

Wanderlust!

Wanderlust!

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Two disparate young persons who meet on a European train and fall in love. He - an American college student. She - a young lady headed for a skiing holiday. This is their story.

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Table of Contents

[Wanderlust - Chapter 1](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 2](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 3](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 4](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 5](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 6](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 7](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 8](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 9](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 10](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 11](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 12](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 13](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 14](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 15](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 16](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 17](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 18](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 19](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 20](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 21](#)

[Wanderlust - Chapter 22](#)

Wanderlust!

Wanderlust - Chapter 23

Wanderlust - Chapter 24

Wanderlust - Chapter 25

Wanderlust - Chapter 26

Wanderlust - Chapter 27

Wanderlust - Chapter 28

Wanderlust - Chapter 29

Wanderlust - Chapter 30

Wanderlust - Chapter 31

Wanderlust - Chapter 32

Wanderlust - Chapter 33

Wanderlust - Chapter 34

Wanderlust - Chapter 35

Wanderlust - Chapter 36

Wanderlust - Chapter 37

Wanderlust - Chapter 38

Wanderlust - Chapter 39

Wanderlust - Chapter 40

Wanderlust - Chapter 41

Wanderlust - Chapter 42

Wanderlust - Chapter 43

Wanderlust - Chapter 44

Wanderlust - Chapter 45

Chapter 1: Wanderlust - Chapter 1

[December 13, 1963]

[Wiesbaden, West Germany]

Soon after the screech of the aircraft's tires on the runway and the loud roaring of the props as they reversed, the young man began to take in his surroundings. He'd been reading a book, as usual, and the sounds of the aircraft as it prepared to land hadn't penetrated into his shell.

Looking expectantly out the window into a gloriously bright winter afternoon he caught his first glimpse of the American air base he knew as Rhine-Main. He'd been lucky enough to catch the space-available flight from New Jersey to Germany after waiting only one day.

The plane finally reached the terminal and squealed to a stop. After several loud bumps as the stairs were put up against the fuselage, the attendant opened the door. Row by row, the slightly numb passengers straggled forward and out the door. Soon, it was the young man's turn.

Physically, one might say he appeared 'rugged looking'. He stood six feet two inches and weighed in the vicinity of a hundred and ninety pounds. His hair was dark and sometimes hung down over somewhat widely set grey eyes in a plain, square face. His name was Bill Stiles.

He'd spent his last summer as a firefighter stationed in Missoula, Montana - the same city that hosted his current school: Montana State University. He was just finishing his sophomore year. During his freshman year, he'd bulked up quite a bit while firefighting - lifting weights, hauling fire hoses around, and lugging equipment up and down mountains.

During the last fire season, there had been four fires. One of them was a really bad one that took nearly a week to put down. As a result of all this physical activity, he carried a lot of muscle. He was definitely not muscle-bound, but could lift over one hundred and forty pounds. When not fighting fires or attending college and living in a dormitory, he stayed mostly as a guest at his parent's house on Malmstrom AFB in Great Falls.

It was because of him being a dependent that he was able to take advantage of this space-available flight. This extended privilege would end upon his graduation - or at age twenty five - whichever came first.

As he trudged across the pavement to the waiting doorway to customs, he reflected that he needed this upcoming vacation. He'd been studying intensely for his final exams during the previous month and, in between caffeine-fueled bouts of cramming, he found himself daydreaming about this vacation.

Now it had arrived; it was the thirteenth of December. His finals were over and time for a bit of relaxation. He was twenty-three years old and supremely happy that this current school year was finished.

His college year ended in December because he started late in the year for his freshman year at college. Immediately upon graduating from high school, he'd spent eight months as a firefighter trainee in the Missoula area of Montana. Since the fire season runs from early spring (for training) until late fall (when the cold and snow starts) his college year was out of kilter. As a result, here he was - free to go wandering around Germany in December without having to get back right away. May eleventh, the start of his next year, was a long way off.

Wanderlust!

Taking his place in line for processing, he reflected on comments made by his best friends. Passersby might say his face had 'character' but he'd been told lately by friends that he just looked tired. The previous week-long burst of mental activity had signaled the end of his second year at college. In between studying and taking exams, working a bit at his part-time job in the cafeteria, and managing a little sleep, the budding romance with a classmate had faded; then wilted. His innermost thoughts agreed that the hardest thing he'd had to do was let go of the young lady.

He figured it wasn't the particular fault of either Beth or him, but a combination of the two of them and their relationship towards each other. She attended a girl's school nearby and, when finals season hit, it hit both of them and they just couldn't find time for each other.

Semi-harsh words were said and the affiliation deteriorated after that. He sighed; dating was out of the question now. This was, perhaps, a blessing in disguise because he was now able to save up enough for a European (mostly Germany) vacation. The very same one he found himself on at this moment.

Smiling ruefully to himself, he once again thought that perhaps he'd been foolhardy by not making at least an overnight hotel reservation here in Wiesbaden but he had absolutely no plans or prior reservations; other than the plane flight out of Malmstrom to New Jersey to Wiesbaden's Rhine-Main Airport. He'd put his name on the waiting list almost six months ago. He knew that flying space-available would be easy going East because most kids were coming back to the States for the holidays. It was really off-season now in Germany, being mid-December, so hotels and trains would be hurting for the tourist money.

So, today is the day he landed in Germany and now he was being waved forward to the customs desk. He'd always traveled light so whatever he carried in his backpack was all he had. He figured he didn't need anything more or, if he found something he needed he'd buy it. He was flush with almost four thousand dollars in a belt around my waist; having earned it fighting fires. At the thought of the money, he looked around but then leaned forward on the small desk and presented his passport.

The process took only moments and then his passport was stamped and he was waved through. He picked up his backpack and walked out into the concourse. Muted noise from passing groups of people, the rumbling, popping, and roar of piston engines as airplanes taxied past, and the occasional announcement over the public address system were just that: noises.

Once out into the bright sunlight he decided that taking a tram from the airport to the train station would be a fun way to make the trip. He checked the large placard listing trams and their destinations, and then queued up for the next streetcar headed that way. Among faces reddened from the cold, blowing wind, he sat back in a chilly plastic seat and watched the scenery go by. Eventually, they neared the train station and he hopped off carrying his backpack over one shoulder when the tram made its stop.

The station was a cavernous structure that echoed loudly with the sounds of hundreds of voices, announcements, and Christmas carols. Casting his eyes around, he finally located the ticketing office and when he arrived asked about a fare to Munich. Bill was very fluent in German because he'd lived in Germany when his father was stationed there in the late-fifties. In the intervening years, he'd kept in practice by joining various German-American clubs wherever he could find them. He was so confident now that he was even thinking in German.

The agent consulted his bookings and said he was in luck as he only had one remaining compartment on the train to Augsburg. Bill thought for a moment as a compartment would be a bit more expensive, and then decided that a compartment would be better than a coach seat so he paid and gathered up the ticket with a hearty "*Dankeschön*". With his backpack hanging from one arm, he began to search out a nice place to have a quick drink.

Wanderlust!

Following the sounds of caroling, Bill soon located a makeshift bar manned, or more properly, womaned, with buxom maids serving warm *Glühwein*; a concoction of wine leftover from the seasonal pressing with spicy cinnamon added. It is very delicious and will warm a person right up. It is also sneaky and will cut your legs out from under you if you have too many of them. He sat at a small table and sipped; but stopped at two of the things and headed for his departure track.

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Across town, in a small, out of the way hotel, a young woman was packing her small valise. She had laid out all her clothing on the bed and was making slow headway folding items just right. She cocked her head to one side, whispered a very unladylike phrase, and started yet again.

Finally, she managed to get it all in; but there was absolutely no room left at all. She decided to wear her sweater under her overcoat. She thought briefly of just leaving it for the maid, but it had been a gift from her sister last Christmas and that just didn't seem right.

Her name was Molly and she was from Montreal, Canada. Her mother and father, Suzette and Alain Garnet, had given Molly this trip as a reward for graduating at the top of her class this year. As Molly was an excellent skier, their aim was to let her go to Garmish-Partenkirchen on a ski vacation.

She glanced at her watch and frowned. It was always difficult to translate her normal watch into the twenty-four hour clock they used here. It had always been that way - even though "European time" was used extensively in Montreal also. She was still on time for her train, but only if she left within ten minutes. She phoned downstairs to the desk and had them prepare her bill. She also asked them to call her a taxi for a trip to the train station.

Taking a last look around the room, Molly picked up her somewhat heavy suitcase and exited the room carrying her key. She took the elevator down and strode over to the desk. The clerk greeted her and she handed him the key. Molly answered him. "*Bonjour. Mon nom est Garnet. Ma facture est-il prêt?*" She asked. The clerk nodded and put her bill on the counter. Molly glanced down the charges, found them to be correct, and pulled the required amount of cash out of her purse which she handed to the clerk.

"*Merci, Mademoiselle. Avez un agréable voyage.*" The clerk said with a smile. Molly thanked her and turned for the door lugging her suitcase. A passing porter saw her and took it from her hand and pushed the door open. He waited with her until a cab pulled up. He leaned into the opening window and told the driver that Molly wanted to go to the main train station. All she caught of the conversation was "â *Hauptbahnhof*".

The porter laid her bag in the trunk and stepped back, tipping his hat. Molly thanked him and got into the back seat. The taxi driver nodded at her. "I take to train terminal." He said.

"*Dankeschön!*" Molly said with a smile. It was virtually the only word she knew in German. Coming, as she did, from Montreal, all they spoke there was French. She sat back and enjoyed the ride.

In due time, the taxi pulled up to the main entrance to the train station. It was bustling with people coming and going through the various doors. She paid the driver, got out, and walked back to the trunk. He popped it, and she retrieved her bag. With a wave, she headed inside.

A brief moment of panic ensued when she couldn't remember where she'd put her ticket. Giving a sigh of relief, she pulled it out of the inner pocket of her sweater. Heading over to the big display board, she compared her train number to the proper column and saw which track she was on. Glancing at one of the many clocks, she hurried towards the gate.

Wanderlust!

The gate attendant took her ticket and pointed to the left. She thanked him and walked down the carriages until she reached the section indicated on her ticket. An attendant helped her aboard and led her down the passageway to her tiny compartment. Once inside, she sighed and sat down on the bench seat. Now, she reflected, she could relax.

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The ticket checker at the gate gave a Bill friendly salute and assured him his train was '*auf der linken Seite*' or, on the left side. Bill walked down the length of the glossy green coaches and found his car, climbed aboard, and located his little compartment. The porter appeared, they chatted briefly as he helped him settle into the room. On the dot, a shrill whistle sounded once, then again, and the train began to move.

With an occasional jolting, the train eased out of the station. Bill sat back in the seat in his compartment and opened the book he'd been reading on the plane but stuffed in a pocket of his pack on landing. He didn't have any real interest in the cityscape unfolding outside his window as during his teen years he'd lived here in Germany and was very familiar with typical German cityscapes. Due to this foreknowledge, he had an adequate supply of paperbacks to keep himself occupied. Lulled by the rhythmic clatter of steel wheels over rail joints and the swaying of the car, his eyelids slowly drooped.

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The train gave a lurch and began to move. In the distance, Molly heard two blasts of the engine's steam whistle. Now that she was underway, she decided to freshen up a little and change into something that wasn't as warm. She found that the compartment was heated well enough to make her uncomfortable in a sweater.

She laid her bag on the tiny table next to where the sink would pull down and unsnapped the latches. She'd packed it so well that the lid popped up and bumped the wall. Molly searched through her clothes until she found a lighter-weight dress. Quickly she slipped off her sweater and skirt and replaced them with the dress.

Then, intending to wash her face and hands, she bent down and attempted to see how the little basin was opened. Two small handles on either side apparently were used to pull it down so she did just that. There was a double click as the latches caught. She pushed the tap buttons and ran a bit of water into the bowl.

There was a small clunk beneath the bowl and, just as she took her hands off the rim, it snapped upwards rapidly, crashing against the stops in the wall, which tossed the entire contents of the bowl into her face. She screamed. Grabbing at a nearby towel, she rubbed the water off her face as best as she could. Glancing around, she spotted a push button with a picture of a waiter on it. Stabbing at it rapidly, she continued to blot up the water on her dress.

The car attendant tapped on the door and she opened it and began speaking rapidly in French. It was clear by the expression on the man's face that he didn't understand much French. Exasperated, Molly tried English and finally tried her very limited German. Nothing helped and her temper began to rise.

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Bill was jolted awake by movement and sound in the next compartment: a couple of scrapes against the connecting wall, two clicks which could have been suitcase latches, and the clunk of a lid hitting the wall. He grumped to himself at the disturbance and returned to his book.

He was in the middle of a chapter when there was a very loud crash, a thump and a short piercing scream from the next door compartment. It sounded pretty painful to him - judging by the scream - but maybe not

Wanderlust!

something he should get involved in. He looked up, waited, and listened carefully, but it didn't repeat.

Moments later, Bill heard a tapping on the compartment door next to him. A deep male voice asked a question and there was an answer from a higher pitched female voice. The door opened and they appeared to be either arguing or (more likely) they didn't understand each other. He heard a faint edge of temper entering the conversation.

The female voice was now raised to a level that penetrated into Bill's compartment. She was definitely frustrated by the responses from whoever knocked on her door. He decided that maybe she could use some assistance.

Reaching for the knob of his door, he eased it open and poked his head out. Next door, the car attendant stood facing a blonde haired young woman with a towel around her shoulders. Her hair was dripping wet; and she was angry - not frustrated. She was trying to explain to the attendant, whose knowledge of English was definitely lacking, that the sink she was using snapped up and threw water all over her.

Sinks on most European trains were the drop-down type to give you more room to move about your compartment. If not locked down, they will indeed snap up and throw water all over. Bill remembered him and his brother doing that very thing to his sister several times.

Deciding to take an active part, Bill spoke. "*Verzeihen Sie mir, Mein Herr, vielleicht könnte ich helfen ...?*" He asked in formal German.

The attendant turned to Bill and smiled gratefully, asking if he would see what was troubling the young lady. Bill turned to her and asked her that very question in English.

"I am trying to explain to this man that the sink won't stay down. I had an entire basin of water dumped all over my front." She said to Bill as she moved further out into the passageway to show him her dress.

It was indeed drenched - and very thoroughly. The towel she held in front of her did its best to cover the wet dress, but not enough to hide her wonderful attributes. She sounded American, but Bill couldn't be sure. He held up his hand to stop her and turned to the attendant. He explained what she had just related. A look of comprehension appeared on the attendant's face and he launched into a speech about how he had begun to repair the sink but needed another part and hadn't finished before she arrived. He was devastated that she would come to grief, and would I please convey this to her.

Bill nodded; then turned to the girl. "The attendant is extremely sorry about your accident. He was in the process of fixing it and was going for a part when you arrived. He got busy and didn't finish the job. Would you please forgive him?"

Her face took on a softer countenance. "Oh. Of course. It's just water. But it surprised me and frightened me a little when the sink jumped up at me."

The young lady turned to the conductor and told him she was sorry she got angry. She also asked if he would see what could be done while she was at dinner. Bill relayed this to the man - who assured her that he would have the job done by then. Using the assistance of Bill, they thanked each other and the attendant walked on down the aisle towards his cubbyhole at the end of the car.

She turned to Bill and smiled. It lit up the aisle. "Thank you very much for your help. I never could have explained it to him without dragging him inside and pointing. I'm Molly, Molly Garnet. From Montreal. I speak French of course, but German is beyond me. You speak it very well."

Wanderlust!

When faced with a pretty girl, Bill tended to run off at the mouth. This was one of those times. He took her hand with his. "My name is Bill, and I'm from most anywhere. My family moved around a lot. My latest home has been Montana State University. I'm a junior there - or will be next year. I learned German as a teenager right here in Germany. I lived here for three years." He explained. "*Mon FranÃ§ais est terrible*," He added, in French, and she grimaced.

"You're right, it is." She said with a quick smile. "Living here in Germany sounds wonderful. And now you're back. Just for a visit or will you stay a while?" She paused and looked around quickly, then followed his eyes downwards to her dress.

Suddenly she became aware that she was standing in the passageway, dripping wet, with a towel around her shoulders and her dress practically transparent. She blushed, deeply, and pulled Bill back into her compartment. On the way in he noticed, however, that the door remained firmly latched open. She crossed the room, dropped the towel, and grabbed another one to dab at her dress; which was now drying and becoming less translucent.

Due to his self-imposed celibacy, Bill allowed that she looked just fine to him. Her honey-blonde hair was done up very short and in big lazy waves that curled around her ears and hung to her jaw line like a golden helmet. Bright blue eyes peered out from above a rather Roman nose that, in turn, sat above very full and kissable lips. She wasn't very tall, just about five feet seven or so, but built athletically. The breasts Bill glimpsed behind the towel were not large by any means, but filled out the top of her dress nicely. Her hips flared out over very well formed legs. When she turned to face the suitcase lying on the seat and bent over, he reflected that the nicely shaped rear view was memorable also.

While she was busy fluffing the towel over her hair, Bill turned to look at the sink. Bending over to pick up a knurled thumbscrew lying on the carpet, he found the matching threaded hole on the sink brace. What had happened was the locking lever had come loose and allowed the spring to snap the basin upwards to the stowed position; bringing a full load of water with it. He held the sink down, screwed the bolt in place, pressed down to lock the brace, and raised his hands. The sink remained down.

"How did you do that?" She asked. "Is that all it took?"

"Yeah. Sometimes vibration knocks it loose. I had to make sure mine was tight also." Bill looked around again. "I, um, seem to be in the way here. I'll get back to my compartment. I'm right through there." He indicated the connecting door by tapping on it with his knuckle. "It's locked so don't worry."

"Why should I worry? You seem to be a really handy guy to have around. Are you traveling with anyone? Wife? Girlfriend?" Molly asked boldly, but began to redden.

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"oh, my," Molly thought. "What made me ask that? Still, he is cute. I bet he already has a girlfriend."

* * *

"No, nothing like that. My last girlfriend was months ago. I've been studying very hard for finals and we just didn't have time for each other. She got bored, I guess."

"I can't imagine that. Perhaps we'll see each other at dinner. Now, shoo. I have to change. Thanks very much for your help."

Wanderlust!

Smiling at Bill, Molly pushed at his chest until he was out the door. Once that was accomplished it closed slowly until it latched shut. "Well, so much for my good deed of the day", Bill muttered under his breath. Turning towards his own door Bill smiled internally and thought that perhaps he could tinker with seating arrangements in the dining car so that she would have to sit with him. He'd have to think about that, he reflected then re-entered his compartment, shut the door, and scrubbed up for dinner.

An hour later Bill passed her door, paused, ready to knock, but then thought better of it and continued onwards towards the front of the train to the diner. The concierge met him and asked how many he was. Bill told him that it was just one, but he might have someone joining him and described her. Bill slipped him a five-mark note and he smiled, nodded knowingly, and led him to a table for two along the left side. The right side held tables for four. The greeter held out a chair for Bill, the one facing the door he'd entered by. He sat down. After the greeter placed a menu in front of Bill he turned and went to meet others.

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Molly took a last look at herself in the polished steel mirror on the back of the door. Satisfied, she picked up her purse and left the compartment. As she exited, the car attendant made to enter. She stopped him with a word and then showed him that the sink was repaired. The attendant raised his eyebrows, said something, which she assumed was along the lines of 'who did it'. Molly just pointed to Bill's compartment next door.

The attendant chuckled and said, "*Sehr Gut.*" Molly assumed he was happy and they left her compartment.

She continued down the train until arriving at the vestibule outside the dining car. She waited until the greeter had seated a couple and then held up one finger. He turned, glanced down the car, and then turned back to her to lead her down the car. They stopped at Bill's table.

He stood and greeted her.

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Bill ordered coffee from the waiter and told him he would wait a moment to see if he was being joined. The waiter poured and Bill sat back in his chair. Since most Europeans don't eat until eight or nine in the evening - and it was just now six - he was practically alone in the car. The waiter refilled Bill's cup only once before he looked up and saw Molly coming around the corner and into the end vestibule. The concierge turned to Bill briefly, who nodded.

The concierge brought Molly directly to Bill's table. With a kind of goofy smile he stood and bowed to her as she sat. Bill spoke. "I hope you don't mind sitting here with me, Molly. Is it okay?"

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"Good evening, Bill." Molly smiled. "Sitting with a nice looking guy is fine with me."

Now it was time for Bill to blush. When the waiter appeared at his elbow, he asked her if she wanted him to order for the two of them. She took a moment to glance at the menu - in German - and gave Bill her permission. He ordered the veal cutlet for two, with potatoes and greens and added a request for a nice half-bottle of red wine. The waiter scribbled furiously, thanked them both, and departed.

"God, you do that so well, Bill. I wish I spoke German as well as French. I try sometimes, but I always get flustered and give up."

Wanderlust!

"Well, I bet you speak French much better than I."

"I do."

Molly launched into a few sentences of French; of which Bill caught only about one word in five, but he gathered that she was pleased with his help in the compartment and for the invitation to dinner. Her French was very throaty and he began wondering if this could develop into something even greater than its parts. She paused, searched his face for comprehension, chuckled, and translated what she had just said.

Bill wanted to know more about this fascinating woman. "Where are you headed, Molly? This train terminates in Munich. Are you going that far?"

"Yes. I have a reservation down in Garmish-Partenkirchen for some skiing. Do you ski?" She asked, looking at him slightly askance.

"Of course, ma'am, we ski the mountains of Montana a lot - that is when we aren't busting cows or punching broncos." Bill said in an exaggerated Western drawl.

Molly laughed out loud. He noted she had a great, ear-to-ear smile. "Oh, I guess I asked for that one." She said. "I love to ski. I've been doing it for a long time. Almost since I was a little girl. We ski a lot up in Montreal too. Where are you headed?"

Now, Bill could both lie and tell her he was headed to Munich also or he could tell her he had no real destination. The latter was the truth. He'd boarded the train with a ticket to Augsburg where he had friends but that could be changed with the addition of a little more money to the conductor.

"I'm actually kind of bumming around." He finally said. "I have a ticket to Augsburg which is a stop before Munichâ!" He paused as Molly's face lost its brilliance. "But, I can change that easily enough." She brightened up considerably. "Would you like some company on your trip?" He asked hopefully. 'Please say yes,' he internalized.

* * *

"I would like nothing better than to have you travel with me. But, I can't seem too eager. After all, how much do I know about him so far?"

* * *

Molly looked pensive, and if considering a lot of variables, and then broke into another beaming smile. "Sure! I'd love that. You can help me with translations and, um, other things."

Bill's face lit up in return. He couldn't imagine what 'other things' she had in mind, but if her mind traveled in the same vein as his it would be interesting to find out what they were.

Their dinner arrived, steaming, on large plates with the side dishes arrayed around them. Bill thanked the waiter and they dug in. She looked up after tasting a bite of cutlet and said that it was delicious. She thanked him for making the choice. He told her you couldn't go wrong with Weiner schnitzel; as long as she remembers those words, and finds them on the menu, she will eat well as this dish was served almost universally. They continued eating without much more conversation.

Wanderlust!

During dinner, Bill glanced up at Molly a couple of times to find her looking back at him. She colored once again and her eyes dropped back to her plate. She was certainly a good looking young lady and Bill knew he was yearning for a little time with the fair sex. With a start, he realized that he hadn't even kissed any girl for over four months. No wonder he was so 'tense'. Their eye contact increased until they were practically staring at each other. There was no doubt that she felt the same way as him.

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Molly's internal conversation was a mixed bag of conflicting emotions. After all, she told herself, how much did she actually know about this self-proclaimed wanderer? He definitely had impeccable old-world manners, spoke well - in both German and English, and, best of all, seemed a genuinely nice guy.

She listened to him as he spoke of living and working in Montana. Then, when it became her turn, she related life in Montreal with her family. They traded off and eventually learned quite a bit of each other. She liked the way his eyes flashed as he described the mountains he clearly loved. She thought idly that perhaps she would visit Montana at some time.

