But it goes deeper than that. You guys got married so young that it's almost like you chopped off your right to be frivolous, weird, impulsive, and just a little bit nuts. You became an, an, an authority figure I guess."

"Authority figure?! Really? How do you figure that?"

"Okay. You coach the soccer team on weekends now. You used to just hang with the guys and hate gym class. Now you're the one with the whistle calling them to order. You're not any older, but you have the authority to really make things stick."

"I never thought of it that way at all."

"And you, Virginia; you're not just another young girl struggling to become a woman. You don't have to sit in health classes and listen to some old woman go on about the dangers of men's penises. Hell, you've given birth for God's sake! You should be the one standing up there and relating everything you went through from the decision to have that baby to childbirth. I know you well enough and I think I have enough brains to see how nice a guy Tom is to never think that was an accident. I think you both planned it, but it took a lot of tears to make it happen."

"Paula, I had no idea that we'd crossed any line at all," Virginia said in a soft voice. "Do you think that there is some way we can regain our loss, or is it permanently gone now?"

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"I think it's gone now, Ginny. Tom began running with the guy pack many years ago, cut you out of the herd, and staked his claim. I could see the effect having a permanent boyfriend had on you. You got a bit less nervous, if that's the word I want. You knew you'd have a date for dances, movies, trips, and everything else. The rest of us were, and are still, in there dressing, teasing, and blushing trying to capture someone like Tom. It's a fact that now, when I mention you to any of the other girls, they seem to refer to you as someone they used to know. It sounds cruel, but that's just the way it is now."

She turned to me. "You're not immune from this either Tom. You don't have to stand around the edges of a dance floor and rate the chances of dancing - or anything else - with all the girls in the hall. I know all you guys do it, but guess what - now *you* don't have to. Think back on the last dance you two went to. Did anyone else come up and try to cut in on you? What would you have done if you were hanging out with the bunch of guys rating every girl and they happened to pick out Virginia as someone they'd like to move in on?"

"I'd have probably gone into fight mode." I raised my hand to the back of my neck and rubbed. "Yeah, I can remember doing just that," I said ruefully.

"There, see what I mean. If Virginia wasn't your wife you'd probably chuckle and make a different estimation of the odds. Now you can't do that because the odds just went to one hundred percent. See what I mean? You're simply not 'real' teenagers anymore."

Paula subsided back into her chair and sipped her cup of coffee. Virginia and I held hands across the table and then we turned to Paula. Virginia spoke first.

"Paula, all we can do now is try and remain friends to those we were friends with before. You and Carol and Shirley and Cleo and the others have always been my friends. I have no intention of giving that up. I don't care if Tom and I have given up our place in the teen hierarchy; we're still just us."

"But you have more responsibility now Virginia. You have Marie to take care of. You can't take off for a weekend bike trip and just leave her. We can. If it pisses off our parents, we'll take the heat. Your parents would look on it as a little time for you two to get together. My parents would think the worst and ground me for a month. See the difference?"

"Yeah, I do," I spoke up. "Neither one of us wants to lose friends over this. I hope we don't."

"I don't think you will, but that loose-jointed goofing around will be gone. Think about it. You can't go out now with the guys and have a few beers downtown without having that little voice in your ear warning you that Virginia - your wife - is going to get mad. Unconsciously, it will put a small damper on the partying."

I gave a sigh, and agreed with her on every point. I stood, gathered the plates, and turned to the sink to rinse them off. I barked out a short laugh as I did so. Virginia asked me what was so funny. When I told her that I'd have never done this before we got married. We all had a laugh. I realized I had moved on in my life. I was only eighteen, but had already segued into adulthood.

Chapter 28: If Only Us... Chapter 28

There was one very humorous event which occurred that involved Virginia and a new guy in school. He had arrived in mid-term from the States and began to quickly work his way through the female population of Stadt High. In just three weeks he'd dated around fifteen girls. Every one of them was a first - and last - date for him. His last date happened to be with Paula, Virginia's best friend.