He refilled her wine glass the second time and they sipped while finishing an excellent meal. She asked Bill if he would write out the dish they had just enjoyed. He did on a paper napkin and she folded it for her pocket. When she'd reached for it, their fingers touched. It felt as if electricity had jolted them. She looked up and directly into his eyes and realized that they were hazel, with flecks of something a little darker. The sides were crinkled a little as if looking into bright sunlight.

When he asked if she wanted another refill of wine, she declined. Already, she'd taken note that her respiration as well as her heartbeat had increased significantly during dinner. Finally, she relented to just a splash from the last of the bottle.

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Conversation between Bill and Molly slowed once again over the last of their bottle of wine. Content to just look at each other, Bill finally realized that the car was beginning to fill up and called for the check. He found that the waiter had thoughtfully broken it up into two separate payments, an action Bill approved of heartily. But, when he tried to pay her portion, she was too fast for him and insisted on her share. The touch of her hand on his arm seemed to electrify him. It was just a reflex action on Molly's part as he reached for the check, but he felt it all down his body.

Molly left her hand on his forearm for what seemed like minutes and then pulled it back to get her money. As they left, Bill added some extra money over and above the tip already calculated into the bill. The waiter smiled and waved them through the vestibule into the next car.

Passing between cars, the train went though some turnouts and the car ahead of them shifted enough for Molly to lose her balance. Corny as it seems, she fell back directly into Bill's arms. He braced himself against the partition and held her tightly. Her hair brushed his nose and he smelled the scent of strawberries. He always had liked strawberries. She turned her head to face him and smiled. "I think you can let go now, Bill. We aren't shaking any more."

"Uh? Oh, sure, Molly. Sorry." He released her, memorizing the feel of her against him.

They continued down the corridor and into the next car, which was theirs. They reached Molly's door first, which she then opened, but paused. Bill was unprepared for her as she reached out and pulled him to her. Without a word, she stood on her tiptoes and kissed him fully on the lips. It was not a short smack, but a

Wanderlust!

lingering kiss that shook him to his toes and made his knees tremble. "I think that maybe you should go to your compartment now, Bill, and unlock your door, *non?*" She said breathlessly when she released him.

Slowly, Molly turned back into her room while Bill moved over to his door and unlocked it. He was still feeling the imprint of her lips on his and when he passed the small mirror over the sink, he smiled at his reflection ruefully; wondering just how far this would go. After several moments, he heard an insistent tapping. At first, he thought it was just vibrations from the rails. But then, Bill realized it was coming from the door separating his compartment from Molly's. Her muffled voice sounded from behind the door asking him if he'd unlocked his door yet.

Bill mentally slapped his forehead. 'So that's the door she meant - the connecting door. What an idiot.'

He sprang over to it and flipped up the latch. Molly was pushing against it and practically fell through; falling, instead, into his arms - again. She looked up at him, hesitated a bit, and then pressed her lips to his once more. It was a long, lingering kiss and when they parted; the two of them were out of breath. Bill could feel her breasts alternately pushing and retreating from his chest.

"Mmmm, that feels so nice to be kissed again by someone who means it." Molly murmured into his ear. She pulled back and looked up into his surprised face. "That's a very long story, so just let me say that my last romance didn't work out so well and leave it at that. Do you have anything to drink?"

"I have a small bottle of brandy in my bag. Want some?"

"Brandy would be nice. I'll get my glass." Molly said as she stepped back into her room to get her glass from the wire holder in the shelf over the washbasin.

Bill snapped up his little glass and uncapped the bottle - noting, sadly, that it was almost gone. He knew he would have to renew it, and soon. Molly returned and they settled down on the bench seat. They each took a sip, licked their lips, and took another. Molly kicked off her shoes, stretched her shapely, nylon-clad legs out in front of her, and pointed her toes outward.

"Ahhhh. This is the way to travel. Not all cramped up in coach, but with plenty of room." She turned to Bill. "This tastes really good. I shouldn't be drinking any more after that wine, but this is really good brandy. What kind is it?"

"Asbach-Uralt. A very good German brandy." Bill held up the bottle so she could read the label. "I bought this bottle as I was leaving the airport." He chuckled. "I've been kind of nipping on it all afternoon."

"Well, it certainly goes on my list of liquor that I like. More, please?" She held out her glass and with her fingers indicated just a little bit more. He poured her just that amount.

Molly leaned back, closed her eyes, and spoke. "What time do we arrive in Munich? I don't remember."

Bill pulled out his timetable and ran his finger down the listing for their train. "Ummm, we stop for an hour in Wurtzberg and ninety minutes in N^¼rnberg. Our arrival time in Munich is at â€” twenty-three thirty seven. If I'm not mistaken we should be hitting Wurtzberg right about now. I felt the train slow a bit ago and saw the fields changing to a more urban setting outside the window. It is eighteen forty-five now."

"What time is that really? I can never get used to that sort of time." Molly grimaced. "I always have to stop and do the math."

Wanderlust!

"It's what they call military time, but the European community uses the same time notation. Eighteen hundred is six PM, so eighteen forty-five is six forty-five PM. Just subtract twelve hours from any time over twelve hundred. Twenty-three thirty-seven is eleven thirty-seven."

Bill had a strange feeling she really did know military time, but chose not to acknowledge that fact for some reason. He was sure that Canada used that time format also. Now was definitely not the 'time' to mention it though as they were beginning to be more comfortable with each other. Bill knew that the brandy helped but he was also determined to not screw up and frighten her by doing something incredibly stupid.

Molly moved to curl up on one side of the bench seat and turned to face Bill with her legs drawn up under her. She was swaying slightly to the movement of the train with her eyes half-closed, staring out the window at lights as they whizzed by. The room was getting dark now as the light outside began to fade; the tiny little blue emergency and night light began casting a delicate halo on her golden hair. 'Damn!' Bill thought. 'She really looks good to me - especially in my weakened state.' He hadn't been near a woman socially in a very long time.

* * *

Molly felt contentment. She realized now that she was completely comfortable with Bill and that she had nothing to fear from him. He appeared to be very interested in her; almost to the point of romantic interest. She realized that he'd not said much about his love life back in Montana, only that he'd had a failed romance. She got the impression that this had occurred a long time ago. 'Yes', she told herself. 'I could fall in love with this man'.

She felt her eyes closing in the warmth of the compartment. Their conversation, while not ever very rapid, began to slow even more, with longer pauses between sentences. Her chin drooped, her eyelids getting very heavy.

* * *

Rap! Rap! "*Zugfuhrer!*" The conductor called out. "*Tickets, Bitte.*"

Molly was startled into wakefulness. Bill hopped up and, after glancing at Molly, who just shrugged her shoulders and smiled, opened the door. There was no surprise in the conductor's eyes as Bill handed him his ticket. He looked over Bill's shoulder at Molly and raised his eyebrows in a friendly fashion. Molly asked Bill to get her purse from her compartment on the bench seat. He stepped between the two compartments, retrieved the purse, and handed it to Molly. She pulled the tickets out and they were duly punched by the conductor also.

"*Gut. Sehr gut. Danke.*" And he backed out of their room and closed the door with a smile and a wink at Bill; who smiled crookedly back at him.

When Bill turned back to Molly, she was now stretched out full length on the seat. "Too bad, Sir. You got up." She taunted. "I've jumped your claim."

"I've got to get you back into your room, Molly." Bill said desperately. He knew he was on the verge of a giant leap forward which might very well frighten her. "Do you want to walk, or shall I carry you?"

"Oh, I doubt you could lift me, Bill. I'm pretty heavy." Bill took that as a challenge because she looked at him and smiled again.

Wanderlust!

"I'll give it a try." He said, kneeling down at the edge of the bench and sliding his hands under her knees and behind her back. "Just relax now."

As he said it, Molly's eyes closed, her head fell back, and a soft buzz came from her throat. She'd fallen asleep! He gently lifted her and when he did, she came partially awake and realized that he had actually lifted her. She threw her arms around his neck and snuggled her head into his chest.

"*Je t'aime, mon amour.*" She whispered into his chest. Bill's kitchen French told him what that meant. He thought that perhaps it was the wine and brandy that had spoken. Maybe it had, but hope sprung awake deep down inside him that she meant it.

Bill carefully maneuvered her through the small interconnecting door to her compartment and looked for a place to put her. He finally pushed her suitcase far enough down the bench with his knee to allow him to lay her out. As he did, she clutched him even tighter and murmured more French into his neck. It was so low and soft he didn't catch it. "What?" He asked.

She replied dreamily, "I just said that it seems I've fallen in love yet again."

Bill was kneeling at her side now, with her arms still around his shoulders. He brushed his hand across her forehead to move a lock of hair that had fallen into her eyes.

"I was thinking the same thing, Molly." Bill said, and then murmured almost to himself. "*Je t'aime* and I'd better get the hell out of here before I do something stupid."

"What? Like make love to me? That wouldn't be stupid, only a crime if you didn't." She murmured softly.

"There is nothing I would rather be doing right now than just that, but both of us have had quite a bit to drink today and this might only be the alcohol talking. You rest now, and I'll go over to my room and splash cold water in my face for an hour."

"So...kay, ummm, soooo sleeeepyâ !" and she faded out again. Bill cast his eyes around and spotted a thin coverlet. Quietly, he flapped it open and spread it out over her sleeping form.

Bill couldn't resist. He bent and placed a final kiss on her lips, which brought a smile to her face, but not wakefulness; then tiptoed out of her compartment and back to his. Reluctantly, he closed the connecting door after watching for a moment to make sure she wouldn't fall out of the seat.

Chapter 2: Wanderlust - Chapter 2

[December 13, 1963]

[Evening train between Wiesbaden, W. Germany and Munich, W. Germany]

Bill sat in his compartment and argued with himself for the whole hour the train sat in Wurtzberg. The brandy bottle was empty; they had drunk what little was left, and he began taking sips from his mineral water bottle. He was sober now, especially after what she had said as he knelt next to her. He thought that perhaps she wouldn't remember it but hoped she would.

It could be a plus for him; to be her companion while she was traveling around Germany. Wonderful, to be sure. But, wait, maybe she was meeting someone. That wouldn't be so good. He also shouldn't think that she would want to go wherever he wanted to go. Maybe she had places she wants to go. The inner conflicts raged about inside his head.

Bill's internal good news-bad news monologue continued as the train began moving again. The noise of the couplers clanking into tension as it started up brought a low moan from Molly's room. Bill opened the door and peeked through to see if she was all right. She didn't seem disturbed and was actually even snoring lightly. 'Great!' He thought. 'She'll be rested and I'll just be horny and full of self-doubts.'

== =

Molly woke once when the train began to move. A light moan escaped her lips. He hoped that Bill hadn't heard her, but then the door opened and he leaned through it. She had already closed her eyes and was simulating sleep. She saw him nod, and then softly close the door again.

Wanting to rest, but her mind not letting her, she began enumerating all the pros and cons of what had just transpired and what might be approaching in the future. She desperately wanted him to stay with her for a while, but could think of no way to ask him without sounding like some brazen hussy from downtown Montreal.

She snickered. Maybe that was the key. But then, reason returned and she worked over other alternatives. She drifted off again with those thoughts churning around in her head.

Molly woke later. Just how much later she wasn't sure, but it was later. She may have found an answer in a very short, but intense, dream. First, she needed to dress for the occasion; nothing too sexy or revealing. In fact, she thought, perhaps taking a step in the other direction might be better. Quietly she rose and went to her bag. She slipped out of her dress and rummaged until she found her white nightgown. It was lacy, but only to a point. It also had a silk underlayer. Nothing must show through. When she topped it off with a frilly wrapper, she turned to look at herself in the mirror.

With a quick brush of her hair and a dab of perfume behind each ear, she went to the connecting door and slipped through it. She found Bill staring out the window at the passing scene, rocking lightly with the car's movement. She quickly crossed the distance and laid a hand on his shoulder. He didn't jump, as expected, because, she realized, he could see her reflection in the window.

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Wanderlust!

The young man stared at the scenery passing by the window for an hour. The lights were off and the compartment was dark except for the little blue light. Bill heard a noise behind him and jumped slightly as a hand rested on his shoulder. Molly had come into the room. He didn't turn around when she bent over and wrapped her arms around his shoulders and kissed his neck. He peered at Molly's reflection in the window. She seemed somehow 'different; slightly out of focus in the double-pane glass. 'Maybe,' he thought, 'I'm feeling the liquor also'.

With a start, Bill realized that she had changed into a very soft, very white, nightgown with a lacy coverlet over it. This is what had blurred her outline. Molly had also added a very delicate touch of perfume - definitely French. Her arms were warm and soft. Her lips touched his ear and whispered "Hold me close."

Bill turned his head and, not wanting to jeopardize the moment, stood and very carefully enfolded her into his arms. They kissed, slowly and tenderly. Once again, he bent and lifted her into his arms. He carried her over to the bench seat and sat with her across his legs - head against the pillow on the armrest. He tugged at the thin blanket he'd used while reading until it covered the both of them.

Molly sighed and her eyes closed. "*Je suis très contente de simplement s'asseoir ici, dans vos bras,*" She murmured. "I am still very sleepy."

"Then rest, Molly. I'll just hold you."

"sooooo nice..." She drifted off.

Time passed, but how much? Bill had no idea. His watch was hidden under the coverlet. The steady rumble of the wheels over joints, the far-off sound of the steam engine whistle, and the occasional bells of passing road crossings were their only companion as they lay there.

Later, as a particularly rough set of rail joints shook the cabin, Molly awoke.

"*Mon Dieu,*" she said quietly. "What was that?"

"Nothing but noisy wheels, Molly." He held up his wrist and glanced at his watch. "It's getting late, we should probably clean up and get dressed. I think we'll arrive at Nürnberg soon and maybe they will park us where we can get off and walk a bit."

"Good!" Molly said, stretching languorously and standing. Bill rose also and opened the connecting door for her. As she passed, he held her arm and she turned.

"I enjoyed holding you, Molly." He said, giving her a peck on the cheek.

She put her hand up and cupped his chin. "And I am sorry to have fallen asleep. I was so warm and comfortable it just happened. I will be back when I dress for the evening." She closed the door.

* * *

'Oh, *Merde!*' Molly chastised herself. 'Why did I fall asleep again?' She had so wanted to make love to this tall, wonderful man. She still felt the tightness of his arms as he easily carried her over to the seat. It was obvious to her that he was interested in her. 'So', she groaned, 'why did I fall asleep?'

The question, unanswered, faded away as she pulled her nightgown over her head, and dressed. How strange, she thought, that people on the continent ate so late. She wasn't starving, she realized, especially after that

Wanderlust!

very good afternoon meal, but a snack would be nice.

As she dressed, she also tried her very best to work out exactly how she could broach the subject of Bill traveling with her. Could she even think of such a thing? He obviously came to Germany with a mind to explore his old haunts and, perhaps, following her around might not be what he wanted to do. Mentally shrugging, she decided that the answer would probably come to her at some point.

Her fully dried blue dress shown under the light of the emergency lamp as she turned to and fro to search for creases. She found none and decided that she was ready to go. She turned for the connecting door, rapped twice gently, and entered when she heard Bill's voice.

* * *

Bill cleaned up as best as he could by drenching the end of a towel with water and sponging off. Then he added fresh underwear, a new shirt, and socks to his still-pressed pants and was as presentable as he could get. While he was dressing, he also wondered how he could broach the subject of him accompanying her for a while on her journey. He had already made up his mind that he wanted to be with her for a much longer time than just on this train.

Molly re-appeared in the doorway after knocking, dressed in her light blue dress. Her hair was slightly mussed, but, considering she never moved while in his arms, that was definitely endearing. Bill checked his watch and found that it was just at nine PM, twenty-one hundred.

"Two and half hours to go. Want to go to the bar car and get a snack or something?"

"Well, we can go, but I don't want anything alcoholic."

"I have the perfect thing. It's called *Apfelsaft*. Technically, its apple cider, but it is carbonated and slightly fermented. You'd have to drink barrels of it to get even a slight buzz. Does that sound okay?"

"Sure. Let's go." Molly stood, took Bill's hand, and pulled him to his feet. They left through his compartment door and strolled down the corridor hand in hand to the lounge car at the rear of the train.

As bar cars go, it wasn't really opulent. It had a very small bar with an attendant, a few scattered easy chairs, and a couple of low tables with chairs around them. They gravitated to a settee that could hold the both of them and sat down. Molly lifted Bill's arm, put it around her neck, and snuggled in close. A slow flush crept upwards on her neck, which Bill noticed. He smiled to himself as he watched it climb.

She caught him looking at her. "What? Am I blushing? Maybe people will think we are just married, no? Oh, wait; no ring." She giggled.

"Europeans are cool," Bill ventured. "Maybe they would just assume we were traveling together and that we had just recently made love." He teased.

* * *

'Ah! He has provided me with what I need to discuss this with him.'

* * *

Wanderlust!

Surprising him, Molly agreed in a matter-of-fact tone. It was the opening she had been waiting for; handed to her by Bill himself! "True. But, are you traveling with me? Will you change your plans to come with me?"

Bill smiled expansively and thought to himself: 'Well I'll be damned. She *was* thinking like me.' "Sure, I can just change my ticket to match yours. Do you have a hotel room in Munich, or are you going directly to Garmisch?" He asked.

"Just as far as Munich right now. I was going to take a day and go sightseeing. My hotel is supposed to be sending someone to meet the train. That is, I hope they will. It's the Hotel Alfa."

The bartender came over and looked expectantly at them. Bill ordered two glasses of *Apfelsaft*. He turned away to get them. Before he left, the bartender dropped a coaster on the table in front of them and made two blue marks on it with a broad pen. Molly asked what that meant and Bill told her it was their tab. "When we leave, we just pay for the amount of blue marks". She said that this was a great way to keep track.

When the bartender brought them their drinks, he informed them that the car would be closed a half hour before they arrived in Munich. Bill told him they would leave by then. He nodded and left them alone again.

"If you will wait a moment while I hunt up the conductor, I'll alter my ticket to Munich right now."

By way of an answer, Molly leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Wonderful. I'd like that very much."

"*Wunderbar!*" Bill stood and left the car in search of the conductor.

He found him two cars forward, chatting with the car attendant. When he was noticed, Bill asked if his ticket could be altered to extend to *München*.

"*Sicherlich. Es kann leicht getan werden.* You have ticket now?" He asked.

Bill produced his ticket and the conductor looked it over. He asked for another twenty Marks which Bill handed to him. A written notation was made on the existing ticket and handed back to Bill with a smile.

"She is very pretty, yes?" He said, grinning.

"She is very pretty, yes," Bill confirmed with a matching smile. "*Dankeschön.*"

"You are welcome. Good evening."

Bill said his goodbyes also, turned, and strode back down the passageway whistling.

When he returned to Molly in the bar car, he told her that he had changed his ticket. She smiled hugely at him and pecked his cheek once more. Out of the corner of his eye, Bill saw two older ladies watching them, grinning, and wondered what they were thinking.

Bill and Molly continued their conversation. They talked of various subjects - their homes, their travels, who they had met and what funny incidents they might have endured. Bill told her that nothing would compare to meeting her on this train; that he had resigned himself to singular travel for his vacation. He added that now he would enjoy it a great deal more. Molly smiled broadly, showing two small dimples in her cheeks and told him the same.

"Why Garmisch," Bill asked. "What's there? I mean, other than marvelous skiing."

Wanderlust!

"I have a girl friend that I haven't seen in five years. We've written letters back and forth, but haven't actually talked during that time. She is going to be there for vacation, so I thought I would go there too. Her last letter mentioned that she'd 'met someone' so I can only assume she is still with him. Now that I've met you, we can be a foursome. That will be great fun, won't it?"

"Sure will. Four is much better than three. How about a place to stay there? Do you have one?"

"Well, no, not really. She invited me to stay with her, but if she's not living alone, maybe they will have room for us in her hotel?"

"We can try, that's for sure. Hey! Look at the time. We'd better drink up and get back to our compartments and make sure we're packed." Bill picked up the coaster, with four marks on it, and took it to the bar. The bartender added things up, gave him a figure - to which he added a good tip - and said their good nights to him. On the way back they walked with their arms around each other. Bill thought she was the warmest girl he'd ever been near.

They came across a man and woman coming towards us so they had to stand aside as they passed. Bill and Molly nodded their good evenings and continued onwards to their car. As they passed the little vestibule where the attendant sat, he hailed Bill in German.

"I see you have fixed the sink, *Mein Herr*. Thank you for that. These aging cars are sometimes troublesome and get ahead of an old man like me."

"Oh, you're not old, my friend. I think perhaps that meeting and greeting people gives you pleasure. Is that not right?"

"Absolutely! Especially seeing such nice people as yourself and the young lady. It makes my heart happy. We will be arriving almost ten minutes early I am told. If you will have your luggage ready, I will see it gets on the platform first."

"Thank you, *Mein Herr*. I appreciate that." They continued down the aisle to their compartments and entered them. Minutes later, they were standing in front of the window in Bill's compartment with him behind Molly with his arms around her shoulders. An occasional light flashed by, or a darkened farmhouse. Made comfortable by the slight alcohol of the drinks, they swayed gently to the movements of the train car which clattered through several turnouts and then began to slow.

"Almost there, *Mon Cher*. I am definitely ready for a bed that doesn't make noise - or move around. How about you?" The car gave a lurch which caused Molly to take a small step backwards. It caught Bill unawares as their bodies made harder contact. Molly chuckled softly to herself. She knew fully what she'd felt.

* * *

'I know what that was. He is as interested in me as I am in him. How wonderful to be on the same train.'

* * *

Molly sighed quietly, and turned to face Bill. Her breasts, held captive in their silken containment, pushed gently into his chest. "Kiss me once again."

Bill bent down when Molly tilted her head up. Their lips met. "Mmmmm, delicious," he said, capturing her upper lip lightly in his teeth. "What is that I taste - cherries?"

Wanderlust!

Molly turned back to face the picture window and the scenery rushing past. "My lipstick, silly. Do you like it?"

"Yes. Very much so. I love cherries; and strawberries." This triggered a long forgotten memory for Bill. He softly related his story to Molly about his young romance years ago. "A girl I once knew right here in Germany wore strawberry-scented perfume. After a great deal of embarrassed fumbling, she and I made love for the very first time."

"You were both virgins? How old were â *non*, it's not my business at all." She shook her head.

"I don't mind telling the story," Bill continued, his voice low, while he again held her from behind. "I was seventeen and so was she, but I was six months older than her. Damn, we were young. As it happened, we had this magical time on a train. We were on our way for a short trip to Paris with the Photography Club from the base where my father was stationed. We were gone for four glorious days. God! It was wonderful. I lost track of her when her dad got transferred to Italy. We corresponded, but even that dried up eventually. I was heartbroken. And, now I've found you; here on a train, and maybe we are in love - I know I am."

* * *

'Mon dieu, he said it; he said he was in love with me! Oh, I love you too; I truly do!'

* * *

Molly whirled around to face Bill and looked deeply into his eyes. "Oh, so am I, Bill. So very much in love." She kissed him again very tenderly and they held that pose until the car gave a lurch to the side as the train was shunted to a parallel track. Bill could see that they had entered the yard at Munich's Main Train Station.

"*MÃ¼nchen! MÃ¼nchen!*" Rang the call from the attendant as he tapped on all the doors down the passageway. "*MÃ¼nchen!*"

* * *

'Oh, *Merde!*' Molly thought.

* * *

"So soon? I want to just stay here with you holding me forever."

"Not possible, my love. They'll want to clean the compartments up in a bit. Besides, you should have someone waiting for you from the hotel."

"Yes, I suppose so. But, darn it, I was really in the mood."

Bill grimaced inwardly. "You have no idea how much I was in the mood also. But, there will be other opportunities - I hope."

* * *

'You would be wrong about that, *monsieur*. I do know what mood you were in.'

* * *

Wanderlust!

Bill and Molly gathered their belongings and shuffled them down the passageway to the vestibule at the end. The attendant was standing near the open door with his hand on the latch leaning out into the night. The car rocked sideways again several times as it threaded the spidery tracks to approach the proper platform. Soon, it eased to a stop amid a hissing of air and squealing of brakes.

The attendant latched the door open and reached for their bags. Once they were deposited on the smooth concrete, Bill turned and palmed a ten Mark note into his hand and wished him a very safe return trip.

"I wish you a very happy visit to *München, Mein Herr*; and you too *Fraulein*." He tipped his hat and climbed back aboard to help the next couple.

"What a great guy," Molly commented. "I know it's his job, but he seemed to go out of his way to help us didn't he?"

"Sure did. Now, let's see if we can find your hotel porter." They started down the platform, which was becoming more crowded as others left their cars ahead of the two of them. Stairs led downwards into an underground passageway that ran between platforms. Eventually they climbed back up and into the terminal concourse. Even at this hour it was very busy. They had indeed arrived ten minutes early though as the arrival announcement of their train was just being made.

Bill leaned in towards Molly so she could hear him. "Do you know which way the hotel is?"

She stopped and set down her bag so she could consult a small notebook. She said "It's supposed to be north of the *hoptâ 'huptâ* !"

"*Hauptbahnhof*?" Bill queried. "It means 'Main Train Station'. If it's to the north we go over there." He pointed towards a sign indicating the *Nordausgang*, or north exit.

"Oh, I am very glad I met you. I'd be lost right about now." Molly lifted her small bag again. Bill grabbed the other one and slung his backpack over a shoulder. They walked over to the exit and went outside into the harsh sounds of horns, doors slamming, and the whistles of the cab-callers.

* * *

'I really meant that, didn't I?' Thought Molly. 'Everything Bill does appears to have a calming effect on me.'

She walked by his side, taking note that he adjusted his stride to hers so that he wouldn't make her walk too fast. He appeared confident and, when he looked over at her, she felt a flush on her cheek as her emotions welled up.

Bill seemed to be everything she'd ever wanted in a man: smart, funny, and good with words. Plus, he was able to speak German, something she could not have gotten along without. Her friend, Francine, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen could get along in German but, like herself, only spoke French natively.

And now, she flushed again, she'd invited Bill to share her hotel room. How naughty was that! Francine would give her an earful over this, she knew. She slowed her pace as they moved through the revolving door and out into the cold air.

* * *

Wanderlust!

It was a beautiful night. Very cool though, with just a hint of snow and coal smoke in the air. There was a faint chuff-chuff from the yard as their steam engine headed off to be serviced. A single, short, hoot was given that echoed again and again between the buildings on either side of the station. Bill knew he would never get tired of that sound.

Molly spotted the porter first. He was across the street pushing a standard hotel cart with the bar above it for hanging suits. "There he is, I bet."

Bill lifted a hand to wave and he waved back. As soon as the light changed, the porter rumbled across to the curb on their side. He greeted them with a question.

"*Fraulein Garner?* Are you Miss Garner?" He inquired.

"Garnet." Molly corrected his pronunciation to the French 'Gar-nay'. "Are you from the Hotel Alfa?"

"*Ja*. Yes. Hotel Alfa. Ummm, you *commen sie mit?*"

Bill judged that he had almost exhausted his English at that point and addressed him in German to assure him that she was indeed the person he was sent to gather up. He added that he was also going to the hotel but didn't add that he'd be in her room though to save her embarrassment. He saw no good reason to mention it. The porter answered in German, with obvious relief, that she was the only one he was sent for, but that he would be happy to take the *Herr's* bags also. Bill thanked him and laid both bags he was carrying on the porter's cart. With a grunt, the porter set it in motion and headed across the street.

On the way over the porter began an almost non-stop monologue about the wonders of Munich. He would pause every so often and waited while Bill translated for Molly. They trundled through a very small alley, tunnel actually, which punched through a block of buildings and onto to the next block. They emerged right across from the brightly lit marquee of the Hotel Alfa. The porter pointed proudly and announced - unnecessarily - "Hotel Alfa!"

Bill and Molly, along with the porter pushing the trolley, arrived at the booking desk where the clerk was ready with Molly's registration card. He gave Bill a questioning look, and then Molly addressed him quickly in French. "*Parlez-vous Français?*"

The desk clerk responded affirmatively and they conversed for a while as the clerk leafed through his desk book. He stopped, pointed, and said "*Ici! Il est, Garnet*" He went on, in French, until Molly stopped him and said something back. He smiled, bobbed his head, and handed Bill a card also. It was done. They had the same room. He said something to Bill in French, which Molly translated for him under her breath to "have a pleasant evening". Bill responded by thanking him in German. This seemed to confuse the man, but he recovered immediately, responded in kind, and told the porter to take them to their room.

After the formalities, Bill asked if something could be had to eat. The clerk seemed devastated the dining room was no longer serving. This didn't bother the two of them at all. The tired travelers, plus the bellboy, entered an elevator and rode up to the third floor. The bellboy unlocked the door to three twelve, pushed it open, and handed Bill the key. Then he went around pointing out the amenities available, and then paused at the door. Bill reached into his pocket and handed him a tip. The bellboy tipped his hat and closed the door. Bill heard the elevator going back down. He and Molly were now quite alone.

Almost shyly, Molly turned to face Bill and hesitantly put her arms around him. As tired as he thought he was, there was enough of a spark to produce a definite reaction. Embarrassed, Bill stepped back a little and suggested that they take their coats off and unpack a bit. Molly turned her back to Bill and he lifted her coat

Wanderlust!

from her shoulders. There was a coat rack near the door where he hung it, and his.

Molly and Bill walked about the room, self-consciously glancing at each other. Now that they were here, together, in a hotel room, things appeared to be a bit awkward for some reason. It was easy on the train to pretend that they had just happened to cross paths, but now they were committed to a course of action. Bill appeared all for it, but Molly seemed to have some doubts now. With a heart rate somewhat above normal, Bill moved about the room straightening things up as a form of 'busy-work'.

* * *

'*Oh, Mon Dieu! Que fais-je?* Bill must think I do this all the time. He must think poorly of me.'

Also nervous, Molly moved about the room and finally settled near the bed with her bag on top of it. She started pulling out clothing in preparation for bed.

* * *

Molly sat her case on the bed and began laying out clothes. When she reached in and pulled out a very sheer nightgown, Bill watched the pink rise from her neckline. She was undoubtedly remembering their earlier encounter in the train compartment. She rubbed her fingers over the smooth fabric and then set it aside. Bill was busily looking elsewhere when she turned her head to see where he was.

Bill came to a conclusion. Not one he was in favor of, but he did feel he should make the gesture. "Molly, are you uncomfortable with me here? I am sure I can get another room. They didn't look too busy."

* * *

'*Non! Non!* He must not do that!'

* * *

Molly whirled down and sat on the bed with her hands outstretched to him. "Oh, no! It's not that, Bill. I'm just a bit just, not sure of my own emotions. I mean a bit Oh. I am just not explaining this very well am I?"

He advanced and held out his arms. She rose and, slowly let him enfold her with them. "Molly. I would do nothing to make you regret anything you do this evening - or any evening for that matter. If you wish, I can go out now or I can stay the night - over there in that chair, if necessary. What happened between us on the train was wonderful; at least for me." She tried to speak but he put his fingertip on her lips. "No. Let me finish. I don't know if my attraction to you is real, or some sort of transference from my past. That's for me to sort out. Right now, this moment, all there is in this room is you and me. I'll do whatever you wish, whatever you ask, and no regrets or argument."

"Oh, Bill! I strongly suspect I'm in love with you. We've only just met but I've had the feeling the entire day that I've known you all my life. Of course I haven't though. What happened between us on the train was indeed magical and I would like to have it continue. As of right now, there is only one thing that is important to me: how you feel about me."

* * *

'Please kiss me.' Molly thought with all her heart.

Wanderlust!

* * *

Bill pulled her to him tenderly, lifted her chin with his fingers, and kissed her gently on the mouth. "I love you also, Molly Garnet. I think I've known that from the first time I saw you standing in the aisle, dripping wet."

Tiny tears formed at the corners of Molly's eyes. Bill had to admit that his weren't completely dry either. They gazed at each other for long moments and then, slowly, they kissed again. This time it was far more satisfying for the both of them than any earlier kiss. It meant that they had, for the moment, solved their inner conflicts and had both, simultaneously, arrived at the same decision.

[December 13, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany, nearly midnight]

In the glow of the single lamp he'd turned on, Bill pulled the cover back on the bed, lifted Molly to it, and knelt on the floor by her side. "Molly. If you'll have me, I'd like to accompany you wherever you go. I don't know how long this can last, but I want to be a part of it for as long as it does."

Molly leaned forward and pulled his head tightly to her breast and began running her hands roughly through the hair at the back of his neck. She was both crying and laughing. "Let us see what tomorrow brings."

Making yet another decision, Bill went to the closet and pulled out another pillow and a blanket. He tossed them onto the settee. "And here is where I'll sleep tonight. As you say, tomorrow will make its own decisions. Fair enough?"

Molly nodded and began shedding her outer clothing. Embarrassed, for some reason, Bill turned away and did the same. While he was occupied, Molly went to the closet and found robes for each of them. She handed one to Bill and wrapped the other around herself. "I need a bath. Do you need to use the bathroom right away?"

"No, not immediately. Go ahead."

"Thank you." As Molly started to close the door behind her, she paused and said "I hope there is lots of hot water." Then she pulled the door closed.

The door opened a crack almost immediately. "Bill, you have to see this." She said.

He entered the bathroom and gave a low whistle. The tub was certainly big enough for two of people. In fact, it probably could have held three persons - if they were really good friends. She knelt and ran the water into it while Bill took in the rest of the room. He held up a small paper box that held bath soap and raised his eyebrows at her in question. "Sure, what kind is it?" She asked.

"It says '*April Frisch*', which means April fresh." He sniffed and added, "Smells like flowers to me." He held it out to her.

"Mmmm, smells wonderful," she pronounced, smelling it also. "Drop some in."

Bill shook out a fair amount into the stream of water. To his surprise it began bubbling up. "Bubble bath!" He said, faking shock. "I'll ruin my standings as a stud if I get into that."

She gave a hoot of laughter. "Don't worry, Bill. I can give you a note of reference if you want. Now shoo while I relax a little." She said as she made to open her robe.

Wanderlust!

Bill exited, reluctantly. "I'll be outside if you need anything. Anything at all. Anything. Back rub. Whateverâ!"

Molly chuckled to his departing back.

* * *

Molly enjoyed just lying back and absorbing the warmth from the flower-scented hot water. It seeped into every pore and forced her tired muscles to relax. Reaching up, she snagged a towel and wrapped it around her hair so as to not get it very wet. She knew that her hair would tangle easily if she slept on damp hair.

Her mind was still trying to cope with what had transpired today. When she left the hotel this morning she had no idea this would happen to her. It was like a whole new tangent to her life. She'd had her share of romances, some very intense, but Bill seemed to be in a totally different category. She didn't know just yet where she could, or should, put him.

'Better I wait a while before making a decision,' she thought, adding a little more hot water using her big toe to move the lever. 'My instincts are telling me to allow him into my bed, but they also are warning me it may be too early. Oh, *Merde!* What to do?'

She finished up her bath, pulled the plug and let the water drain while drying off. She'd found that the towels were huge and could completely engulf her easily. She made sure the towel was secure around her chest. It made her giggle quietly at the thought of 'accidentally' letting the towel drop. She'd seen enough of that tired plot in French cinemas.

She sighed and opened the door to leave the steamy room.

* * *

[December 14, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany - just past midnight]

With one towel wrapped around her and the other in a turban about her hair, Molly trotted rapidly across the floor to the bed. It was piled high with down comforters which she pulled at trying to remove.

Bill watched her as he lay back under a blanket on the settee, and then spoke up. "No, wait, Molly. Those are what you sleep under. They're called a '*Federbett*', or featherbed."

"Really? Very nice. They're so warm," she cooed while sliding deeply under one. The towel around her appeared from under an edge and dropped to the floor. She sighed deeply several times, clearly moving around to get comfortable, and then went quiet.

Bill rose, wrapped in his robe, and turned off all the lights. Except for the small night light on one wall, the room went dark. He went back to the settee, pulled the covers down and settled into it. It appeared surprisingly comfortable, but he had a hard time drifting off. He heard Molly sigh softly again.

* * *

'He is just over there you little kid!' Molly railed against herself once again. She was still undecided as to what course to take. She'd heard him sighing also as he struggled to find a comfortable position. Here she was

Wanderlust!

comfortable, perhaps too comfortable, and he was on that hard settee.

'*J'abandonne!* I give up! Maybe he is as tired as I am.'

* * *

"Bill?"

"Yes," he replied softly.

"Would you come hold me? Having you way over there on that hard couch and I here on this soft bed is not very practical - or nice; and I'm still a little cold."

"Molly," he responded. "Are you sure of this?"

"As sure as I can be. Just sleep - for now."

"I'll accept that." Bill said, standing up and crossing the room. He slid carefully into the bed, trying his very best not to make premature or inappropriate contact. When he got settled, he held his arm out and let Molly snuggle into his shoulder.

She wrapped her hands around his arm to show how chilly she was. Her fingers were like ice against his warm skin. He'd always been blessed with a good metabolism which, among other things, kept his body temperature rather high. He shifted around so that she could fit herself against his side. Molly snuggled under his chin to lay her head on his chest. Her hair, smelling sweetly of wildflowers, rested just under his nose.

The last thing Bill remembered that night was a muffled "*Je T'aime*" from under the edge of the comforter. Only the top of Molly's head was visible. Bill sighed deeply one last time, which she echoed, and they dropped rapidly off to sleep.

Chapter 3: Wanderlust - Chapter 3

[December 14, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany, Morning]

When Bill awoke rather early in the morning to use the bathroom, he remembered to put out the '*Bitte nicht stören*' sign. He didn't want them to be disturbed until they woke up naturally. He drifted back to sleep. The next time he woke, Molly had rolled to one side, facing away, but had pushed her back tightly against him as he lay facing her. His reason for waking was extremely obvious, and intrusive.

Lately, Bill had woken up in this condition on quite a few mornings, but the state he was in today was really industrial strength. It was pressed tightly between them and throbbing with energy. He moved slightly to pull away, but got a muffled "Uh-uh, don't move" from Molly. She pushed herself backwards even harder into him and at the same time lifted her ankle and hooked it over the top of his. They lay in that position for long moments as they both drifted in and out of consciousness.

Later, Bill slipped his arm over her shoulder and kissed her neck. "Good morning," Molly whispered. "I was in the middle of a terrific dream. I was in bed with a wonderful guy and we were about to make love - I hope."

"Sorry. Want me to leave?" Bill teased.

"No, silly. I want you to make love to me..."

From the position he was already in, refusing was not an option; in fact, it would be insulting. Carefully, they moved about until their bodies joined as one. Leisurely, and with exquisite passion they made love, culminating in mutual pleasure.

Breathing heavily afterwards, the two of them lay back on the pillows, fingers entwined. "Bill," Molly said softly. "I want you to know that I don't usually jump into bed with just anyone."

"I never thought that you did, Molly. The very first time I saw you, covered in water, I somehow knew you and I would come to this. I know that sounds hokey, but there it is."

"Hokey? What does this mean?"

"False; funny; not quite right. Something like that."

"Oh. Hokey." She repeated, glancing at the bedside clock. "Goodness! Look at the time. It's almost nine. Do we have any plans today?"

"Well, I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing than making love to you all day, Molly, but maybe we could get some sightseeing in. I haven't been to Munich in a long time". He patted her hip, rolled over, slid out of bed, and stepped over to the bathroom. "You stay right there and I'll be done in a jiffy." Bill called out over his shoulder.

"Mmmmpf!" She said, muffled by the coverlet she pulled over her head.

* * *

Wanderlust!

'I feel so deliciously wonderful right at this minute,' Molly thought, stretching under the warm coverlet. 'And what a lover Bill is! I admit I have not had many lovers, but he is the best - by far.' She hugged his pillow tightly across her breasts, savoring the scent left on it from the night.

He was right. They should get out and about the town while they were here. After all, what better person to be with than one who spoke the local language? She heard the bathroom door open and Bill padded across the room to his backpack. She caught a glimpse of his naked back, a towel around his waist, as he pulled clothing from it. She watched raptly the movement of his muscles as they traced their way under his skin. She felt warmth all over as she watched. It was her turn in the bathroom next.

* * *

After they each washed and dressed, they made their way downstairs to the dining room which was furnished in the Old World style. Lots of dark wooden panels and antique brass fittings. There were many steamy, covered servers along the sideboard. When they were seated, Bill glanced at the menu, saw that the breakfast bar was rather inexpensive, and said "How about just getting what we want?"

By way of an answer, Molly stood up and went to pick up a plate. Bill followed. Down the line the two of them went ladling good looking food from the various trays, pots, and pans onto their plates. Molly had a very healthy appetite Bill noticed. Good, he thought. He liked a girl who eats like a person and not a bird. Molly had not an ounce of fat on her, but she definitely wasn't skinny. In Bill's neck of the woods, they called her type of woman 'rawboned'.

Damn, Bill observed. Molly was beautiful in the morning light that came through the opened curtains. The sun raised a halo of yellow that surrounded her blonde hair and put her face into relief. She smiled up at him, asking with a raised eyebrow what he was staring at, while nibbling on a croissant.

"You're beautiful, Molly. Simply beautiful."

"Thank you, kind sir. Even with a piece of bun in my mouth?"

"Yup. Even with a piece of bun in your mouth." They moved back to their table and sat opposite each other. "Where do we want to go today? Munich has hundreds of great places to visit. I've been here before; a while ago though."

"That's one up on me then. I'd love to just go 'out there' and see whatever we want. Can we walk?"

"We can, but I have a better idea."

"What?"

"Just wait and see. Finish your breakfast and we'll get our coats and mittens for our trip."

"Trip?"

Bill just smiled enigmatically and finished his coffee - which was excellent - and sat back waiting for her to finish. She did and he signaled for the check. Bill paid and they walked back to the elevator to the room.

"Wear your sturdy shoes," Bill called to Molly in the bathroom from the small desk where he was refilling his small flask with brandy he had purchased this morning in the lobby shop. "It'll be cool today, but probably no snow."

Wanderlust!

"Will these do?" Molly asked, putting one foot forward with a very nice suede boot on it.

"Sure will," he replied. "I fixed us *ein* toddy for the body too." He said, holding up the silver flask.

"Excellent! Let's go!"

They closed their door and went down the hall to the elevator. Once deposited on the ground floor, they headed for the front door. On the way by the reception desk Bill dropped the key off. When they emerged into the bright sunlight, Bill shaded his eyes from the glare and searched around for what he had hoped would be near. Sure enough, down the block was a horse-drawn carriage standing by the curb. The driver was in conversation with a man sweeping off the front sidewalk in front of his store. Bill turned to Molly, took her arm, and they headed in that direction.

Bill hailed the driver, and asked him, in German, if he was free. He replied that he wasn't free, but very inexpensive. Then the three of the men laughed heartily. Molly joined in after Bill translated for her. The man sweeping made his manners and went about his way. The driver said his name was HÃ¶rst and his horse was 'Ziggy'. Bill patted Ziggy's flanks and he turned to him and nickered.

HÃ¶rst spoke: "See, he likes you. Where do you wish to go today with this beautiful woman?"

Bill told HÃ¶rst that he'd been in Munich (pronouncing the name in the German manner, with the umlaut: *MÃ¼nchen*) a few years ago, but remembered that there were a lot of places that could be seen simply driving by. HÃ¶rst agreed and after some bargaining a fee was agreed upon. Bill handed Molly up into the open carriage and tucked her under the thick woolen blanket. HÃ¶rst climbed into the driver's seat and clucked Ziggy into motion.

"What was all that about," Molly asked. "I didn't understand any of it."

"I just told him that we were engaged, in love, and in Munich to sightsee. He said he'd take care of driving us around. We can have him all day if we wish. He's a heck of a nice guy I think. Ziggy is his horse."

Molly leaned over to Bill's ear. "But, I don't have a ring do I?" She whispered.

"Don't worry." Bill whispered back. "Most young Germans don't have enough money to give a ring when they get engaged. He probably wouldn't expect us to have one."

HÃ¶rst turned and said to Bill "But you are American, no?" He'd obviously heard him translating for Molly. "You speak German so well. Did you live here long?"

Bill answered that he'd lived over near Trier, in the Rhineland, for three years starting in 1955, and that his father was in the American air force. Molly was trying to follow the conversation, but was clearly feeling left out. HÃ¶rst surprised both of them by switching to very passable English. This made it easier on Molly, who brightened considerably after that.

"Now, what would you like to see first?" HÃ¶rst asked.

Bill answered by telling HÃ¶rst that it had been a very long time since he'd been in Munich so they would be happy to put themselves in his hands. He grinned, and when Bill added that he'd like to hire him for the day his grin broadened into a huge smile. "Furthermore," Bill said, "we'll take care of your lunch too, if you can recommend a good place to eat."

Wanderlust!

"I know just the place. It is owned by my uncle." HÃ¶rst replied. "It is near the center of the town too, where there are many sights to view."

"Good enough. Let's get Ziggy moving then." Bill said, tossing the blanket over Molly's and his knees. "Are you warm enough, Molly?"

Molly nuzzled his neck in response. "Definitely." She leaned even closer and whispered into his ear. "Are you sure we can pay for this? It's got to be expensive - and he didn't name a price yet either did he?"

"He did, but don't worry about it, Molly." Bill whispered back. "I've got everything under control. I am your actual, moneybags."

Molly giggled and leaned back against Bill's arm that he'd thrown behind her. HÃ¶rst jiggled the reins and Ziggy started plodding down the side of the road. As they passed various connecting roads, Bill made a mental map of where they were going. He'd always been able to do that sort of thing. Even when he was young, and in the Boy Scouts, he could take one look at a map or chart and navigate from one side to the other without referencing it again. His friends called it 'spooky', the way he could do that.

They clopped along, the sounds of Ziggy's hooves coming back to them softly from the surrounding buildings. There didn't seem to be much vehicular traffic, so Bill asked HÃ¶rst about that. HÃ¶rst replied that in the winter, most people just stayed inside and didn't go out very much. If they did, they took trams or busses. He added that young lovers preferred carriages like his, and winked at Molly, who colored nicely.

They emerged from Briener StraÃe into a very large, tree filled square that HÃ¶rst told them was the grounds of the German Theatre Museum. It was closed for renovation now, but very interesting to take a tour through. They left the gardens, passed the U.S. Consulate grounds and the '*Haus der KÃ¼nst*' or House of Art. Ahead was a very ornate bridge. HÃ¶rst said it led over the Isar River. When they crossed the river, there was a beautiful monument around which the road divided.

"That is the '*Friedensengel*'" HÃ¶rst explained. "Angel of Peace," Bill translated for Molly. Up close, she was beautifully gilded in gold atop a very tall, slim pedestal. The sun broke through the thinning clouds as they turned northward from the Angel of Peace to Ismanninger StraÃe. Not too far down this little street, they turned into a smaller street and then into yet a smaller alleyway. Molly looked at Bill with eyes wide as if to say 'where are we going now'?

[December 14, 1963]

[Downtown Munich, W. Germany - 1230 hours]

Bill patted Molly's arm and gave her a reassuring smile. HÃ¶rst brought Ziggy to a halt and jumped down from his seat. "We have arrived at my uncle's restaurant. It is not open until fourteen hours, but we can get in the back way through the kitchen. Wait while I feed Ziggy". He went to the rear of the carriage, opened a trap door, and dragged out a feed bag. Bill jumped down and helped lift it over Ziggy's ears, patted his jowl, and wished him '*bon appÃ©tit*'. This brought a giggle from Molly. Bill reached out a hand and helped her down off the step into a dry spot on the pavement. HÃ¶rst led them past a heavy wooden door and into a dark passageway that smelled delicious. Bill's mouth instantly watered at the thought of a really great meal.