The three of us were standing next to Virginia's open locker in the hall when Slick, Paula's nickname for him, showed up. He appeared to be about six foot tall with strangely bleached blonde hair that had streaks of darker color throughout it. A strong jaw, with dimples even, made his face seem almost square. Bright, widely set, blue eyes blinked on either side of an aquiline nose. He projected an attitude of the complete answer to any girl's dreams. I disliked him on the spot.

He lifted his arm to put it around Paula's shoulders but she deftly dodged him by leaning in to put books in her locker. It landed on Virginia's shoulder and stayed there.

"Well, hi there grey eyes. What's your name?"

"Don, she'sâ 'OOF!" Paula huffed as Virginia's elbow smacked her in the ribs. "Ah, er, Virginia." She finished quietly, turning to me to hide a small smile.

"Is it 'oof' or 'Virginia'? He asked, taking her hand.

"Virginia will do, um, Don is it?"

"Yup. Just got here a few weeks ago from California. Actually, right now I'm trying to find a date for the spring dance. Are you interested?" Don said, looking directly into Virginia's eyes.

She looked over Don's shoulder and gave a very stealthy wink towards me at my locker next to hers. She smiled fatuously up at Don.

"Gee. I don't know for sure. I'll have to check with my husband first before I can give you an answer."

He looked a bit startled. "Ummm. Your, er, husband? You're married!?"

Don gave a little bark of laughter, and then smilingly reached for Virginia's left hand. When he brought it up into view, his laughter stopped abruptly. He reached out and touched her wedding ring.

"Is that, er, for real or just guy repellent?"

"Oh, it's real, Don. And this is my daughter, Marie." She said as she opened her locker wider so he could see the pictures taped inside.

"Ummm." He swallowed a couple of times. "Ahh, I mean no disrespect Virginia but aren't you kind of young? I mean to be married and have a kid?"

"That 'kid' has a name, buster. Her name is Marie and she's five months old! And, yes, I am married to a great and wonderful guy who is standing about a foot behind you!" Virginia said, with a little spot of pink appearing on either cheek - a sure sign she was irritated.

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Don spun around and almost collided with me. He looked up and met my eyes. I revised my estimate of his height down to five foot eleven or thereabouts. I was a lot bulkier than him also. I wasn't going to try and wrestle him down to the floor and break his arms by any means, but I did want to set him firmly on the path to righteousness.

"Don, you really got yourself started here on the wrong foot. I've watched you as you cut your path through half the senior girls here. Have you ever wondered why you only get a first date and no more?"

"Um. No. Not really."

"Here is not a good place to talk." I said, trying my best to not show any dislike for him. "You're new here and need to know just how our little closed society works. This isn't the States. You don't have an unlimited supply of girls to work through. Our senior class is only a hundred and seventy-five strong and not a half of them are girls. Do you think you can take some advice?"

"I think so. It depends on what it is I guess." He paused. "Sure. I know I can."

"Good. I think that maybe the best thing to do is start all over again from the beginning here. Hi, my name is Tom and this is my wife Virginia. Her very best friend, Paula, you already know."

Don took a second to think it through and backed up a pace. He held out his hand which Virginia took and they shook. Then he and I shook hands.

"Tom, Virginia, very happy to meet you. I hope I didn't cause you any embarrassment before and I would definitely like to start again."

"Apology accepted, Don." Said Virginia. "Would you and Paula like to have dinner with us tonight at our house?"

Paula nodded and Don spoke. "I accept, and thanks very much."

"We can meet back here at the end of the day then. See you later. We've got to run now for class."

Don looked at his watch, said he'd better hurry too, and strode off. Paula sighed and gave me her thanks. Virginia slammed her locker door, turned to me for a quick peck on the lips, and dashed off to her next class. Just before she left also, Paula told me that she really did like Don, but he was so full of himself he didn't seem to have room for anyone else. Maybe today taught him a lesson. We'd find out.

That afternoon we met at Virginia's locker again. Don was a lot quieter and even a bit circumspect. He treated both Virginia and Paula with a lot more respect and courtesy. We gathered books we'd need for homework and went out into my car.

He looked at our little Volkswagen. "You have a car? My parents won't let me have one. They say the insurance is too high."