The three of them emerged into the noise and bustle of a busy kitchen preparing the noon meal. Utensils clanged, cooks yelled for ingredients, and above them all was the strident voice of, presumably, HÃ¶rst's uncle. He paused for a moment in his rapid-fire orders to glance at HÃ¶rst. When he did, he took in Molly and Bill. A huge smile creased his face and he rushed over to stand in front of them. HÃ¶rst introduced them to

Wanderlust!

his Onkel Niklas. Niklas beamed even more when Bill addressed him in German and introduced Molly. He threw his arms around our waists and practically pushed us into the empty dining room. He pulled out a chair for Molly while HÃ¶rst and Bill took seats beside her.

The restaurant was called, according to the menu placard on the table, '*GrinseKatze*' or, Grinning Cat. Bill thought it was a very cool name and told Niklas that. He boomed out another laugh and said that it was originally the 'Two Dogs CafÃ©', but now that he only had a cat left, that is what the name had become. Bill glanced around to take in the cat motif. A large oil painting of a contented cat lying on a big stuffed pillow grinning at customers was the centerpiece of the room.

Niklas, himself, began bringing out dishes of food. Each one smelled better than the last. They had potato dumplings in thick chicken gravy, and a short glass of beer, followed by '*gebratenen Rindfleisch*' or broiled beef. Their greens were buttered lima beans with corn. Silence ensued as they all dug into this delicious meal. Their beer glasses were refilled at least once while they ate. Finally, Bill laid down his knife and fork, patted his lips with his napkin, and sat back in his chair. "I'm sorry, HÃ¶rst, I cannot eat another bite."

HÃ¶rst laughed and polished off what beer remained in his glass. He leaned forward towards Bill and said sotto voce "neither can I. Onkel Niklas always feeds me too much when I come by - especially with special guests."

Bill asked him quietly how much the meal was going to cost and HÃ¶rst held up his hand and told him not to worry; that it was 'taken care of'. This meant to Bill that perhaps the meal was complimentary. What a great deal that would be for them. Bill did, however, resolve he would leave a little something behind under his plate - the traditional place for 'special' tips.

They all sat and chatted a while longer while HÃ¶rst fired up an immense Meerschaum pipe that gave off a pleasant, scented, smoke. Normally, Bill was rather allergic to smoke - especially cigarettes - but pipe smoke wasn't too bad. Molly excused herself, asking where the rest room was. HÃ¶rst pointed down a small hallway and indicated she goes to the right. She walked away in the direction given.

HÃ¶rst took this opportunity to ask Bill about Molly. He said she was very pretty and that she looked slightly French. Bill agreed enthusiastically with him and said that she was from Montreal, Canada. He added that she probably did have French ancestors. "You are a lucky young man to have such a beautiful fiancÃ©e. Will you be married soon?"

This is something that Bill had been thinking very hard about the last day and a half. He knew that he had fallen in love with Molly and hoped that she felt the same way about him. It was outrageous, he mused, to think that someone you'd only known for less than forty-eight hours could become a lifelong mate, but stranger things had happened. He decided to skirt the issue a little. "I hope very soon," Bill hedged. "She is a wonderful person and I like to think we are very much in love."

"Good. Good. It is easy to see she looks upon you with favor. I met my wife during the war, but she has now been gone for two years," he said sadly. "It was the cancer, you know."

This was the very first time Bill had ever heard any German make a direct reference to the war. He had several questions he'd like to ask, but held back because he didn't know HÃ¶rst at all and didn't want to offend him. HÃ¶rst surprised him by continuing his story after Molly returned and sat down. He gave her a little preamble and then launched into his story.

"I was a dashing Panzer officer and I met her in France. In fact," he added with a laugh, "I was in a very big hurry to catch up with my squadron and almost ran over her with my tank. She jumped off her bicycle and

Wanderlust!

picked up stones to throw at me. One came very near taking my head off. She had a good throwing arm. I stopped my tank and apologized. This stunned her because she told me that never had a German ever apologized to her or anyone she knew. I knew I would be in trouble for being late, but I couldn't leave her. She was beautiful and I knew at that moment we were going to have a life together. I told her my name, and that I would be back through this town in five days."

"Did you make it?" Molly asked.

HÃ¶rst laughed again and told her that his return was only in three days, and that he was being pursued by General Patton. His tank had been destroyed in a field and he was on foot. His fellow officers had left the area and were, in fact, fleeing back to Germany at the time. He decided he'd had enough of the war and walked into her village dressed in civilian clothes. "For this, I could be shot!" He pronounced, waving one finger in the air. "As a spy!"

Bill nodded, and he continued wistfully. "Bernadette was her name and she came to my rescue by hiding me until the war was over. This was a very long time back then as collaborators were everywhere. Eventually, the village people accepted me and we got married. I lived there until she died."

* * *

Molly felt a wave of emotion fall over her. What a wonderful story HÃ¶rst was telling. She tried to imagine herself in the position of Bernadette: very young and determined to keep the enemy at bay, but finally giving in to her emotions.

How nice it would be to live such a simple life with Bill. A small village, a snug cottage with, perhaps, a cow or horse in the back yard. She idly wondered if Bill was interested in that sort of thing.

She mentally shook her head and responded to the end of HÃ¶rst's story.

* * *

"That's the greatest love story I've ever heard," said Molly with tears in her eyes. Maybe she didn't realize it, but she'd said it in French. HÃ¶rst responded in the same language. They carried on for a bit, and then switched back to English.

"Molly and you are of the same mind, it appears." HÃ¶rst intoned quietly. He declined to add anything more but Bill caught his drift. It appeared that Molly was also hoping they would stay together. That thought made Bill very happy.

HÃ¶rst stood and said that if he didn't get back to Ziggy he would become fat and would no longer pull the carriage. Molly and Bill stood also and the three of them left the dining room and back through the kitchen. Onkel Niklas passed HÃ¶rst a large thermos which, he said, contained cocoa "with a little something extra". When Bill reached for his back pocket, Niklas fanned his hands between them. "No. No. I always treat friends of HÃ¶rst. Sometimes, they return to be good customers." He boomed another laugh at them.

They said their goodbyes and went back out into the bright sunlight which was reflected down into the narrow alley by the glass of numerous windows overhead. Ziggy was standing quietly, nosebag motionless, asleep. HÃ¶rst gently removed the bag and stowed it. Ziggy woke up, turned, and nickered softly at Molly. She patted his nose. "You are a very good horse, Ziggy," she told him.

Wanderlust!

The trio loaded back up into the carriage and navigated their way back out onto the larger street. This time they headed south. They passed the Bavarian House of Parliament and the '*Hofbräu Keller*' which, according to HÃ¶rst, was a huge cellar *bier* garden. As stuffed as they all were, Bill figured he couldn't have survived a liter of beer right now.

The carriage swung up and over part of the river to an island, which HÃ¶rst told them was called locally 'Museum Island'. They could see the huge building that housed the German Museum and all its divisions. Turning off the bridge, they wound their way down to the island proper and traveled along a narrow pathway in front of the museum. When they reached a very narrow bridge, HÃ¶rst swung Ziggy up and over it to the north bank of the Isar River. Now they entered a warren of tiny little streets and narrow alleys. Not being able to see the sun, Bill resorted to following the directions as they turned. Generally, they were heading northwards but definitely not in a straight line. When Bill asked, HÃ¶rst told him that they were getting a view of Munich that tourists rarely got. This, Bill thought, he could agree with.

Back and forth they wandered. Molly and HÃ¶rst chatted in French while Bill took in the architecture he loved so much. When he'd lived in Germany before, he'd had a girlfriend who was nuts about churches. Her love of Gothic and Roman architecture had rubbed off on him. Some of the buildings had been there for a very long time. Occasionally, Molly would pause and summarize to Bill what she and HÃ¶rst had been talking about, then resumed their conversation.

In a little while, they came to a section where the buildings thinned out a bit and Bill caught a glimpse of the clock tower on the main train station. He knew exactly where they were then; almost back to their hotel. They skirted the facade of the train station, catching the eye of several couples as they passed by. Molly waved at them and Bill chuckled under his breath. HÃ¶rst waved also and clicked his tongue at Ziggy, who turned to look at him with an expression that said 'hey, I'm already moving aren't I?' Only in German, of course.

At almost fifteen-thirty the carriage pulled up in front of the hotel. HÃ¶rst, reluctant as he was to end the trip, lifted Molly from the carriage and set her on the ground. Bill hopped down and went to Ziggy to congratulate him on a very interesting tour of the city. Ziggy nuzzled against his coat and whickered. Bill scratched him behind the ears. Molly came up and offered him a sugar cube that HÃ¶rst had given her. He was immediately interested more in her than Bill.

Bill asked HÃ¶rst to restate his fee, which he did. It seemed reasonable to him, very reasonable, in fact, so he added an almost fifty percent tip to it and told him to buy Ziggy a nice bag of hot oats. HÃ¶rst laughed and asked if Bill would sign his guest book; who told him he'd be happy to. Bill filled in his name, a mailing address, which he told HÃ¶rst that he wouldn't be near it for at least another month and a telephone number for his parents.

Molly followed suit with her address. Bill looked over her shoulder and committed it to memory. He recited it several times to himself so he wouldn't forget it. HÃ¶rst and Bill shook hands as good friends and Molly kissed his cheek. He beamed and swung up onto the driver's seat. With a click of his tongue and a shake of the reins, Ziggy hauled him down the street. HÃ¶rst turned to wave at them and they returned it.

Chapter 4: Wanderlust - Chapter 4

[December 14, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany, afternoon]

"Do you believe what HÃ¶rst told us about his wife? I always thought that the German Army was tough and unforgiving. He seems like a very nice guy." Molly asked Bill.

"True or not, it was a very touching story, wasn't it? I actually think it was true. HÃ¶rst didn't seem to be the hard-bitten storm troopers the movies always portray German soldiers as - even tank officers. I loved the bit about Bernadette throwing rocks at him. I bet that was true. As I remember, Patton and the German army mixed it up in December of forty-four. That would mean the Bernadette hid him from then to the end of the war in May of forty-five. Five months is a very long time when everyone you know might give you away. I think he's on the level.

"You really know your history don't you, Bill? I didn't know much about it. I was born in nineteen forty four."

'Aha!' He thought. 'That made her two years younger than his twenty-two years.' He was slowly learning more about Molly all the time. "Brrrrr. I'm getting cold standing here outside. Let's go into the hotel and maybe have a little warm-up drink?"

"Sounds good to me." She answered, taking his arm. "Let's go."

They entered and before they were halfway across the lobby, Bill heard her being hailed in French by another female voice. "Molly! Molly! Yoo hoo! *Je suis ici!*" They turned and saw a hand waving above a potted plant. It was followed shortly by an attractive, slightly older woman in a shimmering blue dress.

* * *

Francine! Molly wondered why she was here - and in this hotel. She was supposed to be off in her little skiing lodge taking a vacation. At least that's what she said in her letter. Well, she will certainly tell me.

* * *

She came up to Molly and unleashed a torrent of French. Bill hadn't a chance of deciphering most of it. When the woman ran down, Molly put her hand on Bill's bicep and turned to him. "This," she said "is the person I was supposed to meet tomorrow in Garmisch." She turned back to the woman. "What are you doing here now, Francine?" She asked. "We would have been down there on the afternoon train."

Francine switched effortlessly to English. "I know, I know, but my office called and asked if I could come to Munich to meet an important client." She paused a moment. "Ah, what do you mean 'we'?" She asked with her head cocked to one side. "Have you found a traveling companion?"

"Yes; and his name is Bill. As you may have gathered, Bill, this is Francine."

"*EnchantÃ©.*" Bill said. "Very nice to meet you, Francine. Molly and I met on the train down from the Frankfurt Airport."

Wanderlust!

"*EnchantÃ©*." She said back to him as they shook hands European style - one single pump. "And, are you staying here at the hotel also, Bill?" She added with narrowed, but friendly, eyes.

"Francine!" Molly huffed with mock anger. "If you must know, we share a room. We've just come back from a delightful five-hour horse carriage ride about town and were about to have a drink in the bar. Would you like to join us?"

"Really! That must have been terribly expensive, no?"

"Not very," Bill responded. "We bought the driver lunch."

"Still, usual rates around here are something like forty marks an hour."

This caused Molly's eyes to widen at Bill with an implied question; which he quickly forestalled by wiggling his eyebrows at her. She giggled, and responded to Francine's statement by saying, "Well, it was a very good lunch in a fine restaurant. You would have loved it. Let's go; I want that drink."

The three of them adjourned to the bar, which was overheated enough to force Molly and Bill to shed their heavy coats immediately. The seating appeared to be 'find your own seat' so they did. A waiter came over and took their orders. Bill stuck with a simple beer, Francine and Molly got a brandy each. When the drinks arrived and the waiter left, Francine said to Molly, "Tell all, Molly. How did you and this delicious man meet?"

Bill wasn't sure he liked being called 'delicious' but didn't respond and let Molly recount their adventures. She started right at the basin full of water smacking her in the face and completed with their tour of the city. In between sections of the story, the girls refilled their brandies twice; Bill nursed his beer.

"Well, that is all too marvelous for words, Molly. I wish I were in your shoes now." Bill smiled self-consciously at her comment. "Oops, my dears, I have to be running off to my room to prepare myself for the conference. I have to meet my customer, an American, no less, at eight hundred. Why is it they prefer such early hours?"

"Business ethic, I expect." Bill interjected. "Time is money and all that stuff."

"Ugh. I'd rather meet at a more reasonable hour - like ten or so, over coffee."

"I definitely agree, Francine. I would never have called a meeting at a very early hour either. But, then, I've never been a corporate guy. I am going to college and fight fires in Montana during the summer."

"How exciting! Do you ride horses all the time in Montana?" She asked with a very serious visage.

Bill searched her face for a moment to see if he could detect a shade of humor in her question. She could bluff very well but when he put a bemused look on his face she began to crack. Finally she guffawed and the three of them broke up. Bill liked her humor. He allowed that he wouldn't have wanted to play poker with her though - she was too good at keeping a straight face. Bill and Molly said goodbye as they stood up. Bill went to pay the tab and the three exited the bar. In front of the elevators, waiting for a car to arrive, Francine told the two of them in a stage whisper she was in three-oh-seven. Molly responded with like voice "five-twelve". They sounded like the soundtrack from a "B" spy movie.

The three ascended, dropped Francine off at the third floor and continue upwards to their floor. Down the hall, hand in hand, they went until they reached their room. Bill unlocked it and motioned Molly in. She smiled and

Wanderlust!

pivoted about him so she could kiss him on her way past. They dropped their coats, hats, and gloves on the bench and kicked off their shoes. Molly headed for the bathroom while Bill fiddled with the radiator controls. The heated bar had made their room seem a lot colder.

Molly came out of the bathroom and Bill used it next. Soon, after changing into something a little less dressy, they both sat on the long couch that faced the window. Bill was seated with his feet stretched out in front of him but Molly turned sideways, propped her feet on the arm, and lay back against his chest. She looked up at him and made a pucker with her lips. He kissed them gently.

* * *

'I really don't want anything now but a nap.' Molly thought. 'I wonder if Bill feels that way also, or if he has other ideas.'

Molly decided to see if they could just sit quietly on the settee and read. It had been so very long since she'd done that; by herself or with someone else.

She made up her mind and spoke.

* * *

"Now, we are just going to relax, Bill. I have my book and yours is *à l'um à l'* over here." She said, lifting it from the coffee table and handing it to him. He adjusted the light and they read. A very pleasurable hour passed, then two. A knock on the door signaled the room service waiter with the light meal, coffee and brandy Bill had ordered in the bar earlier. He lifted Molly from his lap and went to the door. The waiter wheeled in a small cart, accepted his tip with a little salute and bow, and left.

Bill moved the cart over in front of them on the couch and poured coffee. Molly accepted it and held out her cup until he tipped a little brandy into it. She sipped and pronounced it 'good'. Bill splashed a little into his coffee also and sat back down. They carefully arranged themselves as before and resumed reading. From time to time, they took a snack from the tray. The tiny little bread rolls stuffed with ham and chicken were delicious, but it was the cheese that made the meal.

[December 14, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany - evening]

The weak sunlight outside slowly waned until nothing could be seen but the lights from rooms in the building across the way. One of them appeared to be a hotel also which prompted Molly to wonder if anyone over there was as happy as they were here. Bill told her that he doubted that. When she asked why, he told her that nobody could be happier than he was at this moment. She kissed him and added "*merci*, kind sir".

The next time she opened her mouth, she yawned until her jaw cracked. "Oh, *mon dieu*, I am sorry. I suddenly am very tired. Would you mind terribly if I crawled into the inviting comforter right now?"

"Not in the least, *mon Cher*, I was thinking of the same thing, but not just yet. I want to finish this chapter before I stop. Good night."

Molly kissed Bill, and sat up to swing her legs off the couch. He helped her to stand and watched as she weaved across the rug, removing outer garments, and piled into bed. She landed dead center, burrowed into the thick feathered comforter, and wiggled a little to make herself comfortable. It seemed it was only moments

Wanderlust!

later that Bill heard the soft buzz of her snore. He smiled to himself and dimmed the light to just one bulb. He continued to read; thinking 'so, is this what it would be like if we were married?' He fervently hoped so.

* * *

Surprised, but happy, at Bill's placid response, Molly lay back under the comforter. The events of the day whirled around in her head. At first, it was difficult to bring order to them, but eventually they coalesced into the background of her primary thought.

'What ifâ ?'

* * *

Around twenty-three hundred Bill got tired also. The brandy was gone, and the coffee pot empty. Once he pushed the cart into the hallway, he went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, and headed for bed. Molly was splayed out over the entire center of the bed so Bill gently levered her over to one side far enough so he could lie comfortably. She stirred, flung an arm across his chest, scooted close, and snuggled into the crook of his arm. She said something in French that he didn't catch, and then resumed buzzing. Bill stroked her shoulder until he felt himself drifting and finally surrendered to the siren call of sleep.

Chapter 5: Wanderlust - Chapter 5

[December 15, 1963]

[Hotel Alfa, Munich, W. Germany - morning]

Dawn arrived and settled down on the town like a soft grey blanket. Clouds had returned and brought along a blustery wind. Bill could hear it moaning around the window ledges and rattling the glass panes. It was a good morning to stay burrowed deep into the covers. He rolled over on his back, but suddenly realized he was alone in bed. Molly was already up.

He heard the very faint sounds of singing coming from the bathroom. Then, the rushing of water from the tap and silence again. Molly was undoubtedly taking a bath. The view in his mind's eye of that operation gave him pause for thought. Bill quietly got out of bed and tiptoed across the rug. When he tapped on the door, the singing stopped and he heard her tell him to come in.

"*Buongiorno, il mio amore!*" Bill announced with a broad smile, bending down to kiss her.

She gave him a smooch, leaving bubbles around his mouth that tasted of apples. "Don't tell me you speak another language. What was that, Italian?"

"*Ma, naturalmente.* And that, my love is just about all I know - except enough left to get my face slapped. Oh, wait, I can get that done in two more languages: Russian, '*Ñ Ñ ÐµÐ±Ñ Ð»Ñ Ð±Ð»Ñ , Ð Ð¼Ð»Ð»Ð»Ð»*,' and Spanish, '*te quiero*'."

"Goodness. You're a wealth of surprises, Bill. I wish I could 'get' languages. I suppose you're one of those people who can live a week in a country and speak it like a native?"

"Not really. I just have an ear for it. I hear something, and the translation, and I mimic it. German is the only language I can actually think in though. None of the others."

"You think in German? I can only do that with French. They speak it all around our area in Montreal. I grew up with it. Conversations in my house run about half French and half English."

Bill sat on the edge of the tub and swung his feet into the water. Molly slid over and began washing them. Her touch caused other reactions in Bill; one of which caused her to get a rueful expression on her face. "Why the long face?" He asked.

"We will have to hold our lovemaking for a little while, Bill. I am early, but maybe that is to be expected since I met you. I am devastated." Her eyes fell downwards.

Bill lifted her chin and gave her yet another kiss. "No matter. We will still have each other's company. *C'est la vie.*"

"But," she said softly, "what about you?"

He put his hands on her shoulders and began rubbing her neck. "Molly, you don't have to do anything for me. I can wait." He said at last.

Wanderlust!

"But, my love, I don't want you to wait. It gives me pleasure to give you pleasure. Besides, it is just for a few days."

"Does that mean you have decided to let me travel with you?" He asked hopefully.

"I am thinking that maybe instead of going to Garmisch, what if we just pick a different destination and go there for a while? How about that?"

"Sounds wonderful. But, where shall we go? Do you have some place in mind?"

"Right now, I am hungry and just want to go to the dining room. I will think about a good destination for us."

"Right!" Bill stood up, moved to the sink, and began brushing his teeth. Then he broke out his shaving gear and lathered up. This piqued Molly's interest and she rose from the tub, wrapped herself in a towel, and moved behind him.

She wrapped her arms around his middle and said over his shoulder. "I want to watch." She said with a lilt to her voice. "I've never been in a bathroom with a man shaving before."

"Really?" My eyebrows rose in the mirror. "That sounds like an old movie or a romance novel line."

"Really. My old boyfriend had so little face hair he rarely shaved at all. Have you ever had a beard?"

"I did. Once. I liked it, but I had to shave it off because the firefighting gear wouldn't fit properly over it."

"Ah. I hadn't thought of that. I think I would like you with a beard."

"So be it, then. I will grow one especially for you!" Bill wiped the foam off, ran a washcloth over his face, and turned to her. He gave her a big kiss and ruffled the towel around her hair. "Want some help?"

Molly nodded so Bill unwound the turbaned towel and began lightly drying her golden hair. She turned from side to side to assist him and, finally, it was mostly dry. She shooed him out of the bathroom so she could 'put on her face' without the distraction of his presence.

Back in the room, Bill donned underwear, chose a nice woolen shirt, and brown cargo pants. He'd always been partial to cargo pants because you can carry so many things in them that would otherwise look bulky. He stared into the dressing table mirror and imagined what the return of his previously nice, dark, beard would look like. He figured he could probably grow one in about a week or so; then he would leave it up to her which style he'd go for.

* * *

'Merde! What a time for this to happen.' Molly raged. She knew she was close, but to have it happen now was definitely not in her plans. At least Bill took it calmly enough. She also knew that there were other ways to please a man but she knew she was not very skilled in those matters.

'Perhaps he will be a total gentleman and not make demands of me at all. Or, would that be too much to hope for? Bill is a total man in every way; I could not, would not, refuse to make him happy.'

She was also wondering if Bill was serious about just wandering off in a different direction. She had no particular destination in mind, but perhaps Bill did. If so, then he would offer it as a destination and she could

Wanderlust!

make her response. She felt deliciously adventurous at the thought of dashing across Europe with this mysterious man.

'Paris! Yes!' That was the destination she would pick. It had been a kind city to her parents and now, perhaps, it would for her also.

She conversed with herself this way and that until she realized that her face was completely done. Packing everything back into the small plastic case, she gave the sink a final wipe and pulled the door open.

* * *

Molly emerged from the bathroom and began dressing also. She put on a set of very sheer yellow panties and a bra, followed by a knit yellow skirt and sweater combination. The yellow emphasized her blonde hair even more than usual. With a pale orange scarf tied around her throat they were ready for breakfast.

Bill snapped up his map of European train lines and schedules from the little entrance table and followed Molly out the door. Maybe, he thought, they could pick a new destination at breakfast. They were led into the dining room by a young woman who smiled a lot, and seated at a small table for two near the side of the room. They were told to just go to the breakfast bar and scoop up what they wanted. Both of them had similar tastes: eggs, toast, a little sliced bacon and a dollop of orange marmalade on the side for the ever-present croissants. The mugs the hotel provided for coffee were tall and deep, Bill was happy to see.