"Mine was too, but I paid for it out of my wages at the PAO. When I got married, the premium went way down even though I was just eighteen. Something about being married makes that happen."

"Well, that's cool then."

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He opened the door for Paula and she stepped into the back seat and slid over to the opposite side. Don got in next to her and pulled the front seat back so Virginia could get in. I closed the door and got in the driver's seat. We didn't have far to go, but it really did beat walking.

I parked in one of our two slots (my dad parked in the other) and we all piled out. I opened our front door and we all went into the living room.

"I keep sounding like a broken record here with my questions, but do you have this whole apartment to yourself?"

"Actually, it's half of what was assigned to my dad. He and the rest of my family live in the other side which is a three bedroom side. Ours is just two bedrooms."

Just then, Hilde, my parent's maid, came out of Marie's bedroom with the baby over her shoulder. She spoke a torrent of German to which Virginia responded. They talked for a couple of minutes and then Hilde handed Marie to Virginia and went through the connecting door to the other apartment. Marie took that moment to release a huge, gassy, belch which brought a smile to everyone. Paula reached for Marie and Virginia handed her over.

"Wow! That sounded like very good German. How long have you been living here?" Asked Don.

"Just over three years," Virginia answered. "Tom is better at it than I am. He's fooled real Germans into thinking he was from Trier."

"No shit! Oops, sorry, Virginia."

"No shit," she responded with a laugh. "But we try not to swear in front of the B-A-B-Y," she spelled.

Don thought a moment and then broke out with a huge laugh as he caught the joke. I thought to myself that he was trainable and maybe he just might make a good match for Paula. Time, and Paula, would tell for sure. He went over to peer at Marie in Paula's arms.

"Oh, she is a cutie for sure! Can I hold her?"

"Sure," said Paula as I nodded my assent.

Paula held Marie out and Don nervously braced her little head with the palm of his hand. Then he took her completely from Paula. He smiled down at her, tickled her chin as her little blue eyes opened, and began to track his face. A tiny smile appeared which melted Don's countenance visibly.

"Oh, man. What a heartbreaker she is for sure."

"Time for me to top off her tanks right now though Don." Virginia said, reaching for Marie. "You three go ahead and yak for a while. I'll be back in a bit."

"Okay, Honey. I'll play host. Do either one of you want some iced tea or coffee or something?"

"I'd love a glass of tea, Tom. How about you Don?"

"Tea's fine with me too."

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I went into the kitchen and filled four glasses with pre-brewed tea, added ice, and just a drop or two of lemon. Paula and Don had taken seats on the couch so I set the tray down on the coffee table and we took our glasses. I sat in the side chair. After taking a couple of swallows of tea, I decided it was time for Don's education into the workings of our teen society here in Stadt.

"Don, I asked you before if you'd like to know how to fit in around her a lot better. Still interested?"

"Absolutely. The three of you are so very different than the bunch I ran around with in California that it seems like a different world here. I mean, I've never seen to many kids with such good manners."

"Good manners are just the beginning, Don. Being polite to everyone isn't practiced by everyone here - that's for sure, there are some bad ones - but those of us that do treat each other with respect get along much better than those that don't. You started out in the 'don't' category simply because of an attitude that ran contrary to ours. My guess is that you lived off base and went to a civilian school. Am I right?"

"Yes, you are. I was bussed across town to a school where nobody really cared about anything or anyone's feelings. With a class of over seven hundred it seemed easier to just blow through dates instead of picking just one to stay with. I guess that I just carried that over to here. I can see now it wasn't a good idea. I apologize, Paula, for treating you that way."

"Apology accepted, Don; and I'd like to add that I would like to go with you to the spring dance in Virginia's place, seeing as how she's involved with another guy now."

We all had a little laugh over that but then Don's face dropped back into seriousness.

"Thank you, Paula. It's a date then."

* * *

Don and Paula went to the spring dance and had a great time. Virginia and I went with them. We switched partners a couple of times and Virginia reported that Don was a very good dancer. Not as good as me, but good. Two weeks later, Paula happily reported that she was wearing Don's garnet ring and pulled it out from between her breasts to show us. She and Virginia hugged and I kissed her cheek. The next time I saw Don I congratulated him and shook his hand. He looked puzzled until it dawned on him what I meant, and then he actually began to blush a little. He said that she's a great girl and he has stopped looking around. I had completely changed my mind from my earlier snap judgment and come to think of him as a good friend now.

Chapter 29: If Only Us... Chapter 29

As June approached everyone got ready for final exams and graduation. We had survived high school! Three couples, one of which was in our closely knit group, announced engagements. Roger and Cleo made it official at the senior prom. He went to one knee right in front of her in the middle of the empty dance floor and proposed. Shouts of congratulations from his male friends and shrieks of joy from her female friends echoed around the hall. We gave them a solitary dance in celebration.

Virginia accused me of knowing about it because she'd seen Roger and me near the jewelry counter at the BX a couple of times. I told her that I did know what Roger was up to, but I elected not to tell her because it might get back to Cleo. Virginia looked pensive for a moment, but then her face cleared and she smiled. That told me I'd made the right decision.

Marie began to grow like a weed. She had doubled her weight and grown seven inches in six months. She was now able to get our attention by making a raspberry sound (or, normally, crying). It was startling for either of us when we were holding her and reading and she would give us a wet blast of air.

One morning, Virginia went into Marie's room to change her and I heard a terrible scream. I rushed out of our bedroom and almost collided with Virginia who was holding Marie tightly to her chest.

"I think I've broken her arms!" Virginia screamed with tears streaming down her face.

I quickly, and carefully, ran my fingers down each arm in her sleeper but could detect nothing wrong. She also wasn't crying at all. How could she be that hurt?

"Honey! Calm down. Why do you think you broke her arms? She's fine!"

"Well, I reached into the crib and when I picked her up her arms bent the wrong way."

"The 'wrong way'? What do you mean?"

"I put her down last night on her stomach. She sleeps better that way. This morning, it was dark in the room and when I picked her up, ummm, waitâshe was on her back! That's why her arms bent that way! Did you turn her over?"

"Nope, not me. Maybe she did it herself. Put her back down on her stomach and let's watch."

She carefully put Marie back in the crib on her stomach. She struggled a little, fussed a lot, and then squirmed enough to get a little knee under her hips. She lifted quickly and suddenly flopped over on her back. A tiny hint of triumph glinted in her blue eyes.

"Son of a gun," I ventured.

"Well I'll be. Wait till mom hears this."

* * *

Graduation ceremonies took place on a gloriously clear and warm day in early June. Virginia had elected to carry Marie up the steps to the podium. It had been cleared through the school administration and faculty so that wasn't a problem. Since her last name and mine were the same now, we sat together through the speeches

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and hoped that Marie wouldn't wake up and cause a fuss. She didn't, and our row finally rose to march up the aisle to get our diplomas.

I got mine and then Virginia was handed hers. The principal shook our hands and we stepped down, stage left, and went back to our seats. When everyone had received their papers we all stood and tossed our headgear into the air. We'd done it! We were now loose on an unsuspecting world!

* * *

A very nervous Virginia acted as Cleo's Matron of Honor at her wedding to Roger in late June. They had originally planned on waiting until August, but changed their plans. Two months later, Cleo confided in Virginia that their haste was a bit premature. Virginia told her not to worry because they were planning to get married anyway. This way, nobody would accuse them of any hanky panky. All four of us knew better though because we'd been on that train to Paris with them.

Five days after I turned eighteen I took and passed with a very high score the examination for Civil Service of the United States. I was accepted into a grade of GS-6. Normal entry level was lower than that, but consideration had been given to the job I was filling at the PAO. I was assigned back to the PAO, but now I had the status the same as a rookie Lieutenant. I was afforded the privileges of the Officers Club and, if I wanted it, I could draw a housing allowance and move off the base.