As they ate, they pored over the map. Bill suggested north but Molly seemed to favor westward. To the west lay Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and, ultimately, France. He asked what she would be interested in seeing but she became evasive. After a little hemming and hawing Molly admitted that she didn't have a lot of money with her. She added that she could get more, but would have to visit a bank and have a draft wired over. Bill told her not to worry, that he could cover most their expenses; so where did she want to go?

* * *

Molly: 'Really? Goodness; he's been paying for almost everything we've done plus our hotel rooms. Firefighting,' She reflected, 'must pay pretty well.' She thought again of the perfect solution! Paris!

* * *

"How about Paris? I've always wanted to go to Paris. I've dreamed of walking down brightly lit streets in the evening and crossing bridge after bridge over the River Seine. My mother met my father in Paris - right on the left bank - at a shop. That's always seemed so romantic to me."

Bill refolded the map to show the area between the two cities. "Well, it's settled then. We go to Paris. When do we leave?"

"What? Just like that? That's not very fair to you. Where do you want to go?"

"I want to go wherever you want, Molly. I want to be with you for a long time." Bill took her hands in both of his. "I believe that I've fallen in love with you in just these few short days." He stopped for a moment and looked from one of her eyes to the other. "I can have the desk check fares and time for us. They may also be able to phone for a room at a hotel for us. Shall we go and see?"

Molly finished the last of her croissant and tipped her coffee mug up. "I love a man who makes up his mind and then does it. I love you also, Bill; very much. Let's go to the City of Light."

Wanderlust!

Bill paid the tab and they walked out into the lobby. On their approach to the desk, Molly also added that she'd better alert Francine that they were not coming to Garmisch.

"Good idea," he said. "I'd forgotten that."

Molly took care of the message to Francine first; simply telling her that she would not be coming down for skiing, but, instead, was going to Paris. She added that she was sure Francine would understand.

Bill asked the desk clerk if arrangements could be made for train travel to, and a hotel in, Paris. He said "certainly" and proceeded to consult timetables and other books. Several minutes elapsed until he lifted his head from the piece of paper he'd been taking notes on and announced "There are two methods of travel, *Mein Herr*. One, almost direct to Paris and another through Zurich, Switzerland. Which would you prefer?"

Molly and Bill consulted briefly and they settled on the scenic route through Switzerland. She put her hand on Bill's arm. "Oh, could we stop in Zurich for a little while? I've never been there either and it will be a new country for me." Bill turned to the clerk, who nodded and nosed into the books again.

"There is a train to Zurich leaving the Hauptbahnhof at twelve-ten hours. It arrives in Zurich at eighteen fifty-five. Will that be satisfactory? How long do you wish to stay in Zurich? A day, perhaps?"

Molly nodded and Bill confirmed that a day would be fine. "Ah, then you will need a hotel. Our sister hotel, the Hotel Arlette, is just across the river from the station. It has rates are very close to ours. Will that suffice?"

"That will do just fine." Bill responded, smiling over at Molly. He turned back to the clerk and asked about the second part of their trip.

The clerk consulted his notes. "There is a train for Paris, leaving the same station, at six minutes past eleven hours in the morning. It arrives at Paris Ost at seventeen twenty-seven. Are you familiar with Paris, *Mein Herr*?"

"I am. Not intimately, but enough to get around. Paris Ost is just across the river from Paris Nord is it not?"

"Yes, *Mein Herr*, it is. Shall I book your trip? You can pay for the train travel right here. The hotel will take a reservation from us, but you will have to pay when you arrive. A moment and I will give you a total."

"Thank you, very much. We appreciate the effort."

He bent again to the books, shuffled some pages, and scribbled on his pad. He arrived at a total for Bill and spun the page around so he could see it. It was a totally reasonable price and Bill said so. The clerk smiled and Bill reached for his wallet to pay. Molly followed his fingers as he pulled bill after bill out. Her eyes grew wider until he finally stopped. The clerk took the money and left for the back room to make the telephone calls.

"Bill! That was a great deal of money. Are you sure you can afford this? We can stay here, or just continue down to Garmisch if you want."

"Your wish is my command, Molly. You wanted to go to Paris and I'll take you there. Now, hush and let me take care of things."

* * *

Wanderlust!

'Mon dieu! He makes it sound so simple as if ordering a taxi. That was a great deal of money he just paid for us to travel. I must think of a way to repay him; perhaps I will visit a bank and have a draft wired to me in Paris.'

* * *

She hugged him and looked up with her eyes shimmering in tears. "Oh, thank you. Thank you, very much, Bill. I am so happy that washbasin dumped water on me."

They laughed at that and were still laughing when the clerk came back to assure them that the arrangements had been made. He added that since it was now only eight hours, the tickets for the train would be delivered within the hour and they wouldn't have to get them at the ticketing office inside the station. "Great!" Bill said with gusto. "Thank you again for your immense help."

"My pleasure, *Mein Herr*. Enjoy your trip. Would you like me to total your bill?"

"Yes, please. Would you call us in our room when the tickets arrive?"

"Certainly. It will be done."

Bill and Molly went back up to the room and began to gather up their belongings. He saw her slip the remainder of the bubble bath into her suitcase. She knew he liked it. Bill was packed a bit before Molly was, seeing as how he only had his backpack to deal with. She finished and came over to sit beside him on the couch. They looked out the window at the buildings across the street and listened to the wind whining around the sill.

Molly began softly quoting a poem in French. When Bill asked her what it meant, she said it didn't translate into English very well. He was familiar with those types of poems so he didn't press her. She did tell him that it was very complimentary to young lovers and the man in particular. She nuzzled his cheek until he lifted his chin. She kissed Bill's Adams apple and hugged him close to her. He could feel her warmth. She said she could feel his beard coming in. She grasped his chin on both sides with her hands and kissed him, very soundly, on the lips.

"That is for being you." Molly repeated the action and then said, "And that's for taking me to Paris."

Any further escalation of activities was cut short by the ring of the house phone. Bill rose, picked it up, and heard that their tickets had arrived. He relayed this to Molly and she sighed. "I hope we have some privacy on the train."

"We should, I asked for a roomette, not a day coach."

"Oh, all that rapid-fire German there in the middle?"

"Yup. We need our privacy don't we?"

"We do. Definitely. We'd better go."

They hefted their baggage and went down the corridor towards the elevator. Down they went to the lobby and over to the desk. The same clerk greeted them, handed Bill their tickets and the bill. Bill paid, and the clerk gave him a receipt. Bill managed to keep Molly from seeing the amount on the receipt, even though she craned her neck to look over his shoulder.

Wanderlust!

"Oh, pooh. I couldn't see it."

Bill laughed and said, "I know. Ready to go, my love? *Auf Wiedersehen!*" He said to the clerk as they headed for the door. "Come back soon," the clerk replied.

Chapter 6: Wanderlust - Chapter 6

[December 15, 1963]

[Central Train Station, Munich, W. Germany - 1120]

Molly and Bill arrived at the train station with about forty-five minutes to spare. Not really wanting anything to eat, they settled on a bottle of water from a vendor and sat on the benches placed in front of their gate and waited until the train backed in and was made ready for passengers. Finally, the gate opened and the guard checked their tickets and pointed them towards the last car.

Bill glanced at their tickets as they walked down the platform and located car twenty-seven twelve. Their small roomette was indicated by the letter 'D'. This time, there was no helpful porter so they put their small bit of baggage into the racks provided and settled down for departure.

A short rap on the door and the sound of it sliding to one side produced a rather short man wearing a dark blue suit. He wore a peaked hat with a silver badge hat and spoke to them. "*Vos billets, monsieur et Mademoiselle?*"

Molly gave a little start at hearing French, but recovered. "*Bien sÃ»r, monsieur. Ici, ils sont.*" Of course, sir. Here they are. Molly took the tickets from Bill and handed them over to the Conductor.

He examined them, punched the bottom of the top ticket, and handed them back to her with a smile. "*Un agrÃ©able voyage, les jeunes.*"

"What was that he just said at the end?" Bill asked Molly. "Did he call us kids?"

"Well, not really. *Les jeunes* can mean many things. He probably meant youngsters. Kind of like an old granddad would address his grandkids.

"I'm okay with that, I guess. I wonder if he thought we were married."

"Would that make any difference?"

"Nope. Not at all. Not to me anyway. How about you?"

"No, my darling. Oh! I am so excited to be actually going to Paris. I've always wanted to go, but my parents just couldn't afford it. My sister is going to be soooo jealous."

"Sister? You have a sister? How old is she?"

"Lili is seven years older than I, married, and has two children - a boy and a girl. Now; you must tell me something about your family."

With a short, noisy lurch, the train began pulling out of the station. Very slowly it rattled over switch points until it was well out of the yard. Soon, it switched over to tracks that were much smoother and accelerated. Bill and Molly had begun their journey to Zurich, Switzerland and the little Hotel Arlette.

Lost in thought as Bill was, it took a nudge from Molly to get his attention again. He began to answer her last question. "My dad is in the air force and we've lived all over the place from Alaska to Germany. He left

Wanderlust!

Germany to go to Montana so I graduated from high school there and went to the state university since it was much cheaper as a resident of Montana. I have a brother, who is three years younger than me, and two sisters - both younger than my brother. My secret is that I've been to Paris before."

"You have? When?"

"Back in the spring of fifty-seven. I went there with my photography club. There were six of us kids and two chaperones. As odd as it might seem, there were three boys and three girls. It was a wonderful trip. My girlfriend, Susan, and I were so much in love. It was on that very train that we gave our virginity to each other."

Molly looked up at Bill and smiled. "How romantic. I'll bet you were devilishly handsome even back then."

"I don't know about that, but she and I stayed together for almost three years. Teenage romances running that long were unheard of back then. Ours came to an end though. Her father got stationed down in Italy and we just sort of lost contact. We wrote for a while, but the letters got fewer and fewer until they just stopped. I don't want to talk about me any more. How about you? Any romances in your past?"

"Oh, goodness! My very first love was only fourteen. I was twelve at the time. He liked to be my partner at dancing classes. He would run across the floor and grab me every time the music started. One day, he just stopped running. I cried all night but managed to cheer up. Number two was a helper in the school library. I was what you would call an upperclassman - a 'senior'?"

Bill nodded and Molly continued. "It was I that pursued him. I finally managed to get him alone in a stack of books at the back of the library. He struggled, but quit when I kissed him. Ten seconds later, he was tearing at the buttons on my blouse. I got a bit scared and kicked him in the shins. His ardor waned after that. The third, and final, was you my love."

"The way you say 'final' makes it seem very, um, final. Do you really feel that way?"

"Oh. I do! When I first put my eyes on you my toes curled. I had just been slapped in the face by cold water, which was still running down my front, and then you popped out of your door. I could hardly breathe. When you started speaking German I thought you *were* German, but when you spoke to me I knew you were American. I fell in love right at that minute."

"I am flattered then. I have to confess that I thought you looked rather delightful yourself - in a wet sort of way. *TrÃ's Chic.*"

Molly laughed at that. "But, I was so wet and frazzled."

"I know. That's what I loved about you. You had that disheveled look. And, you were not getting through to the porter. I had to help you."

"I'm so very glad you did." Molly pulled him down and kissed him deeply. "I've loved you from that very moment."

The two of them sort of fell into the bench seat; Bill first, followed by Molly. She landed right next to him, swung her legs up and over his, and cuddled up to his chest. They were both a bit tired but managed to watch the rapidly passing scenery for a while. Soon, Bill's eyelids grew heavy and he drifted off.

Wanderlust!

It was only ten minutes later, by his watch, but he felt very refreshed. Molly was still snoozing on his shoulder so he didn't move. Occasionally the bogies would run over points but the noise didn't wake her. Bill shifted slightly, pulled her even closer, and buried his nose in her hair. He could smell the apple blossom from the shampoo she used this morning. He couldn't imagine being more content than he was right now and drifted off again.

Molly's round little bottom was generating quite a bit of heat directly on Bill's upper thighs. He knew it would be terribly unfair of him if he began to react, so with an effort of will, he very gently disengaged her arms from his neck and lifted her carefully. She remained asleep even after he lay her down in the seat and put a pillow under her head. Molly smiled, licked her lips, and resumed her soft buzzing. Bill took the opportunity to slip out of the compartment and locate the washroom. Once there he splashed water on his face and dried it off. In the mirror, he saw that his beard was beginning to darken his chin and cheeks. Pretty soon he would have to start trimming around the edges so it didn't look too ragged. But not today.

Bill eased back into the room but when he shut the door it clicked loud enough to wake Molly. "Hmmm? Whazzat?" She demanded. "Bill?"

"I'm here, Molly. I went to the washroom for a moment. Are you hungry? Should we make plans to get a meal before we arrive, or just get a snack here and hit a restaurant when we get there? We arrive at almost nineteen hundred - seven in the evening. As I recall, the natives don't get started on dinner until around eight or so."

"Well, maybe just a snack. Do they have a diner on this train?"

"Now that you mention it, I'm not sure. Let's go explore."

"Okay. Let me get myself together. Which way is the washroom?"

"Mine was towards the head of the train so yours is probably at the other end of the car."

"Okay. Be right back." Molly gathered up her bag and slipped out the door. Bill bided his time watching fields, houses, roads, and hills pass by rapidly. He estimated they were doing around sixty or so. Molly returned in about five minutes.

"There was a woman in the washroom that asked me if we were the newlyweds in compartment 'D'. I couldn't say no, so I just smiled. She said something that sounded like 'guck' and patted my shoulder as she left."

"She probably said '*Glück*'. That means 'luck' in German." Bill decided to float out a trial balloon. "You know, it sure would make things simpler for us when we travel if we were actually married, or, appeared to be so." It hung between them for several seconds until Molly answered.

* * *

'Was that a proposal of marriage? No, wait. He said appear to be so. Maybe that is what he meant.'

Molly tossed the idea around for a moment in her head. It would certainly be much easier than trying to explain that they were just traveling together; especially at hotels. She was sure they would be discreet, but still there might be embarrassing questions asked.

'Then again, why not?'

Molly answered Bill's question.

Wanderlust!

* * *

"There will not be anybody at all who know either of us in Zurich or Paris. Why not. It would just be a little fib wouldn't it?"

"I suppose so; and you're right. Nobody knows us at all. We will have to go ring shopping in Zurich won't we?"

"But, I thought you said that Europeans were less attentive to things like that."

"They are, but I'm not European and I have my own standards as an uptight American. Besides, it would give me great pleasure to put a ring on your finger - make believe or not."

"Ah, but I am French - or nearly French anyway - so we go buy '*une bague*'; one ring, no?"

"No." Bill responded and she looked quizzically at him. "We buy three rings: one engagement, and two wedding rings. If we're going to do it, let's do it right."

She laughed and hugged him. "All right, three rings - but not too expensive, please."

"Not too expensive, I promise. Now, let's go get a snack."

They stood and brushed the wrinkles out of their clothes. Bill hooked Molly's elbow in the palm of his hand and opened the door for her. As she passed him she gave him a peck on the cheek and headed down the aisle. Bill stopped her, and hooked a thumb to the rear of the train. "We already know there isn't a bar car back there because we would have passed it getting aboard. If there is one, it's up front."

Molly smiled ruefully. "You always know what to do, Bill. So decisive, you know."

Bill took her hand and they walked forwards. The next car was compartments like theirs, but the motif was red plush instead of dark blue. The car after that was a coach. It was about a third full with uncomfortable-looking passengers. Bill was glad they'd opted for a compartment instead of these bench seats.

"Ah! Here's the bar car." Bill said, opening the sliding door to a wood paneled entryway. Sure enough, when they went through the vestibule the car opened up into an area that had seats along both sides and tables in front of them. There were a couple of people sitting with drinks in front of them and a foursome playing what looked like bridge. Their chatter sounded British.

When the waiter appeared, Bill asked him for two brandies. The waiter smiled his acknowledgement and went to fetch them. He returned with two balloon glasses filled with an amber liquid. Bill inhaled the aroma of his favorite brandy. At least, he thought, they were still on a German train even though the porter and conductor were French. Bill passed him a banknote to which the waiter made change and leaned down to set it on the table. Bill lifted his glass and tapped it against Molly's.

"Here's to us, Molly. Thank you for just being you."

"And thank you for being so wonderful, Bill. I'm starting on the adventure of my life here with you." She and Bill sipped their drinks and stared into each other's eyes.

"Ah. I see I was correct." A voice came from behind Molly. She turned and smiled up at the women who had just spoken.

Wanderlust!

Bill replied, in German, that she was almost correct. He launched into a complete fabrication about the two of them running away to get married, but hadn't done it yet. They were ultimately headed for Paris where Molly had relatives. Most importantly, an uncle who was a priest who was willing to perform the ceremony. The woman congratulated Molly on her engagement, shook Bill's hand, and wished the both of them the very best of luck. She passed on down the car and sat down; where she opened a book and began reading.

"What was that all about, Bill? I heard my name and the word 'luck' again didn't I?"

"Yep. I told her a big fib though. I said that we weren't actually married yet but had run away to Paris to meet your uncle who was a priest and would marry us."

"Oh, you're awful!" Molly gave Bill a fake grimace and popped him on the arm. "But, I do like the story though. It was a much better sound to it; especially since we don't have the rings yet, no?"

"Right. I agree. Then that's settled. Another?" Bill held up his glass. Molly shook her head and glanced at her watch.

"Nope. Not for me. We'll be arriving in just over an hour. How about we go back to our little room and smooch?"

"I'm always ready for some 'smooching', but that's not very fair to you is it?"

"You let me worry about that, my love. You do look a little tense to me. I have just the medicine for that."

Bill had never heard a more compelling reason to get alone with a girl in his life. The two of them stood. Bill dropped money on the table, and they left. The bartender raised his hand as they passed and wished them a good trip. Bill thanked him.

Bill had just locked the door when Molly pushed him back with her hands on his shoulders until he sat on the seat. She turned him to one side and knelt behind him. He felt her fingers pushing and prodding around the back of his neck. Bill felt several vertebrae pop as she kneaded his muscles. He did feel the tension going away, very fast, but it was replaced with yet another type of tension.

Molly nuzzled the back of Bill's neck with her lips and trailed her tongue down what she could find of his spine inside his collar. Her hands roamed the front of his shirt and unbuttoned each button carefully. With a yank, she pulled the tail of his shirt out of his trousers. She helped pull the sleeves off his arms.

Gently, Molly pulled Bill back so that his shoulders were resting in her lap. She bent down and kissed him. While they were engaged in that pleasurable activity, her fingers were busy elsewhere. Deftly, she unfastened his belt, unzipped his trousers, and freed what she sought. Amid soft moans, quiet cries of joy, and sudden release she tended to his needs. Bill tried, but she wouldn't accept any return from him. Quietly, they held each other and listened to the sounds of the car as it rolled along.

* * *

'I've never done that before in my life.' Molly spoke to herself. 'I hope I did well. Bill seemed satisfied in any case. I loved the feel of his strength in my hand. Oh, *merde*! I do wish I was finished with my *menstrues* because then we could have done things properly.'

Molly looked down at Bill, resting with his eyes closed, in her lap. He looked so relaxed now - a far cry from his state just minutes ago. She hated to intrude, butâ

Wanderlust!

* * *

Reluctantly, Molly spoke softly. "We'd better prepare for arrival hadn't we?"

Bill opened his eyes and looked at his watch. "Yeah. We should." He pecked her on the chin. "I love you."

They both stood and Bill flipped his shirt on and buttoned it up. Then he pushed his shirt tail back into his pants and zipped up. With a last tug of his belt, he was dressed again. Molly changed her blouse, but this time she added a very lacy white bra under it. Bill thought it was very sexy.

The train slowed, clattered through more points as it entered the yard, and wove its way to the proper platform. The two travelers looked around to make sure they hadn't forgotten anything, and then stood by the door ready to get off. The car rocked several times more and then slowed down to a crawl as the train ducked under the large canopy over the station. With a screech of brakes and a hiss of released air the train stopped. A porter opened the door and they stepped down. Bill helped Molly off and they took up their bags and walked into the cavernous interior.

Inside the huge station there was a large area off against one wall that held a long bank of telephones. Above the phones were brightly colored advertisements for the various hotels to which the phones connected. Molly sat with their bags while Bill looked for their hotel, the Comfort Hotel Royal Zurich. He didn't find it, however. It seemed to him that only that larger, which meant more expensive, hotels were allowed to advertise on this wall. He did, however, have the hotel's telephone number.

Locating a public phone, Bill dropped a coin and called the hotel desk. When the woman answered, he identified himself and asked for the quickest method of getting to their lobby. She gave him explicit instructions to exit to station at the northeast corner, walk across the bridge, and go through the little tunnel between the two buildings directly across from the bridge. When we exited, we would be right across the street from the hotel. Bill reflected that this was a very similar approach as their last hotel.

Bill thanked the woman and went back to Molly, who was in conversation with a slightly built young man named Rolf who spoke passable English. Rolf said he had a hand-cart outside and would be happy to pull our bags to the hotel - for a small token of our esteem. His idea of what constituted a 'token' and Bill's differed slightly but they came to an agreement. The three of them walked outside, where Rolf had left his cart, and put their bags onto it. Then they began their trip to the hotel, which Rolf knew of.

They crossed the bridge, which was quite long, and entered the small, echoing, passageway between buildings. It was well lit, even though it was still daylight out, because the buildings merged at about the third floor. When Bill asked what building this was, Rolf told him it was the '*Amt für Landschaft und Natur*' or Office of Landscaping and Nature. Sounded very dry and dull to him for such a huge building.

When they emerged from the reverberating passageway there sat the hotel, across the street, as Rolf had promised. The facade looked as typical as it should for mid-European architecture and stood around five or six floors high. Some nations call the ground floor the first floor and some don't. Bill couldn't remember if the Swiss did. Rolf stopped at the entrance and transferred their bags to a roller cart produced by a bellboy.

"Thank you, *Mein Herr*," Rolf said, shaking Bill's hand. "Have a nice stay in Zurich."

Bill stopped him as he started to turn away and asked "What time do you begin looking for customers?"

"Sometimes, I am up very early, and sometimes later. Will you need me tomorrow?"

Wanderlust!

"I wish we could stay longer, but we are leaving on the train to Paris tomorrow at eleven oh six. Could you meet us here at the hotel around ten fifteen?"

"Certainly!" Rolf said with a smile. "I can be here at that time." He tossed a salute to Bill, bowed to Molly, and left.

Bill turned to Molly. "Now then, that's settled. How about we check in - Missus Stiles?"

Molly gave him a shy but broad smile, took his arm, and they followed their luggage up to the desk. After showing their passports, signing the register, and requesting a wake up call for eight, they followed the bellman to the elevator. Their room was on the third floor according to the button the bellman pushed on the panel.

Down a long, carpeted, hallway they walked until the man stopped at room three fifty-seven. He unlocked it and rolled their bags inside. Bill lifted them off, tipped him, and watched the bellman go back down the hall. "I like being called Missus Stiles, you know." Molly offered. "Come, Mister Stiles, let's go get something to eat."

"I know what I'd like," Bill said as he smiled at her. "But, that's not on the menu right now I'm afraid. Out of season I'm told. Pity."

Molly smacked Bill on the arm lightly, kissed him, and said that he was being mean. She added that hunting season would begin anew in just a couple more days. "I can't wait - but I will." Bill replied.

They left the room and, as they passed the desk, the thought occurred to Bill that they didn't have a hotel in Paris. Thinking that Paris wasn't a good city to arrive in without some place to go, he spoke. "Hold on, Molly. Let's stop at the desk and see if they can recommend a good hotel for us in Paris. Where do you want to stay?"

"How about a room with a view of the Eiffel Tower? That would be very romantic, I think."

"Done!" Bill turned to the clerk who smiled up at him from her chair. "How may I help you, *Mein Herr*?" She asked in German.