In August, Virginia and I held quite a few brainstorming sessions with both her parents and mine. Sometimes all six of us were together pondering what we should do. My dad said that his tour would be up in four months and he'd lose his quarters, naturally; so that made it imperative we moved somewhere. Virginia's parents weren't much better off because their extension ran out in three months. We decided to take the offer of off-base housing that my newly acquired status gave me. I made a phone call to Frantz and Angelica and asked if we could come down for some advice.

Next evening, we bundled up Marie and drove down to the Inn. Frantz and Angelica greeted us as the old friends we were by that time and herded us into their living room. We sat down, Frantz prepared to fire up his pipe, but was glared down by a stern-faced Angelica, and we began to lay out our options for what we needed vice what we could afford and everything else we would need to live off base. When we finished our little spiel, Angelica began talking to Frantz.

"Your brother has that apartment across from the train yard. Is it ready for rent?"

"I do not know, Mother. Let me call him," Frantz said, going to make the call.

We chatted about things that had happened since the last time we were here; including the fact that Frantz's niece, Danni, has come to work here at the Inn. She was out shopping, but would be back shortly.

Frantz came back into the room and said that the apartment would be available in two weeks after his brother cleaned it out and repainted a room. He said apologetically that it was located next to the train yard and was hard to rent. I told him that would definitely not be a problem at all because I loved trains and that I knew someone over in the yard. He beamed and asked us to come back Saturday and he would show us where it was.

While we were talking, Danni came in laden with three string bags. I jumped up to give her a hand but Angelica beat me to it. We were introduced, and Danni curtsied. She was a very buxom blonde wearing a tight-bodice dirndl with ties crisscrossed under her breasts. Her skirt was very full and hung well below her knees; a rounded, rosy-cheeked face set with very blue eyes completed her visage. She had a very soft voice

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and a twinkle in her downcast eyes. She appeared to be very shy but once she realized we spoke excellent German she warmed up a lot.

She told us that she'd been studying English in school, but hadn't had much luck with the practical side of it because of the lack of native English speakers. Virginia and I both told her we'd be happy to help.

"I am â thanking you â much." She said haltingly in English.

I replied, "You are very welcome" in the same language, to which she curtsied again, dimpled and giggled.

We were invited for dinner, but Virginia begged off by telling Angelica that we had to get back to the house. I confirmed that we would be back on Saturday; Frantz told us to come around thirteen hours. I told him we would.

Saturday afternoon found Virginia and me, less Marie, back at the Inn. Frantz packed us into his old Opel and we made the short trip down to his brother's apartment. If ever there was a 'cartoon' German that popped into one's mind, Frantz's brother was it. Claus was built like a fireplug with a very ruddy face, a bulbous nose, and a fringe of hair that ran completely around his bald head. He laughed a lot and his entire body bobbed when he talked - and he never really stopped talking.

He immediately began speaking in understandable, but halting, English until I assured him that both Virginia and I spoke German. To which Frantz added his agreement. This was good news to Claus and he shifted gears and began showing us around his little apartment.

The bathroom was pretty small but it only seemed that way because of the huge enameled metal tub that dominated one whole corner. The usual WC tank on the wall was hung next to an on-demand hot water system. This meant that the water was only heated when you turned on the tap. Very efficient. A small sink stood against the opposite wall with a cabinet above it.

We went from there to the bedroom. Frantz's description of it being small wasn't quite right. It was quite large actually and centered against the far wall was an enormous four-poster bed complete with canopy. There were two chests of drawers and a very large clothes wardrobe against a wall. Two windows looked out on the cinders and tracks of the railroad yard. I was going to love this place if we could afford it. The kitchen was utilitarian with a gas stove, which Virginia mumbled to me she'd never cooked on, a fairly large refrigerator and dual bowl sink. Quite a bit of counter space was available.

The living room was very comfortable. The big window looked out on the quiet street in front of the apartment. The room contained a very nice sofa, two easy chairs, a gas fireplace, a dining table against the wall that would be pulled out for meals, and two huge bookcases filled with books.

I asked what the stairs at the side led to and Claus said it was just an attic storage room about two meters by three meters. Very limited headroom though because of the roofline ridge.

Frantz and Claus put their heads together and palavered off and on several times as Virginia and I went out of earshot. I figured they were talking money. I sidled up to Frantz and asked about the money protocol. He told me to just ask, so I did. Claus named a figure that I thought was very reasonable. We could make that payment fairly easily and still have enough for food and utilities. When I asked about utilities Claus told me that the town of Stadt specified that utilities were always to be included in the rent paid. This was definitely good news.

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We would have to foot the bill for a telephone though - a necessity for us or we'd never hear the end of it from our parents - and a newspaper. I needed the phone so that the PAO office could get hold of me if necessary. Claus and I shook hands formally and the deal was done. We had a house of our own!

Frantz told us that he'd give us a nice housewarming and provide food for it. It was a very nice gesture because he didn't have to do it. He shrugged that off and told us we'd become almost family to him and he really wanted to do it. He said there would be about fifteen or twenty people and to be sure to bring Marie. I told him we definitely would.

Claus said we could move in three weeks from now. He wanted to paint two rooms and re-sand the steps leading up to the attic. I told him with a laugh that it would probably take us that long to gather all our stuff. He did indicate that we could put anything we brought over into the bedroom where it wouldn't be bothered. I thanked him for that. With a final walk through, Virginia, Frantz and I went back out to his Opel and drove back to the Inn and Angelica.

Chapter 30: If Only Us... Chapter 30

Three weeks to the day Claus called me and said the apartment was ready for us. I thanked him and turned to Virginia.

"We have a new home, Honey. Claus said the apartment is ready. We need to go sign papers."

"Oh, wonderful! I've been packing some of our stuff so we can move almost right away. Can we borrow your dad's bus to help move?"

"I imagine we could. We could even take the rear two sets of seats out to give us more room. I'll go ask."

I went over and tapped on the connecting door. My sister pulled it open and said that dad was in the living room. I went in and asked. He said yes and that he'd even help us move.

Virginia and I went down to Claus's little office and signed paperwork. Most of it had thoughtfully been translated into English. The deal looked good, the money was right, so we signed and had our very first home to ourselves. We shook hands with Claus and he handed us our keys. He smiled broadly, knowing that we would immediately go to the apartment but also asked that we be there at seven this evening for the housewarming. We told him we'd be there and left for the apartment.

We poked around and looked at the great job he'd done painting and fixing up. The steps to the attic were nicely varnished and when I peeked into the space it looked large enough to store almost all of our things we weren't using at the time. The stove seemed different until Virginia said she thought it was new. The on-demand hot water fired up and produced very hot water. I found the adjustment and turned it down a little so we wouldn't be scalded or, more importantly, scald little Marie. We left to go back to the base for a bit.

That evening, we arrived at the apartment and found the door open and the sounds of a group of people enjoying themselves. When we entered the living room everyone stood and introduced themselves. Some were neighbors, some were friends of Otto and Herta, and some were just friends with the others. All the women wanted to hold Marie and one of them rattled off to her friend in very fast local German that Virginia was way too young to have a child. When I answered her in the same town patois she looked a little embarrassed and apologized. She added that my German was very good. She laughed wholeheartedly when I bowed and clicked my heels towards her.

Even Danni, Otto's niece, put in an appearance. She asked shyly if Virginia would like to have some part-time help and brightened considerably when Virginia said she would like that very much. Danni took Marie into the other room and out of the smoke from many cigarettes. I didn't really mind it, but Virginia wanted to keep it away from Marie as much as possible.

The short '*kaffeklatsch*' lasted for about an hour or so and then everyone said their goodbyes and left. Danni brought Marie to Virginia and shyly shook our hands as she left.

"Well, Honey. It's all ours now and we can move tomorrow after work." I said.

"Oh, Tom. I feel a little scared now. On base we had our families around but down here all we have are strangers."

I held her shoulders. "But, they won't be strangers for long. We'll see them every day at some time or another. We even share a common patio with the Wilhelm's. It'll be fine, you'll see." I said, putting my arms around the

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both of them and hugging.