Bill explained they were just married a day ago in a quiet ceremony and wanted to visit Paris, but couldn't afford a very expensive room. This wasn't strictly true, but Bill figured a little embellishment wouldn't hurt. He went on to tell her that his wife, indicating Molly by putting my arm around her, would love to have a view of the Eiffel Tower. Could she help?

She grinned conspiratorially and leaned forward. "Let me go talk to the manager. He has many friends in Paris. Please wait." Bill nodded.

Molly asked Bill what that was about and he told her. She just shook her head ruefully and looked particularly 'new bride-ish'. The clerk returned and told them the manager was making some inquiries and would be just a moment. Bill thanked her and then moved to the chairs across from the desk and necked - tastefully.

From time to time, the clerk looked up and smiled again at them. She was probably a hopeless romantic. Finally, the manager himself came out of his office and beckoned to them. They stepped up to the desk.

"You continue to have good luck, *Mein Herr*. I have found a very nice hotel, the Hotel Muguet, on the Rue Chevert which is very close to the tower. The manager there assures me that the room he will provide has a very nice view of the tower. It will be on the top floor also. What time will you arrive, and at what station?"

Wanderlust!

Bill pulled out their tickets and told him they would arrive at Gare du Nord at seventeen twenty-seven tomorrow. He made a note of that and went back to his office. Bill could hear him relaying that to the other manager. He hung up and returned to the desk. "It is settled, *Mein Herr*. If you wish a taxi to take you there, give them this." He wrote down the address on the back of his business card and handed it to me.

Bill thanked him profusely and decided to ask another favor: where could they get a good meal at this hour. The manager told him that the best place to get a meal now was just down the street. Its name was Casa Ferlin. Bill inferred from the name that they would be eating Spanish tonight. After saying their goodbyes, he and Molly walked briskly up the street in failing light and increasingly cold winds to the restaurant.

[December 15, 1963]

[Comfort Hotel Royal Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland - evening]

Their meal was very tasty and very Spanish. They didn't get a lot on their plates, but there appeared to be at least seven courses. It was quite a bit more than either one of them wanted, but they didn't leave a thing. Feeling a bit bloated, they went back to the hotel and headed for their room. Molly kicked off her shoes immediately, fell across the bed, and declared she was 'stuffed'. Bill had to agree with her.

It was now almost ten in the evening and Bill, for one, was really bushed from all the travel. He asked Molly if she wanted the bathroom first. She cocked her head to the side, and told him to go ahead if he wouldn't be too long. He said I wouldn't be long and began stripping as he went across the room. Molly whistled low and inviting when he dropped his shorts and stepped out of them.

"I'll be back soon. Don't fall asleep. Okay?"

"O â ¡ Kay." Molly sighed out slowly, closing her eyes and feigning a snore. Bill laughed and closed the door to the bathroom.

Bill only spent about ten minutes washing up and brushing his teeth but by the time he returned to the bedroom Molly was asleep. He had a towel around his midsection and was very warm but she looked a bit uncomfortable in her street clothes. Bill carefully unbuttoned her blouse, unzipped the side of her dress, and pulled the tail out from her waist. She woke up and regarded him with slitted eyes. "My, that was fast."

"Fast? I took almost fifteen minutes. You went to sleep didn't you?" Bill accused.

* * *

'Not really. I woke when you first touched me and thoroughly enjoyed having you unfasten my clothes. Mon dieu, I wish I could have responded as I wanted.'

* * *

"Ummm, I must have. Sorry," she said with a lazy smile. "My turn?"

"Yup."

Molly sat up and her blouse fell to her waist. She looked up at Bill and said "You've been busy, haven't you? Well, you might as well finish the job." She held up her arms and he unsnapped her bra and pulled it from her shoulders. She took a moment to cup each breast and smooth out the wrinkles caused by the material of her bra. "Maybe I'll buy a new bra in Paris. A real French bra; with plenty of lace. How about that?"

Wanderlust!

"Parts of me are applauding already, Molly."

"Uh, yeah. I can see that," she said with a smirk. "Your enthusiasm is beginning to show. I'd better get to the bathroom."

Molly stood, and her dress fell to the floor along with her blouse and bra. She simply stepped out of it, hooked her fingers into her panties, and pushed them down with the rest of her clothes. Damn, Bill thought for the hundredth time, she was beautiful when she was nude. She stepped across the room and shut the door to the bathroom behind her. Bill removed his towel, got into his pajama bottoms, and slipped into bed. He pulled the covers up across his chest. The last thing he remembered before he crashed was that he could hear Molly humming that tune again and singing in French.

Chapter 7: Wanderlust - Chapter 7

[December 16, 1963]

[Comfort Hotel Royal Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland - morning]

When Bill woke there was sunlight streaming in through the partially closed curtains in front of the picture window. From what he could tell, it was going to be a great day. His movement woke Molly who cracked an eye, smiled up at him, snuggled much closer, and dropped her head on his shoulder. She reached up and ruffled the coarse hairs on his chin and cheeks.

"This I like very much. It will look nice on you, *Cheri*. Today we go look for rings no?"

"Yes. Today we will see what we can find. I don't think we are too far away from a shopping area. According to my tourist map, it's just down the street a dozen blocks. We'll wash up, get dressed, have some breakfast, and go looking. So you want the bathroom first, Molly?"

"*Non*. Not immediately. Shall I deal with this?" Her hand had crept down Bill's stomach and was now finding an interesting thing to hold.

As much as Bill would have liked it, he shook his head. "No, Molly. It will go away soon. Probably when I take my shower. It is not fair to you at all."

* * *

'Goodness. I am sure any other man would have not said that. He is such a considerate person to think not only of himself. When I am again able, I will have to do something very special in repayment. *Mon dieu*, I can hardly wait.'

* * *

Molly tossed her head in mock surrender and lay back on the pillow, surrounded by the crown of her golden hair, and watched Bill with half-slitted eyes. "I think maybe tomorrow the time will be right to make passionate love."

There could be no doubt in Bill's mind that if at all possible, Molly would find a way to make that happen. Reluctantly, he got up, walked across the room to the bathroom, and started to close the door. Before he did, however, he blew her a kiss; which she caught and threw back to him.

The two of them had an abbreviated Continental breakfast which consisted of a steaming mug of tea, a croissant each, and a strawberry tart for Bill. Neither Molly nor Bill liked a really heavy breakfast because it made both of them incredibly sleepy in the late afternoon for some reason. Besides, later this morning they needed to be at the train station to catch the run to Paris.

Shortly before nine they emerged from the hotel and walked towards the shopping area Bill had spotted on their way here. Their object was to find a set of rings they could use to avoid any awkward questions that might arise about the two of them traveling together. The fact they weren't married didn't really bother either one of them, but it could be cumbersome to keep explaining that they weren't married - yet traveling together alone. Bill was sure that Paris was an enlightened city, but some of the better hotels probably frowned on casual arrangements.

Wanderlust!

The third shop they entered had no customers at this early hour, and just one rather elderly male clerk who sat on a stool behind the back counter reading a newspaper. Bill and Molly greeted him and added that they were just looking and for him to keep his seat. He smiled and vaguely waved his hand around the shop. Molly and Bill began looking into the glass cases to one side.

Molly pointed out several simple ring sets, silently adding an extra finger tap to indicate the price. Bill nodded or shook his head as they wandered from case to case. On their third case they spotted a very nice set in white gold. It was slightly ornate, with an entwined design that looked to be a vine of some sort. There was an engagement ring holding a red stone set in the middle that looked to be perhaps a garnet. The clerk rose off his seat, folded the newspaper, and walked towards the couple.

* * *

'Oh. That set is beautiful. And the stone! I am sure that's a garnet. Please do not be very expensive!'

* * *

"You have found something of interest?" He struggled with his English.

"Yes. We have, sir." Bill responded in German. The clerk visibly relaxed and began telling them the various highlights of the particular ring set they had indicated. Molly appeared to be following the conversation but finally put her arm on the fellow's wrist to stop him. She asked, in French, if the stone was a garnet. He responded, also in French, that it was indeed.

The clerk had a slightly confused look on his face which prompted Bill to explain that Molly was from Canada and he was from the United States. Further, they were about to become engaged and were now shopping for a ring set to use for the wedding to come. The clerk complimented Bill on his German and continued to talk but as a slower pace so that Molly might follow.

Molly looked up at Bill, her face shining, and gave him a hopeful, questioning look. Bill took a moment to convert Swiss Francs to US dollars in his head. He figured that this particular set would run about six hundred dollars. That would put a small dent in his reserve, but once he got to Paris he could wire his bank for more funds if he needed to.

On one side of the price tag, there was a letter code. Bill wondered if this gave the clerk some indication of the minimum price he should accept for the set. He excused Molly and himself for a moment and drew her to one side. In rapid English he told her he was going to find out if his idea was right. He would ask the price of several other pieces and see if he could correlate the asking price to the coded price. He was betting it was a simple substitution code as the letters "JJ" appeared at the end of quite a few sets. Bill figured this meant either '00' or '99'. They went back to the clerk who stood by the case.

* * *

'How clever he is. I never would have thought to look at those little marks. I will help him try and figure out the coding.'

* * *

Molly asked to see several other sets, and found varying letter codes, until Bill felt he was satisfied. If he was right, the set they wanted could be sold for as low as four hundred and fifty dollars. To test his theory, Bill asked the clerk if there was a discount for cash. The clerk replied that there was indeed a discount, and named

Wanderlust!

a lower price. The two of them dickered back and forth politely for a bit until they started to approach Bill's target value. There the clerk began to make smaller discounts. Bill now knew he was right.

Eventually they all settled on four hundred ninety dollars. The clerk removed the set from the case, took down a small flip-top box in deep blue, and laid the rings to rest. While the clerk was preparing the bill they chatted and in the course of their conversation he asked them what their wedding date was. Bill gave him a date four days from today, adding that they were headed back to Munich for the wedding. The clerk beamed and wished them good luck, then led them over to a small case close to the door. He pulled out a light blue board with many silver pins on it and told Molly to pick any pin as a wedding gift from the store.

Molly chose a pin the size of a fifty-cent piece that held both an outlined rose overlaid by a *Fleur de Lys*. "This looks very much like part of the Montreal coat of arms. I love it."

"Then please allow us to present this to you for you wedding gift." The clerk pronounced, laying it in her palm.

"Oh, thank you, *Monsieur*. I will wear it at the wedding as something new." She took his hand and smiled over the counter at him. He beamed at the both of them and wished them good luck yet again. Bill lifted his arm to him in farewell and they left his shop.

* * *

'I cannot believe we just did that,' Molly told herself. 'What would mother think if she knew?'

She chuckled and imagined that she just might approve.

* * *

Bill looked at his watch and told Molly they had better hurry back to the hotel to meet Rolf. He silently hoped that Rolf would be there. If not, he supposed the hotel could ring up a taxi in no time. He didn't have to worry however because Rolf had parked his wagon just off the entrance to the hotel. Bill told Molly to wait outside and he would go get their bags. She began talking to Rolf as Bill entered the hotel.

Bill went up in the elevator to their room, gathered the bags, what little there were, and went back down to the desk. Their bill was ready and, after he reviewed it, Bill added a small gratuity and handed over the cash. The US dollar was apparently doing well against the Swiss Franc because he got back a bit more change than he'd been planning on. This helped to offset the dent the ring set put in his wallet. He exchanged pleasantries with the desk clerk, picked up their bags again, and left the lobby. Rolf took the bags from Bill and put them in the wagon. They then set off for the train station.

[December 16, 1963]

[Zurich Main Railway Station, Zurich, Switzerland - before noon]

It was very busy inside the station. Noontime appeared to be the time that quite a few trains left for many destinations throughout the continent. Looking at the big board, Bill even noted two trains that, apparently, took the train-ferry route across the channel as the stated destination was London.

Bill and Molly walked past the gates until they approached a smaller board listing some of the platforms and trains available in this area. Their train to Paris was on track seventeen and they had stopped at track twelve. On the way to seventeen, Bill pulled Molly to one side and handed her the wrapped set of rings. "Now would

Wanderlust!

probably be a good time for us to exchange these don't you think? Before we board the train."

* * *

"This is so exciting! I feel very naughty doing this, but I also feel strangely pleased. If only this was happening for real. I think it would be wonderful being married to this man. Goodness! What am I thinking? I've only known him for a very short time!"

* * *

"Oh, yes!" Molly said with excitement. "Let's do that right now." She glanced in both directions conspiratorially to see if anyone was close and then tore the wrapping off the box. Carefully she lifted the lid and removed the man's ring and smiled up at Bill, who held out his finger. She slid it on. Then Bill lifted first the engagement ring, kissed it, and slipped it on her finger. Then he followed it with the wedding ring. Molly gave him a huge kiss. "I love you, Bill Stiles."

"And I love you, Molly Garnet-Stiles." He paused, and then said "Of course, you're going to be hyphenated aren't you?"

"I'll have to think about that." Molly paused for a second or two. "There, I am finished thinking. No. I will simply be your wife, my love. No hyphenation." They kissed again, unmindful of the traffic now streaming by for a train departing from the gate we were standing next to.

They began again towards gate seventeen; silently, each of them with their own thoughts. In his mind, Bill wondered, not for the first time, just how nice it would be to be actually married to Molly. That would be food for thought in the days to come he was sure.

[December 16, 1963]

[The Paris Express, Zurich, Switzerland to Paris, France - nearly noon]

The Paris Express, proclaimed the signboard on gate seventeen. A ticket taker stood to one side and examined their tickets then indicated they were to board the fourth car up. Molly and Bill continued onward to the indicated car and stopped again in front of the vestibule while the porter helped an old lady to her compartment. When he returned, he greeted them in English. Bill replied in German and Molly replied in French at almost the same time. The porter laughed and led them to their compartment halfway up the corridor.

"Your compartment, *Mein Herr*," he intoned, tipping his hat to Molly as the two of them went through the door. He did not fail to notice the very new and shiny rings on both their hands and his smile broadened. "If you will entrust me with your tickets and passports, I will ensure you will not be disturbed the entire trip. It will be just over six hours and we do not anticipate any delays." He said with a quick wink at Bill.

Bill smiled back at him, managed a slight nod, and then laughed a little when he looked at Molly. She had worked up a very nice flush and was now looking down at the carpet.

The porter wished them a good trip and closed the door behind him as he left. Bill reached out and eased the lock down. "Well, Missus Stiles, what shall we do to kill the next six hours?"

"Come over here right now and just hold me, Bill." She led him to the bench seat facing forward and they sat down very close to each other. Bill's arm went around Molly's shoulders and she leaned back against his chest

Wanderlust!

and shoulder. When she looked up at him, there were tears in her eyes. "I love you so much it hurts me. You are so wonderful. I am very grateful you decided to take the same train as I. It seems so long ago and that I've known you all my life. Please, just hold me - and love me."

"I do that, very much, Molly. I can't think of anyone I've ever known that I would want here beside me but you. It's funny, but I've been thinking the same thing as you - that I've known you for a long time also. Funny, isn't it?"

"No, not funny; wonderful!"

Bill kissed her tears away and then kissed her gently on the lips. Molly cuddled up closer to him and they just held each other until the train began to move. Slowly at first, then with more and more acceleration it exited the city and began their journey. Molly seemed content to just lie back against Bill and he certainly wasn't about to move and spoil the mood. Silently, they watched the scenery as it passed, only to fade away behind their speeding train. They went across a long viaduct, high above a small town and then began weaving their way through low hills along a lively stream.

The train would occasionally pass small villages and factory areas, but the main scenery was simply field after field prepared for winter. The rattle of occasional switch points fading away as the lovers drowsed. "Molly?" Bill asked quietly.

"Mmmm?" A quiet response.

"Have you thought about the end of our journey?"

"You mean Paris?"

"No. I mean what's to become of us beyond Paris. What do we call the time when we both go back to our lives?"

* * *

'*Mon dieu*, I do not wish to think about that at all! But I must. What will happen? And, where will it happen?'

* * *

"Oh, no, my darling. Don't even think of such a thing right now. Just hold me, and love me. That's all I ask for the moment."

"That I can do easily." Bill tightened his arms around Molly and kissed the top of her head. She brought his hand up to her lips and kissed the ring she had just put on it. Bill waited, silently, for her to say anything more, but she didn't.

Bill had been doing a great deal of thinking, however. He reasoned that he could certainly do much worse than Molly for a partner for the rest of his life. She was funny. She was very smart. She was definitely sexy, but not blatantly so; and completely undemanding of him. He'd known girls who, in the couple of weeks they were together, seemed to suck all the life out of their relationship in just that short a time. Molly, on the other hand, hadn't done that. Bill came to the realization that he was truly, madly, in love with her and when, not if, the opportunity presented itself he would ask her to marry him - this time for real.

Wanderlust!

Molly emitted a familiar soft buzz as she drifted off to sleep in Bill's arms. Eventually, his eyelids drooped and they napped in the warm compartment.

The sudden noise of rail joints and switches woke Bill. He looked at his watch, and then realized his other arm had fallen asleep because Molly had turned to rest her cheek on the point of his shoulder. It was resting on a nerve. Gently, Bill tried to shift enough to restore circulation, but he woke Molly. "Whaz, um, where are we? I must have fallen asleep."

"I'm not sure, but maybe we are approaching the French border. That would mean that the last town we went through was Basel."

For confirmation, there was a slight tapping on the door. The porter's voice informed them that they were at the French border, but he would see to their passports and not to disturb themselves. Bill thanked him and stretched. Molly sat up and moved her neck back and forth, then also stretched. She reached back with one hand and put it on Bill's upper leg to steady herself as she launched off the seat towards the small washbasin.

Bill smiled as she carefully inspected the latching system before adding any water to the sink. She caught him looking and laughed. "See! I am learning aren't I?"

"That you are. Save some water for me. I need to trim my beard a little."

"Oh, but it is so nice already. What more could you do?"

"Maybe take a little off around the center of my cheeks?"

"No. I like it just so."

"Your wish is my command, *mon amour*. *Je vais laisser*."

Molly turned to Bill with an open mouth which then turned into a giggle. She corrected his pronunciation slightly and Bill repeated it several times the right way. "*TrÃ's bon*. You are a fast learner, I think. Are you hungry at all?"

"Come back and sit by me. I hunger for your touch, nothing more."

"Oh, my god. You sound like a French romance novel. No wonder I love you so much. I will return to your strong arms momentarily. See! I can do it too."

They both started giggling, which led to outright laughter. They tried several sappy lines on each other until they had tears falling down their cheeks. It was one of the things Bill loved about Molly: she was so spontaneous; so full of mirth at almost any occasion. Bill opened his mouth to ask her the big question he'd been wrestling with, but caution made him close it again.

During their laughing fit, they had apparently cleared customs and were now backing out from under a covered shed. The train paused several times, shunted back and forth, and then the ventilation went silent for about two or three minutes. Molly asked Bill what was happening and he told her they were probably either cutting out cars or adding cars to the train. Several more jolts occurred, and then they began to move smoothly up to speed.

"Oh, I guess that sounds reasonable." She looked at her watch and announced proudly that "It is now almost thirteen. Are you hungry?" She asked again.

Wanderlust!

"Yes. I believe I am." Bill responded. "Maybe they added a snack car, or lounge car. Let's go see."

"Okay. Let me touch up my hair. It's a mess."

"Nonsense, leave it the way it is. People will think we've just been making love. Let their tongues wag!"

"Oh, you're horrible." Molly giggled. "And, I love it. Let's go!"

Before he opened the door, Bill turned her around and kissed her on the lips very hard. It escalated into a lingering kiss; the kind that begins at the lips and continues through every nerve ending in your body. When the sensation reached Bill's stomach, and below, it started a process that would have kept them in the compartment for a while.

* * *

'Oh to be able to simply go back into this warm compartment and make love. I could feel his eagerness that time; but, no, not now. This makes me very sad.'

* * *

"Later, my love." Soothed Molly, patting my cheek. "First, you must feed me. Rapidly, perhaps, but feed me you must."

"Well, okay," he responded as he pushed himself into a semblance of propriety. "But I don't like it," he added, making an attempt to nuzzle her neck.

Molly fended him off and lifted the latch on the door. They left the compartment giggling. The porter was sitting at the end of the long passageway smoking a pipe. He beckoned Bill over and when he arrived he handed them their passports. Bill put them in his jacket pocket and asked the porter how far up the train the snack car was. He replied that there was a full dining car, but it would not be open for another half hour. He added that they could wait in the lounge car until they began serving in the dining.

Bill thanked him. He and Molly continued over the connecting vestibule and into the next car forward. European trains were different than American trains in that the bar car, or lounge car, could be anywhere in a given train. If the train had several destinations, it made sense to use this arrangement so that cars could be dropped off or added without having to shift the lounge and dining cars.

Chapter 8: Wanderlust - Chapter 8

[December 16, 1963]

[The Paris Express, Zurich, Switzerland to Paris, France - afternoon]

Bill and Molly entered the lounge. There were a smattering of people sitting on the easy chairs or around tables which held a variety of mixed drinks and beer glasses. They found a nice seat and Bill asked the couple sitting across from them, in German, if they would mind if they sat with them. The man responded in almost the same accent as Bill's, who surmised that the man was from the same area he'd learned his German in.

They introduced themselves as Mister and Missus Stiles - Bill and Molly. Still in German, the couple introduced themselves. They were Werner and Hilde von Klemp from Trier. "I thought I detected a little *Luxemburgish*," Bill said with a smile. "I used to live near Bitburg about ten years ago. It is nice to hear it again."

"Did you live there long?" Werner asked.

"Only three years. My father was in the American air force and was stationed there. I live in Montana now, and I'm going to college there."

"Really! You are American?" He seemed astonished. He'd also added that last in English.

"Yes, I am. I admit it." Bill said, in English, with a short laugh. "Does it show?"

"Not at all. I thought you were a true *Rhineland*er when I heard your accent. You're very good, you know."

"Thank you, Werner. *Frau* von Klemp, do you speak English as well as your husband?"

"Not so very good, but I can follow the conversation better than I can speak. You had me, um, fooled also. Please, call me Hilde." She turned to Molly. "Tell me, my dear, am I being nosy, is that the right word - nosy? - If I ask you if you have just been married? Werner and I saw you board and I told him at the time you just had that look of newlyweds."

* * *

'Bill was right! I feel a little remorse to be making this deception, but the alternative would be much worse. Young ladies simply do not travel around with young men to whom they are not married. At least, not this young lady.'

'So why am I doing this? I do not know. I just know that it seems so natural to be thought of as Bill's wife. Maybe it is meant to be. I hope so.'

* * *

Molly colored up nicely and just nodded. Hilde put her hand on Molly's and patted it. "Good for you, Molly. You have hardly said a thing here. Werner and your husband have been talking all the time. Where in America are you from?"

"I am - was - Canadian, Ma'am. I lived in Montreal."

Wanderlust!

"Oh! Do you have some French then?"

"Yes."

"Oh, wonderful!" Hilde proclaimed. "We are truly an international group of four. For this, we must have a drink. Werner, go get us something festive."

Werner rose and walked to the bar while Hilde and Molly chatted back and forth in French. Bill listened for a bit, and then realized that Werner would have to come back carrying four drinks. He excused himself and went to give him a hand. Werner wouldn't let Bill pay for the glasses of champagne though, so Bill proposed that he pay for a nice dessert at dinner - to which he invited the von Klemp's to join them in.

"I accept, Bill; or is it Wilhelm?"

"Either will do, sir. I've answered to Bill for so long it just comes naturally to me. Wilhelm will do fine."

"Then Wilhelm it is. That sounds much better for your level of German, no?"

"Yes, perhaps it does. I really hadn't thought of it that way, Werner. Ah, the drinks are ready."

Werner paid the man and the two of them carried the glasses over to the women and put them down on coasters. Once Werner and Bill were seated, Werner raised his glass and toasted the newlywed's good health, wealth, and happiness. A traditional toast delivered in German. Bill translated for Molly as it was spoken in very old style German. Molly responded in French, and Bill added a "*Salut!*" They all drank.