I kissed her cheek and bent to kiss Marie. She gave me a raspberry and we broke up. It took us four days of hard work to move all our stuff from the base to the apartment but when we were finally done we had a home. We hosted both families to dinner in our cramped living room and kitchen but a great time was had by all.

My mom surprised me a little when she put her arm around my waist and told me again that she was so proud of me and my family. She added that it didn't seem like I was anywhere near a kid any more but a young adult with a family.

* * *

With a heavy heart, Virginia and I helped her parents pack up for their transfer. They were on their way down to Italy which isn't that far away by train but a long way for moral support. Every so often her mom would hand Virginia something of her childhood and they'd have a good cry over it. Pictures, stuffed animal, old toy, or bronzed baby shoes; it just didn't matter to them.

Finally, the day arrived when they were to leave on the train. Feeling a little bit strange seeing them off for a change. Virginia, Marie, and I, along with my whole family, stood in a sad little group as they waved from the compartment window until the train rounded the corner near the river.

Virginia turned to me and hoed and hawed into my shoulder. I lifted her head, kissed away her tears, and told her that we were her family now and always would be. Red-eyed, she nodded and kissed me back. My family said their goodbyes and went off to get their car for the ride back to the base. I felt that Virginia might like to just take a stroll. Marie was put into her baby carriage and we went down the sidewalk towards the fence around the rail yard.

The first thing I noticed was Hans's little switcher chugging down the yard lead with a string of beer wagons. As it got closer I could see that it wasn't Hans doing the driving. It looked like Gerd was firing, but no Hans. I waved as they passed and Gerd waved back vigorously and indicated for us to wait.

We sat down on the bench that had been thoughtfully placed just for train watchers and waited until Gerd and his driver came back empty. The driver tooted twice, which is a signal for stopping, and squealed to a halt right across the fence from us. Gerd bounded down from the engine with his face wreathed in smiles.

He asked if we had heard about Hans. The last I'd known was that he was a pretty highly placed engineer but that's about it. Gerd filled me in. It seems that Hans was not only the chief engineer, but was really supposed to be in his office instead of driving trains. Now, I'd known he was a pretty big guy when he and the gang at the office paid for all our meals on the Tulip Express for our honeymoon to Amsterdam, but this was the first time I'd really seen just what a big shot he was.

Gerd started to say something else, but stopped and stared at the baby carriage. He did a double-take and looked at me quizzically. I told him that, yes, this was our baby, and he really started to get agitated. He called back to the driver who looked both ways to see if anyone was watching, and ran over to the fence. Gerd rapidly filled him in on who we were and how much Hans liked us. He pointed to the baby and said that it was ours.

Virginia uncovered Marie and held her up to the wire. Gerd tickled her under the chin, looked at the little black smudge he'd put there, and quickly wiped it off with a clean rag - apologizing all the time. We laughed and put him at ease. The driver was getting a bit nervous and said he wasn't supposed to leave the engine so the two of them went back over and climbed aboard. Gerd told us to go to the second floor of the Bahnhof and

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ask for Hans. We waved as the driver tooted three times (which startled Marie) and hustled down the tracks back to the brewery.

We did as Gerd told us and found Hans in his office. When he saw who it was he hopped up and rushed to shake my hand. He bowed over Virginia's and also did a double-take at the carriage. We went through the bit about whose it was just like Gerd and let him hold Marie. He went back across the office and sat down. He began bouncing Marie on his knee and making puffing sounds. She was certainly meeting a lot of men in her young life.

He told us he'd finally been told that as a supervisor he should get out of the yard and back up in the office. He had reluctantly agreed and, now, here he was; surrounded by forms and all. He was philosophical about it however and said that he'd accepted his lot. Changing gears quickly, he invited us down to the employee cafeteria for a cup of coffee. We accepted.

During the relatively short time we spent in the cafeteria we met what seemed like everyone in the building. Some of the people who had contributed to our honeymoon meals said that they were happy to finally meet the young couple Hans had been going on about. I thanked each and every one of them and so did Virginia. We finally had to leave because Marie was getting fussy. As we said goodbye Hans told us to come back and visit him in his dungeon. We laughed and Virginia pecked him on the cheek. Then we left for home.

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Soon, too soon, it came time for my family to leave also. Virginia and I helped pack their household goods too. We ended up with more things than we needed, but we took them anyway. We could always put them in the attic or, as my dad told us to do, sell them.

We tried to have them over for dinners as much as we could, but as time became short, our gatherings became bittersweet. We would sit and reminisce a lot. Conversation slowed and we just sipped coffee or wine and remembered. Finally there was no more time for dinners. They were to leave the next day.

They had taken their bus up to Bremerhaven to drop it off for shipment six weeks ago so all they had to do was take a train up to Rhine-Main Air Base for the flight home. We repeated the scene at the train station that we had for Virginia's parents. Once mine left, we'd be really by ourselves.

Since I had a GS rating, I still had base privileges so that wasn't a problem. I couldn't buy anything at the Class VI store (liquor store) because of my age, but I did have limited Base Exchange access for some things but not others. My job at the PAO was keeping me very busy as well as coaching the high school soccer team on Saturday afternoons.

When we got home from the train station Virginia and I sat in the living room, her head on my shoulder and we both got a bit weepy. Marie woke up and blew a nice, wet, raspberry at us and smiled. That broke the tension and we laughed; maybe a bit forced, but we did laugh.

"Virginia, Honey, it's just you, me and Marie now."

She snuggled deep into my shoulder, sniffled once, and lifted her head to kiss me.

"Yup. Just perfect."

* * *

We stayed in Germany for another five years. I was promoted to shop supervisor which carried a GS-9 ranking. That made me an honorary Major. My pay allowed us to move into a larger apartment downtown. We now had three bedrooms so I was able to set up one of them as a darkroom. I taught myself how to develop color film and began taking baby pictures around the base for even more money.

I bought Virginia a secondhand Volkswagen bug and rebuilt the engine for her one weekend. She named it Christina.

Virginia landed a job as teacher's assistant at the base high school. Her first assignment was to teach women's health, which tickled her a bit owing to her own history. In the three years she taught there, many girls came to her for advice on how to handle an overly-aggressive boyfriend. During the same time, only one girl became pregnant.

Marie, now six, was a very inquisitive kid. She asked hundreds of questions about the world around her. She could also switch seamlessly between English and German because when she started talking Virginia and I spoke German on odd days and English on even days. Of course, Danni and all our neighbors spoke only German.

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Speaking of Danni, Virginia and I held impromptu classes and taught her conversational English. She went on to apply, and land, a job at the base elementary school teaching German to the children.

Frantz had a severe stroke which put him in the hospital for over a month. It took away his ability to speak clearly. Angelina assumed the entire care of the Inn but it became too much for her and she ended up selling it to a big chain that promptly closed the Inn and razed it in order to put up an ugly steel and glass parking garage. Frantz passed away six months before Angelina sold the Inn. She moved away to Osnabrück to be with her younger sister.

Don had become a close friend of the family and on Christmas day, six weeks before Paula was to return to the States with her parents, he proposed to her and she accepted. They had both gone to Hanover to attend the American University run by the University of Maryland. We still keep up correspondence with them. They have a two year old son now.

Hans was promoted once more to Station Manager for the whole Bahnhof. We attended his promotion party that lasted a whole day. That same day, Hans announced that Gerd had taken and passed with high marks his test for engineer. Hans put him in charge of the little switcher he'd been firing for ten years. Gerd, in turn, announced that he was engaged to marry his girlfriend of four years. She stood beside him and blushed mightily.

Mr. Espana, Arlo, who had been one of the chaperones on the event-filled trip to Paris so many years ago, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. He was eventually confined to a wheelchair in which he scooted around the halls of the high school. I began to help out more with the Photo Club and eventually was asked to be one of the chaperones on yet another trip to Paris, but this time Virginia and I were in charge of five guys and eight girls. I was tough, but fair, and kept a weather eye on them from reveille to taps. What went on at night was up to the individual girls and their moral compasses (plus a very frank talk by Virginia).

Virginia, Marie, and I wish you a very heartfelt '*Auf Wiedersehen*' from Germany.

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