The train clattered and swayed its way through the French countryside until a waiter came into the lounge and announced that the dining car was open. The Stiles and von Klemp's rose and walked through the vestibule and waited for the Maitre'd to show them to a table.

Their dinner conversation was animated and ranged through many subjects as they ate. Manners prevented them from lingering for any length of time after the meal as others were waiting for tables by the time they had finished. Time had flown by and, glancing at his watch, Bill noted they had just ninety minutes until their scheduled arrival in Paris. Molly and Bill excused themselves from Werner and Hilde after exchanging addresses and a promise to at least let them know how their visit to Paris turned out. They all shook hands but then Hilde impulsively hugged Molly and whispered in her ear. Molly and Bill waved their goodbyes and headed back towards their compartment.

* * *

'She wished me good luck and that I had a wonderful man. Gosh, I already knew that, but it is nice to have someone else confirm it.'

* * *

"What was that all about?" Bill asked Molly. "Very secretive, no doubt."

"Oh, nothing that I didn't already know. She told me I had married myself a fine young man and to take good care of you. I intend to do that at every opportunity."

Their trip back to the compartment was uneventful. The porter tipped his hat as they passed and both of them smiled back. Bill opened the door and held it for Molly. When she passed him, he patted her bottom. She

Wanderlust!

snorted, but turned to him and grinned. "Are you going to read a while? If so, I'm going to try and take a nap. I'm really sleepy."

"Go ahead. I think I'll do just that." Bill fumbled through his bag until he came up with his current book. When he settled down on the bench crossways and leaned back into the tiny pillow he was ready to begin but Molly handed him a tiny bottle of brandy that she'd bought in the hotel gift shop, and then went to the other bench and sat.

"Here. A present for you. Enjoy."

Bill looked at it, took it from her fingers, and kissed two of them before she pulled her hand away. "Thank you. I was just wishing I had something like this." He twisted the top off and took a swallow. It was good brandy and warmed him all the way down. "Very good, indeed!"

Bill began reading and gradually the noise of the rail joints, the subtle shaking of the panels, and all the other various sounds faded away. He was engrossed in the secretive world of Thomas Elphinstone Hambledon, his very good friend. Occasionally Bill changed position or adjusted the blinds as the sun streamed through the window, but for the most part he was silent.

* * *

Molly looked over at Bill. He was comfortably settled down in the seat and occasionally turning pages. She didn't know who the author was other than someone named Manning Coles. Then, as he turned another page, she caught the title 'Night Train to Paris'. How very odd that he would be reading that book at the same time he was actually going to Paris!

'I wonder,' she asked herself, 'if I could interrupt his train of thought.' She chuckled internally at the joke and quietly slipped her dress off.

* * *

Molly made a noise. Bill wasn't sure what it was, but it did get his attention. She was sitting on the other seat in her underwear with just a simple slip as a cover. When he glanced up, she smiled at him seductively and crooked a finger. "Why don't you come on over here and sit with me, Bill? You can finish that book later."

As luck would have it, he had just reached the end of a chapter so he quickly slapped the bookmark into the spine and closed the book. Bill was very attentive. "Have you something to show me?" He asked blandly.

"Not immediately, but you can help unwrap it if you wish." Molly lifted the hem of her slip and walked it up the leg that was cocked up on the seat. When it reached her knee, she let go and it floated down to her waist. An enigmatic smile was on her face. "That is, if you want to."

"I want." Bill said rapidly and sprang from his sitting position only to crash to the floor. His leg had gone to sleep and collapsed when he put weight on it. "Ah. Damn! That hurts." He said, rubbing the knee that he'd landed on.

Bill gradually pulled himself to his feet by holding on to the window sill and staggered across the small room towards her Frankenstein style. Molly broke out in giggles, which escalated into guffaws. "Are you hurt?" She gasped between breaths. "What's wrong?"

"My leg's asleep from here to my toes," He indicated thigh and pointed down. "I can't feel a thing."

Wanderlust!

"Oh, poor baby. Come on over here and let me help."

Bill finally made it to stand next to her shaking his dead leg. Molly reached out and began massaging his calf and the area just below his knee. His muscles jumped when tingles in that part of his leg began to appear. When she shifted to his upper thigh he was almost back in business. Her fingers wandered north of his upper thigh and began massaging something entirely different. This object hadn't been asleep at all. In fact, it was fully awake and stretching as Bill stood there.

* * *

Molly reached out and freed him from his trousers. 'Is it wrong to want to please him in this manner? I love the way he responds to my touch; so warm and solid. If it gives us both so much pleasure, how can this be a bad thing? I am thinking it is not.'

* * *

Bill leaned back with his eyes closed and concentrated on his breathing as Molly worked her magic yet again. Soon, he was again relieved of his inner tensions.

"Molly, you are so good to me. I can hardly wait until I can repay you. I promise you that one night will be all about you and nothing more. Good dinner, soft lights, a small bottle of wine, and an entire evening dedicated to just pleasing you. Would you like that?"

"Sounds wonderful." Molly said softly, laying her head on Bill's shoulder. "Hold me, Bill, for just a little bit - until we have to get ready for arrival. That's pretty soon isn't it?"

Bill glanced at his watch. "Yup. If we're on time, in about 30 minutes. Do you have all your stuff together?"

"Yes, I do. Everything except my book, but I can carry that in my purse."

They sat silently watching the landscape change from country through suburban and into a cityscape. The train slowed down to almost a crawl, stopped and started many times, until it hissed into the station and halted. Molly stood up, adjusted her clothing, and glanced around the little room. "I don't see anything we've forgotten. Ready to go?"

Bill picked up his backpack and a small paper bag of magazines he'd bought and fumbled the door open. Molly preceded him out with her bag and into the passageway that ran lengthwise down the side of the car. After a short walk, they were stepping down to the platform of the station.

Chapter 9: Wanderlust - Chapter 9

[December 16, 1963]

[Gare du Nord, Paris, France - early evening]

Moving with the flow towards the exit, Bill and Molly emerged into a huge concourse. Announcements in French, German, and English were a constant background along with the hum of conversations around them.

Bill pulled Molly to the side of the foot traffic streaming by and took out his map. "We're here," he pointed. "And, we need to get here," he pointed again. "I don't know if I really want to tackle the Paris Metro right away so I guess we'd better take a taxi. But first, I need to change some money."

"How about over there?" Molly pointed to a small window with '*Change Currency*' over it. "That means currency exchange."

"Sounds good to me." They walked up to the window and Bill pushed some German marks through the little slot. The attendant counted them out, did a calculation on paper, and began selecting Francs from another drawer. She counted out the value - twice - and pushed the bills back out to him. He smiled and pushed them into his inside jacket pocket. "*Merci!*" He offered and they walked away.

"Do you suppose there is a doorman or something like that who could tell us how much a taxi would cost to reach the hotel?" Bill asked.

"I haven't a clue, but we do have the telephone number. I could call." Molly advised.

* * *

'About time I started to do a few things for us instead of relying on Bill to do it all.' Molly held out her hand for the paper with the number.

* * *

"Ah, I didn't think of that. Here, go call. My French is so bad I'd probably order a pizza." Bill handed her a fistful of coins and she handed him her suitcase to take care of. He watched the sway of her long coat with fascination as she walked away. Molly entered a phone booth, consulted the piece of paper for the phone number, and dialed. She waited a moment, dropped coins into the slot, and began talking.

Molly returned with a smile on her face. "The desk clerk says to pay no more than what the tariff sheet on the back of the front seat says to pay for 'zone three'. We are coming from zone five. She also says that it should only take about twenty minutes - given the state of traffic. Be sure to look for a small, red sign stuck on the dash. It's their license. If they don't have one, don't get in because it is an unlicensed taxi."

"Great, they have gypsy cabs here too. Let's move out then."

Bill and Molly picked up their baggage and headed towards the large exit doors. "Molly," he said. "The last time I was here with my parents, a cab driver took us all over the place until our bill was huge. He kept ignoring our questions and would just shrug and pretend he didn't understand. What he didn't know was my mom spoke French. When we arrived, the driver launched into a long torrent of French trying to explain why the bill was so high. He tried all sorts of things to which we just looked blank at. Finally, when he ran out of

Wanderlust!

excuses, my mom took over and raked him over the coals for trying to cheat us. He was one very surprised taxi driver. Don't let him know you speak French and we'll see what happens."

"Okay, but if we get really involved I'll have to say something."

"Okay. Here we are." Bill turned to the guy calling up taxis from the line down the street and asked for one. The man blew a whistle and the first taxi in line moved up to the curb. Bill glanced inside, saw the license, and checked the back seat for the tariff sheet. All in order. Bill stated slowly, clearly, and in English, that they wanted to go to the Hotel Muguet at eleven Rue Chevert. The driver nodded enthusiastically, grabbed their bags, and set them in the trunk. Bill helped Molly into the seat and then sat next to her. Before he even got the door closed they were off with a screech of tires.

"Yow!" Bill said. "Slow down, slow down!" He shouted. The driver turned towards him and grinned even wider. Apparently his command to slow was interpreted by the driver as 'go faster'. His foot fell on the accelerator and they roared down the avenue.

Molly turned to Bill and mouthed 'now?' He barely shook his head 'no'. The driver picked up the handset of his radio and rattled off a sentence or two which was answered with a laugh and a response. Molly's eyes widened and she snorted - which she managed to change into a small cough.

Bill turned to her and she leaned toward him with a fake kiss. "The driver reported he had two stupid tourists and he was going to give us a 'tour'. The other voice said to 'take it easy'. I hope he does." I nodded.

The bump of direction Bill had always had was telling him they were going nearly the right way. The cab ripped around a corner and turned right onto Rue La Fayette. This road runs in the general direction of the Champs Elysées so when (or if) they passed that at least they were on the right track.

There were several more radio exchanges between the driver and his headquarters. Molly kept Bill advised as to what was being said. She changed her expression to one of venom at the latest exchange. "The dispatcher just called us 'fish' and told him to hurry up." She said with rancor.

The instruction was apparently evidenced by an even faster passage through streets full of cars. They weaved in and out between them and at one point we even passed two cars by driving into opposing traffic. Bill was getting pissed. This jerk was trying to kill them. Molly noticed the clench of his jaw and put a restraining hand on his arm.

* * *

Molly was outraged. 'This *folle idiote* is going to get us killed! And if he doesn't do it, Bill will kill him anyway. I must calm Bill down.'

* * *

She shook her head minutely and mouthed 'I'll take care of it'. The taxi slowed a little taking the curves around the Place de la Concorde but sped up as it roared across the River Seine. After a tight right turn, they ended up rising to cross a street and then falling to ground level again along the river. Bill sensed that they were still heading the right way. The driver braked hard, throwing them against the front seat, and bent around a sharp left turn into what appeared to be an alley. Molly and Bill exchanged looks. Bill reached forward and tapped the guy on the shoulder but he shrugged it off, chattering back at them in French. Molly gave Bill a barely perceptible nod.

Wanderlust!

Their taxi emerged into a wider street but Bill was unable to get a street name. They were very rapidly approaching some sort of square with a huge building in the middle. A sign proclaimed 'École Militaire' - Military Academy; they had gone too far. Suddenly, the taxi swept into a left turn across oncoming traffic. Molly slid into Bill fairly hard, and he heard their luggage slap against the side of the trunk. A short block later, they turned left again into an even smaller alley than before. This time Bill did see the sign. They had finally arrived at Rue Chevert. Up ahead was the marquee of their hotel. The driver locked his brakes and smoked to a stop in front of it. Molly was prepared. She had a very pissed look on her face. As Bill exited the taxi and slowly got out his wallet, Molly unloaded - with both barrels.

For perhaps two or three minutes Molly yelled, screamed, and waved her hands about as she spouted rapid French. The driver alternately looked mollified and enraged as she, presumably, told him off. The hotel bellman looked on bemusedly as she kept moving towards the driver and he kept stepping backwards. At one point, he practically tore his door off getting in to unlock the trunk. When it popped open the bellman unloaded it. Bill gave the doorman a shoulder shrug and then the two of them faced Molly.

She was winding down now and had the driver responding with very short sentences. Molly turned to Bill and, hiding her hands from the driver, she indicated a four and two zeros; four hundred Francs. Bill pulled them out of his wallet and handed them to her. She turned and practically threw them at the driver. There was fire in her eyes when she delivered the last line, fist shaking in front of her. "*Et, monsieur, nous sommes Canadiens, les Américains ne!*" And, sir, we are Canadians, not Americans! With that she flounced up the steps and into the hotel.

When Bill caught up to her, he whispered carefully to her. "Good lord, Molly, remind me to never piss you off. You were magnificent!"

She turned to him and smiled from ear to ear. "That was fun!" It was all an act! She was really good. That was one cab driver who will be a little more careful about saying things he thinks nobody can understand.

[December 16, 1963]

[Hotel Muguet, Pares, France - early evening]

Molly slowed and let Bill get ahead of her when they approached the desk. She held her eyes downcast and smiled shyly at the clerk. He welcomed them and Bill gave him his name. The desk clerk spoke excellent English and addressed the room first, passed Bill a key, and added that the dining room would be open at nineteen hundred. He tapped a bell and the same young guy that brought their two bags in carried them over to the elevator and pushed the button. They all got in and ascended to the fourth floor - apparently the top floor - because there were no more buttons above the one he pushed.

Bill and Molly's room was wonderful. It overlooked many rooftops and avenues running full now with the evening rush of automobiles. Molly came over to stand next to Bill and, as he did at first, gasped at the view. Sticking up, very tall across the way in the middle distance, was the Eiffel Tower, resplendent in dim lights which would brighten as darkness fell. "Oh, beautiful," declared Molly. The little desk clerk in Zurich came through. "I'll have to drop him a card now to thank him. Hey. What's this?"

Molly lifted an envelope from the middle of the bed and opened it. "Bill!" She cried out. "Come look at this!"

He went over and she handed him a buff card. It was in French, but he puzzled out a couple of things. They were to call room service, announce our room, and claim a small bottle of champagne. "But what's this all about, Molly?" He asked, pointing to smaller print. "I can't translate it very well."

Wanderlust!

"It says we can order anything on the attached menu." She interpreted. She put her finger on the line that read '*compliments de la maison*' to which had been added, in ink, '*pour un cadeau de mariage*'. "That means 'compliments of the house; as a wedding gift. Oh, how wonderful of them." She turned to Bill with tears in her eyes. "Now I feel bad."

"Well don't. They want to give something to us so we shouldn't disappoint them. We can repay later with a really good tip can't we?"

"I suppose so. But it will have to be a great tip then. Maybe I can find some small gifts for the maids."

"That's the spirit. Do you want your champagne now, or do you want to unwind first?" Bill asked, glancing down the menu. "The beef looks good, or how about some fish?"

Molly moved next to him and read over his shoulder. Her finger stabbed. "There! I want that. It is braised scallops with a wine sauce. You'd better get the beef, my love, because if I'm right, you'll be very busy tonight."

Bill conceded the point with a gentle kiss, which escalated to a much longer one. The menu fluttered to the floor, unnoticed, as they wound their arms around each other and held tight. With her eyes shining, Molly picked up the telephone and ordered their meal, in French, with a timid voice. "It will be perhaps a half hour. We have time to wash up if you wish. I'll scrub your back if you'll scrub mine."

"Oh, no!" Bill said, holding both his hands in front of his chest. "One thing will lead to another and we'll be eating cold food and drinking warm champagne. We will use the bathroom separately. *Capishe*? Now, say '*si signore*' and skedaddle."

"What means this 'skedaddle' word?" Molly asked.

"It means, young lady, to exit the room rapidly. It's a cowboy term." Bill chuckled at her.

Molly responded with a curtsy and a '*si signore*' and skedaddled into the bathroom. Bill soon heard her softly singing that same French tune as before. She sounded perfectly content to him. It was going to be a night to remember he was sure.

Bill prepared for his turn in the bathroom by taking his clothes off and wrapping one of the towels around himself. They were big, fuzzy towels and hung from his waist all the way down to his ankles. He lowered the light level in the room by turning off the overhead light and two of the three other lamps. The only one left was a floor lamp right next to the small table where they would be dining.

Molly popped out of the bathroom looking freshly scrubbed and pink all over; everything Bill could see that is. She had also found the towels but on her it ran from a knot above her breasts almost to her knees. Bill moved forward, but she stopped him with a hand to his chest. "Hold that thought, my love. We have to eat first. I'm starving â for food"

Pretending to pout, Bill stuck out his lower lip and stubbed his toe into the carpet. "Aw, shucks. You never let me have any fun, mom!"

That brought forth a guffaw of laughter from Molly. Shaking her head, she turned to the bed and withdrew a dress from her bag that Bill had never seen before. It was black, and had a very low neckline. "I was saving this in case I got lucky in Garmisch. I still got lucky, but in Paris instead." She held it overhead and let it settle down over her shoulders. When the knot in her towel was loosened, the material dropped straight down

Wanderlust!

affording Bill the fleeting glimpse of bare breasts and other delights. "Now, you go." She pointed at the bathroom door.

Bill went. The bath was still waiting, as she hadn't drained it. Bill noted that she had put something into it that smelled like roses but what the heck, he thought. He added some more hot water and settled down into it. He sang through two stanzas and a chorus of a very bawdy logging song; probably off-key. The acoustics in the bathroom were perfectly resonant with his lower tones. He hummed deeply. Molly tapped on the door and told him he was 'rumbling'. "Sorry!"

Bill hopped out of the tub, dried off, and slipped into his only pair of silk pajamas. His brother had laughed himself silly when he first saw him in them, but relented when he bought him a pair. Now his brother loved them. With the belt to his robe cinched, he was ready to eat.

Bill emerged from the bathroom at almost the same instant that the door buzzed. "*Un instant, s'il vous plait*" Molly called, checking to see if they were presentable. They apparently were because Molly opened the door and let the server in. It turned out to be a girl dressed in an almost classic French maid's uniform. She smiled at both of them, and then pushed the cart into the room.

Molly told her to set the meal out on the small table, which she did. The champagne stand was placed at Bill's side of the table and silverware added on top of nice linen napkins. The server asked Bill if there was anything else, which he understood, so he said no and gave her a small note. She thanks him, rolled the cart over to the wall, said "*bon appétit*", and gently closed the door.

The food was superb and the wine very cold and bubbly. Molly got slightly tiddy and began playing footsie with Bill under the table. By the time the meal was finished, she'd worked his enthusiasm into an excited state. When she declared it warm in the room and flapped the top of her black dress he figured it was time to take action.

* * *

'That meal,' Molly thought, 'was wonderful! I'd better watch the wine though. But I love feeling this way!'

She began slow-stepping to a silent waltz humming within her mind. She knew she shouldn't have any more wine, but it tasted so good. 'No more!' She scolded herself as she danced.

Then she glanced out the window.

* * *

While Bill cleared the table and put everything on the cart, Molly danced about the room, swirling and dipping to music he couldn't hear. She was positively glowing. When she neared the window, she froze. "Oh! That's beautiful! Come look, Bill. The tower is lighted up with color!"

He came up behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist, and pulled her against him. She leaned back and to the side so she could nibble on his earlobe. Unbeknownst to her, the number one way to get his juices flowing was to nibble on his earlobe. He moved his hands upwards to cup each breast gently. "Mmmmm. This feels good." He murmured to her.

"And so does this," she added, pressing her back warmly against his chest. Their hips met. This finished the job she'd started at the table. He was really excited now.

Wanderlust!

Bill untied the top straps slowly and the little black dress slipped downwards off her shoulders. Bill carried her over to the bed and knelt beside it. As promised, he made every effort to do nothing but please her as much as he was able for the whole evening.

They made love at least four times that night. Neither one of them got much sleep, but they both woke almost rested in the false dawn of early morning. It was another day, and they were in love, and in a lover's city. Bill woke Molly with a kiss. "I love you, Molly."

"*Je t'aime*, Bill. I truly do."

"And I you," he replied.

Chapter 10: Wanderlust - Chapter 10

[December 17, 1963]

[Hotel Muguet, Paris, France - morning]

Daybreak arrived far too quickly for Bill. Their little love nest softly glowed, lit by a morning sun reflecting off the windows on the buildings across the way. Half-awake, half-asleep, his mind reluctantly emerged from a wonderful dream - a dream that replayed memories of last night's sensuality.

As he drifted into consciousness, he became aware of Molly's presence in bed with him. Under the sheets, hidden from view except for a yellow fuzz of hair, she slept. Her long eyelashes were closed; one hand folded under her cheek. He thought she was so beautiful lying there like that.

* * *

Something had changed, Molly thought. Yes, she was sure now. Bill's regular breathing had changed. She became aware of being looked at. Not a stare, for sure, but certainly with interest. Her breathing changed also as she came more awake. She cracked an eyelid.

* * *

Molly became aware of his gaze through some extrasensory perception, and opened one eye. A smile crept onto her lips. "Good morning." She said softly. "Is it time to get up?"

"No, I don't think so." He kissed the tip of her ear, which produced a delicious shudder. Her arm snaked out and pulled at his shoulder.

"What? Then why are you staring at me?"

"No reason. No reason at all except I want to." The golden reflected light only highlighted her smooth complexion. Bill kissed her again. She responded with one of her own. In moments, they were tangled in the sheets, giving and receiving of each other with loving abandon. It was as if the fullness of the previous night had not existed. Their emotions rose together until they both reached their climax together.

The morning sun had now set the room ablaze in light; shining down over their lover's embrace. As Bill reached over to the bedside table to view the clock, the moment was broken with a rapid knocking, a brief pause, and the turn of a key in the lock. As he heard it, he realized he had completely forgotten to put out the 'leave us alone' sign.

"Oh! Excusez-moi, monsieur et madame. Je croyais que vous aviez déjà quitté. Je suis tellement désolée." The first maid through the door cried.

Molly moved with a start, rolled over to face her, and began to laugh. She explained to the poor red-faced girl that they were indeed still in bed and they didn't require anything just yet. In an aside to Bill, she told him to roll slowly over on his stomach; which he did. *"S'il vous plaît, nous donner une demi-heure et nous serons hors de la salle."* Molly said.

The flustered girl spoke up again. *"Non. Non, nous y reviendrons plus tard. Encore une fois, désolée."* Then she and her helper backed out the door. They could hear both girls giggling as they moved to the next

Wanderlust!

room.

"What was that all about?" Bill asked Molly. "Sounded like they thought we weren't here and would come back later. Was I right?"

"Pretty much. I told them to give us a half-hour and they could come back, but they said they'd be back much later. In France, that could be this afternoon - especially since they know we're newlyweds. And, speaking of that, from her point of view, I am sure she undoubtedly got your point."

Bill looked down at the slightly open covers. Oops. "I don't suppose that you sitting up and forgetting to bring the sheet up with you might have had something to do with it also." He countered.

Molly looked down quickly and blushed. "Oh! You're probably right, Bill. I was surprised when the door opened."

The moment, however, was broken. Knowing they would have many more of them, Molly pushed off, rolled over to face Bill, pulled his lips to hers, and kissed him sensuously. "You, my love, are a very serious lover. I haven't known all that many, but without a doubt you are at the top of the very short list. I love you."

"And I, you." He responded, kissing her back. "Rock, paper, scissors for the bathroom?"

"What is this 'rock, paper, and scissors'? I don't know that."

Bill gave her a brief lesson in the game and she won three times in a row. She hopped out of the bed and danced naked across the rug to the bathroom. Then she hit the tile. "Ooh! Cold!" She pivoted and called to him. "Toss me my robe, Bill, please."

He lifted the robe from the bottom of the bed and tossed it over to her. She caught it, slowly slipped it on, lingered long seconds to finally close it and tie the belt. She loved to tease - and he loved her for it.

The mechanics of the morning toilet performed, Bill and Molly dressed quietly, each silent in their own little sphere, until he glanced up at her. "You look wonderful this morning, Molly. It's going to be a bit chilly so maybe we'd better do some shopping for a sweater or something like that. Neither one of us thought we'd be way over here in Paris instead of skiing. All I have is a fairly thick jacket."

"I surely didn't either. I was going to borrow something from Francine." She smiled at him. "But, she's not here is she?"

"Nope. Ready to go?"

"Yes. Feed me." Molly took Bill's arm and they went downstairs to the dining room. It was small and had several tables already in use. They found one against the wall and he sat Molly down. "You wait here and I'll get you something to eat. The usual?"

"That will be fine. Thank you."

Bill loaded up a plate with everything they both wanted, balanced two mugs of coffee against his arm, and took them back to her. He almost dumped one of the coffees in her lap. "Whoops!"

"Exactly - whoops." She said with a laugh. "I'm famished. Probably all the exercise." She showed a little flush along her jaw.

Wanderlust!

* * *

"What a fantastic memory he has. I could never remember all the things about him that he knows of me. Will I ever tire of finding out what he can do?"

* * *

"No doubt." Bill said under his breath, and dug in. Breakfast was indeed tasty and they polished it off quickly. He made another trip over to the bar and got two more cups of coffee. This time they just sipped at it while setting up their day's travels. Eventually, they paid and left the hotel.

[December 17, 1963]

[Paris, France]

The entire day sped by rapidly. At first, Bill and Molly decided to attempt the Metro system. He'd traveled it before and found it to be the most rapid way to get about the city. At a small kiosk Bill bought a folded plastic map of the system and pointed out all the places that Molly would probably want to see. They were the usual tourist fare, but, if you had never seen them, they would still be attractions.

The two of them popped up out of the underground steps like moles flushed by a hose and wandered around. Bill had brought his smaller camera so, whenever he felt like it, he snapped pictures. Molly wanted some of them for keepsakes and when he told her he developed and printed them himself she was delighted. "You can do that?" She asked. "Wonderful! I've always wanted some pictures of me that one just can't get in a studio. Sexy, but not 'cheap'. Do you do that sort of thing?"

Bill related his story of the small series of prints he had made for Virginia long ago. Molly clapped her hands and said that this is what she had in mind. "Oh, please! Do some of me!"

"How can I refuse you? The morning sun through our room window makes you actually glow. They'll be *objets d'art*. You'll have the final say on which ones I print."

"Oh, wonderful!" Molly exclaimed, throwing her arms around Bill. Bemused passersby grinned at her enthusiasm. "For repayment, I will teach you French. When you wish to say something, ask me first and I'll translate for you. *Vous Ãtes d'accord?* Do you agree?"

"*Oui, Je suis d'accord.*" Bill replied hesitantly.

"My, you pick up languages fast. I've never seen anyone do it so quickly."

"I've always had that knack. I learned basic German in about four months. Of course, I was immersed in it pretty totally because of my involvement in the Boy Scouts and all the clubs I was a member of. Those that didn't care to learn were pretty much ignored by the rest of us."

The pair wandered around various parks and statues in their travels about Paris. Whenever they could see it, they took their bearings from the Eiffel Tower. When they couldn't, the Metro map helped locate them to within at least a street or two. They found a very nice department store and picked up a pale blue bulk-knit sweater for Molly and a corded sweater for Bill. Molly topped it off with a beret for him.

"There, you look very French now." She exclaimed, setting it at a jaunty angle.

Wanderlust!

"Yeah, until I open my mouth and get tagged as a dumb *Américain*."

"Well, if anyone gets close I'll just start chattering. You smile when I do, nod when I do, and nobody will know different."

Bill laughed, pulled her close with an arm around her waist, and kissed her cheek. "Done! *d'accord!*"

For lunch, they stopped at a café that seemed to be doing some outdoor business even though the temperature was down. It was located right on the *Champs-Élysées* one block down from the *Arc de Triomphe*. Hot chocolate never tasted as good as it did to them that afternoon. The small, hard, biscuits were very delicious when dunked carefully into the steamy liquid. Occasionally Molly would feed Bill one, or he fed her. They consulted their map and dove down into the Metro again. Their target was the Left Bank - the *Rive Gauche*. Not far.

The stalls lining the stone river wall were very numerous. They seemed to sell everything imaginable from them. Bill and Molly poked along, spending almost ninety minutes wandering from hut to hut. Some were closed up, but most of them were open for business. Molly bought two small colored pen and ink prints of two soldiers crossing swords, or, possibly dueling. The old woman who ran the stall couldn't enlighten them further on its history.

Later on, at another booth, Bill bought some very old, very large, French currency bills that were no longer in circulation. They were huge. Fully eight inches long and five inches tall. He wondered how anyone would get them into a wallet or the like. The guy at the booth told him, through Molly, that these were bank exchange notes. The high values were the clue. No common person would be able to spend such a large bill unless they bought a house or a car. They all laughed at that one.

Finally, very tired and footsore, and not willing to walk the four or five blocks to the hotel, they entered the Metro for the trip back. Sitting quietly, Molly and Bill held hands as the car rocked and rattled. Once they arrived at their destination, the doors opened and they stepped out, crossed the platform, and went up the stairs. A cold wind had sprung up and was now being funneled down the narrow alley the hotel sat in. Happy they had bought the extra jackets; they turned up their collars and walked swiftly through the front doors.

"*Bonsoir, monsieur.*" Called the desk clerk. "*Madame, vous avez un message.*"

"A message?" Molly looked quizzically at Bill. "Who knows we're here? Oh, wait. I think I told Francine we were coming here didn't I?"

"I think so. Go get your message." Bill advised.

* * *

'What in the world can this be? Only Francine knows where I am and she wouldn't call unless it was important.'

* * *

Molly walked over to the desk and the clerk handed her a buff envelope. She thanked him and came back to Bill's side; opening the envelope as she came nearer. She began to read. Her face turned white as all the blood seemed to drain from it.

* * *

Wanderlust!

'Oh no! Not now! Not this!'

* * *

"Molly! What is it?" Bill grabbed her shoulders as the paper fell to the floor. "Molly! Come over here and sit down." He dragged her to one of the seats nearby and pushed her down into it. Tears welled up in her eyes and she started gasping for breath.

"It's â it's my father. He's had a stroke!" She cried in a burst of tears. The desk clerk fluttered about, unsure of what to do. Bill asked her if she would get Molly a glass of water and she rushed off. Bill quickly went over and picked up the paper from the floor. Damn, he thought, it's in French! He puzzled out the message: "*Votre pÃre a eu un accident vasculaire cÃrÃbral, mais se repose Ã l'aise maintenant.*" Your father, ummm, vascular cerebral - circulation in the head? He decided he needed Molly's help.

He held the message out to her. "Molly! Help me out here. What does this mean; the last part about 'maintaining'? Doesn't that mean he is okay now?" She looked up at him, squeezed tears from each eye, and nodded slowly. "So, he's doing okay now? Is that right?"

"Yes." She said quietly with a catch in her voice as she translated. "It says 'your father has had a stroke, but he is resting comfortably now'. But he's only forty nine!" She wailed. The clerk arrived with a large glass of water and a short snifter of what Bill assumed was brandy. He took them from her and handed Molly the water. She sipped at it several times then managed to get hold of her emotions long enough to look up at Bill and sniffle. "Please, Bill. I'm all right now. Don't worry about me." She struggled to stand. He wouldn't let her.

"You stay right there for a moment. We're not going any where until you are feeling better. Here, have a sip of brandy." Bill held out the glass and tilted it a little. Molly touched the tip of her tongue to the amber liquid. "There you go. Have some more now." He commanded.

She sipped again, paused, and then pushed the glass away. The clerk was still hovering anxiously, wringing her hands. "I am sorry, *Monsieur*. I did not take the message. I did not know what was in the *envelope*." Bill thought idly that the word was pronounced the same in either language. "Will *Madame* be all right?"

Bill told her "she will be fine" which brought a sigh of relief from the clerk. "Her father is quite ill. I realize we have only just arrived, but we may have to leave very soon. Will that cause any problems?"

"Oh, no, *Monsieur*. You have prepaid, but I will alert the *directeur de l'hÃtel* that there has been an emergency. I am sure he will understand."

"Thank you very much, *Mademoiselle*. That will help greatly." Bill turned to Molly. She had recovered her color, but was still crying gently into her handkerchief. "Molly. Let's go to our room. Perhaps we can call from there and see for sure how he is."

"But, my mother won't recognize a call from Paris. She won't know who it is."

"Don't worry. I will make the call and tell the operator to say it is from you. She'll take it. Come on now. Let me help you stand. Take my arm. First, we need to call Francine back and ask her what she told your mother."

Molly gripped Bill's arm tightly, nodded, and pulled herself to her feet. The clerk helped, handing Molly her purse and the small package of prints she bought. "*Merci, Mademoiselle. Ma, umm, femme va bien maintenant.*" Bill wondered if that was correct. It must have been at least close because the clerk smiled at

Wanderlust!

him, nodded, and turned back to the desk to watch the two of them as they went over to the elevator and waited for the car.

Molly leaned on Bill heavily, turned, and wrapped her arms around him tightly. "I love you. I love you. I love you." She murmured into his neck. The car arrived and the doors opened. They rode in silence except for the occasional snuffle from Molly. "My mother's first question will be 'why am I in Paris'? I just know it"

"Tell her the truth. You are here on vacation with a man you met just a week ago who wants very much to marry you." Bill suddenly realized that he had spoken aloud what he had resolved to put off for a bit.

* * *

'Wait! What did he just say?'

* * *

Molly looked up at Bill, startled, and began tearing up again. "'Oh, Bill. Are you asking me to marry you?'"

"Well, yes, I guess I am. Will you?" He asked, softly.

Molly flung her arms around him and began kissing his face and neck, blubbing anew; but this time with joy. "I accept! I will! I want very much to be your wife!" And continued kissing him with fervor. "*Mon Dieu, je t'aime tellement!* I love you so much!"

"Then, it's settled. We'll see about a flight back to Montreal as soon as we can. I'll call as soon as you've called Francine and asked for more information on your father." Molly nodded at that pronouncement and blew her nose.

"Okay. I'm all right now. I am so sad for my father, but so happy about everything else. Maybe this will cheer him up."

"That's the spirit!" Bill grinned at her and picked up the phone.

[December 17, 1963]

[Hotel Muguet, Paris, France - early evening]

Molly made two calls that night. The first was to Francine in Garmisch. They both learned that Molly's father had had his stroke earlier that day, but was taken to the hospital immediately and was now recovering back at home in his room. It was not a strong stroke, but enough to scare everyone very much. Molly broke the news of her engagement to Francine amid more tears - of complete happiness this time. They broke into rapid-fire French which Bill had no hope of following. He could only wish that it was good news.

Bill placed her second call with trepidation. It was only seventeen thirty here which made it mid-morning in Montreal. The phone rang for quite some time until it was picked up and answered by a young female voice. "Allô ?"

"Excuse me, but is this the Garnet residence?" Bill asked.

"Yes. Who is this?"

Wanderlust!

"My name is Bill Stiles and I am here with Molly. Are you Denise?"

"Yes. Who did you say you were? Where is Molly?" She said quickly, with alarm.

"She is sitting here next to me. Wait a moment." Bill handed the phone to Molly, who began firing questions at her sister. When she slowed down Bill could hear her sister trying to answer them.

Denise reported that the stroke was, indeed, a mild one that did not incapacitate their father very much. Some shortness of breath and a mild numbness in his legs was the only result. He was resting back at home now, having been discharged from the hospital. She added a demand to know who it was she was talking to at first.

Molly began relating to her sister, albeit briefly, the tale of her meeting Bill, joining in travel, and falling in love. Bill could see her beginning to relax as she shared confidences with her sister. He didn't know how much this call would cost - and didn't care - as long as it comforted Molly. This was a good thing. Soon the two of them were giggling. The seriousness of Molly's pronouncement that she was engaged to be married in the near future stilled her sister's voice at last. There was a long pause and then a cry of joy that Bill could hear from several feet away.

With a confirmation of what Molly had just told her sister; a pronouncement that she was coming home shortly to help with her father; and the recitation of the phone number for the hotel, Molly said her goodbyes after swearing her sister to secrecy and hung up.

* * *

'What must Bill think of me and my family? Denise had sounded so confrontational at first. He must think she is always like that. Still, even with the troubles of my father, it was good to talk with her.'

Molly recalled Denise's response to her pronouncement of engagement. Denise had been after her for some time now to settle down. Now that she may be able to do that, Denise would be satisfied.

'Mon dieu! What if he *really* didn't like my family?'

* * *

Molly turned to look at Bill with wide eyes. "Oh, my God, Bill. I hope you will like my family."

"If they are anything like you, Molly, I am sure I will. I'm more worried that you won't like my parents. They can be a bit odd, at times. Sometimes I can't figure out what they are thinking. I do know they would like to have me meet a nice young woman and settle down though. It appears I have done just that."

Another thought came to Bill. "How are you fixed for money for the trip home? Do you have enough?"

* * *

'I hadn't thought of that either. I had the return ticket for my trip home stashed in my purse, but to make reservations now in so short a time would cost extra. I don't know if I can accept Bill's help with this. Should I do so?'

* * *

Wanderlust!

"I have the ticket I need stashed in my purse. It should be enough. At least I hope it is. But what of any extra fees for short notice?"

"Well, if you don't have enough, I can add to it. Let's let things calm down at the desk downstairs and ask for a settlement in the morning. We can see if they will book us a flight out of Orly or maybe Charles de Gaulle. I'm pretty sure there are direct flights to Montreal from here. I will take care of everything. You just go take a hot bath and relax into something comfortable right now. I'll take care of any calls that may come in."

Molly rose, kissed Bill soundly on the lips, and began taking off clothes on the way to the bathroom. Soon, he heard the water thundering into the tub. She was silent in there, though, this evening; with no singing. She was still troubled. Bill was tempted to put in a call to his folks, but decided that he would call from Montreal. Much more mysterious that way.

* * *

Molly lay back in the hot water and let the tensions of the afternoon fade away. They were still there, but she felt much better now that she had talked to her sister. Once, when the water grew cold, she added a bit more hot water from the tap with her toe. She didn't really feel like doing anything tonight but going to bed and trying to sleep well.

'But then, what of Bill? I cannot just ignore him. I must try to hide my sadness.'

She was very happy when he simply asked her to come to bed and he would hold her.

* * *

The two of them did not make physical love that night; only emotional. Molly crept into bed and laid her head on Bill's chest. They held each other tightly and conversed in low, soft, tones until she drifted off into an uneasy doze. Later, as he began to cycle towards sleep himself, she began the soft drone of a deeper sleep. Bill had a surprisingly dreamless sleep.

Chapter 11: Wanderlust - Chapter 11

[December 18, 1963]

[Hotel Muguet, Paris, France - morning]

The new day dawned with blustery winds rattling high flying leaves from the autumn trees against the window. Wan light from the newly risen sun shined its pale light across the room; warming nothing in its path. Bill woke before Molly, who had shifted down and away from him, pressing her body lengthwise against his side. Steady, but heavy, breathing told him she was still deeply asleep. Good, he thought, the sleep would do wonders for her. Since Paris was ahead in time from Canada, the time she spent asleep would not be wasted.

Bill rose carefully, trying hard not to wake Molly, and eased the bathroom door shut. He had taken his large pillow and laid it along her length in an attempt to keep her sleeping. He quietly did his morning ablutions, paying special care to a very light trim of his new beard. He noted it was filling out very nicely now and would soon need to be trimmed into a more pleasing (at least to him) shape. Teeth brushed, hair combed, Bill quickly slipped into clean underwear and the clothing he had laid next to the radiator the night before.

Bill decided the main order of the day was to secure more cash for their travels. There was no doubt on his part that he would accompany Molly back to Montreal and give her any assistance he could. They had come a long way in trusting each other and he had no intention of abandoning her now when she needed him the most.

A sudden thought: the telephone. Bill hadn't wanted it to ring so he had asked the night clerk to hold any further calls. He lifted the receiver quietly and waited for the operator to answer. "*TÃ©lÃ©phoniste*. May I be of service, *Monsieur*?"

"Have there been any further calls for either *Madame* Garnet or myself?" Bill asked, thinking that any calls would be for her in her maiden name.

"No, *Monsieur*."

"Thank you. Oh, has the manager arrived yet this morning?"

"Oh, yes, *Monsieur*. He has arrived just ten minutes ago. May I ring him?"

"*Non*. No, I will be down to talk with him shortly. Thank you. *Merci*."

"*Je comprends. Bonjour, monsieur*."

"*Bonjour*." I hung up.

Bill bent over Molly and kissed her lightly on the forehead. She stirred, but didn't wake. Silently, he gathered up their official documentation and slipped out the door to the elevator. When he arrived in the lobby, he walked up to the desk and was greeted by the day clerk; an elderly gentleman who peered at him over half-frame glasses. Bill introduced himself, and accepted his condolences at their devastating news. Bill assured the clerk that the crisis had reduced itself to a smaller level. When he asked to see the manager, the clerk rose and tapped at the door behind him, received muffled permission, and entered. He reappeared momentarily and beckoned Bill into the manager's office.

Wanderlust!

The manager, who appeared to be around thirty-five or so, stood and offered his hand to Bill. He spoke English well and asked him to sit. When they were settled, he enquired as to Molly's health. Bill told him she was still sleeping, and added that this was probably the best thing for her under the circumstances. The two of them exchanged odd bits of conversation until Bill felt he had the manager's measure.

Bill broached the subject. "*Monsieur*, could you possibly recommend a bank nearby where I might write a check or send a cash request to my bank in the States? I have more than sufficient funds to pay for our wonderful accommodations, but it seems my wife would like to cut our trip short and return to her father's side. For us to do this right now, we will need extra funds."

The manager thought a moment, looked off into the middle distance over Bill's shoulder, then focused back on him. "What is the amount you wish *Monsieur*? If it is possible, the hotel would be happy to honor your check."

"Oh, thank you very much, Sir! We can make do nicely with the sum of fifteen hundred dollars. If that is too much, then, perhaps I could pay for a telephone call to my bank for verification?"

He seemed to take that in stride. At least he didn't jump out of his chair and run around the room claiming it would break him. Instead, he thought a moment and then smiled. "Of course, we would be honored to assist in any way. May I also suggest that the hotel travel services arrange your airline tickets? There is a small fee, but all details are taken care of by them - including the travel to the airport. Will that be satisfactory?"

"We would be very happy to put ourselves entirely in your capable hands then, *Monsieur*. Thank you very much indeed."

"Happy to help out, sir. I will have the travel person begin and, when she is finished, you may write your check. The difference will be refunded to you. Will that be acceptable?"

"Very much so. Missus Stiles and I appreciate your assistance very much. Since we were just married very recently, her passport is in her maiden name. Will that be a problem?"

"Not at all. Do you have them at the moment?"

Bill produced them from his jacket and handed them over. "I do."

"*Bon!* Then we will take over from here. Check back at the desk in a few hours for any results. Have you had breakfast yet, *Monsieur*?"

"No, I haven't. As I said, my wife is still asleep but perhaps I will wake her and come back down. Thank you very much again."

The manager made an 'it is nothing' hand movement that the French are famous for, and stood. Bill did also and they shook hands. Bill left the manager's office feeling as if many weights had been lifted from his shoulders. He caught himself humming the little tune that Molly sings in the bath as he took the vacant elevator back up to their room.

* * *

'Goodness! Have I overslept?' She looked at the little clock. 'No, it is early yet.' Her hand flashed out and patted the bed beside her. 'But where is Bill?' She sat up quickly, remembering with a smile the last time she'd done that. 'The bathroom perhaps?'

Wanderlust!

Dragging the blanket with her, Molly stepped across the room and peered into the bathroom. 'No, not in here. Then where? Perhaps downstairs in the lobby or the dining room.'

Molly relaxed a little and crawled back into the warmth of the bed.

* * *

When Bill returned, Molly was awake, but apparently not yet out of bed. She had changed position to lie on her back with the covers tucked under her chin so all Bill saw was her head, framed by the gold of her hair. "Ummm. Good morning, my love." She murmured. "You were silent getting out of bed. You should have woken me. Where have you been?" She queried.

"I've just talked to the manager and he's agreed to take my check for the funds to fly us back to Montreal. I even added a little more for traveling cash. It wouldn't do for us to arrive poor would it?"

Molly sat up - remembering this time to hold the sheet demurely in front of her. "Wait. You do this for me?"

"Of course. I love you, Molly. Why wouldn't I want to help all I could? After all," he said with a grin. "Didn't I sweep you away on our adventure?"

Molly smiled slightly and spoke with a sardonic flair "I recall that I came willingly." Her voice changed to a serious note. "Please, Bill. Let me help pay for something."

"Okay. You can pay for breakfast. I'm hungry! Hop up and make yourself more beautiful than you are right now; even though that's not possible."

Molly wrinkled her nose at Bill, but smiled anyway. "*Mon dieu*, I do love you so." She held out her arms and he came forward into them. They kissed gently and then again with a little more passion. She broke away with a gasp. "Wow! You prescribe powerful medicine, doctor. You go over there and sit down while I get dressed. Good boy!"

Bill's tiny sexist side noted that she made herself presentable in record time - for a woman he thought wryly. Soon Molly was dressed in a pleated woolen skirt with a crisply starched white blouse and a sweater over her shoulders. Sensible, fur lined, boots were on her feet. She leaned way over towards his sitting position, closed her eyes, and puckered up. Bill kissed her as he stood and they held hands going through the door, down the hall, and into the elevator.

Breakfast was very good. Occasionally Bill would catch Molly in a pensive mood, but she would brighten when he asked a question or made a comment. Apparently, the word had gotten around to a lot of the staff about Molly's dad. They were solicitous towards her and all offered condolences of some sort. They finished up their meal. Bill set aside a larger than normal tip and the two of them walked towards the main entrance.

Bill and Molly were headed in no particular direction so they wandered around corners that looked interesting, and about parks that piqued their curiosity. They never got lost due to the ubiquitous "M" signs announcing the Metro and what particular station it was. If in any doubt, Bill could pull out the map and locate them within a street. Their footsteps echoed at times against the gaunt looking buildings with their high-ported windows and small flower boxes hanging below the sill. Most everyone they passed smiled a hello, or at least nodded a greeting.

One of the corners they went around opened onto a huge street. It appeared to be at least six or eight lanes wide but it was difficult to tell due to the traffic seemingly wandering to and fro along it. The sign at the

Wanderlust!

corner identified it as the Boulevard Raspail. A green sign pointed the way to "*Jardin du Luxembourg*" which Molly identified as the Luxemburg Garden, or park.

"Let's go there and find a spot to sit, Bill. My feet are tired."

"Your wish is my command, my love. *Marche.*"

Molly giggled at him and with his arm around her waist they braved the traffic to cross the road then walked down another road, which turned out to be named the Street of Flowers, towards the park. No flowers were present this late in the year, but there were many flower pots and large boxes with dirt in them. The trees ahead signaled the park proper.

"This is beautiful!" Molly exclaimed. "Even without leaves the trees are magnificent. Just look at them!"

Bill did, and had to agree they were quite old and very tall. His nose twitching to a scent, he realized that there was at least one chestnut vendor here in the park. Arriving at the correct direction, he steered Molly towards the small plume of steam that rose from the vendor's cart. "Mmmm. That smells wonderful! Can we get some?" She asked.

"Of course," Bill answered and turned to the vendor. "*Deux bouquets, s'il vous plaÃ©t,*" he asked in his best French. Molly cracked up and the vendor looked amused.

"You used the word for a group of flowers - *bouquets*. The best word to use is '*paquets*' or packets." Molly smiled up at Bill in his consternation. "You are getting to be very good though."

Molly turned to the vendor and spoke briefly. He responded with a knowing nod and a friendly smile. He added several more to their two packets and handed them over. They were very warm and the scent of roasted chestnuts prevailed.

"*Merci.*" Bill said, handing a small bill to the guy. He made change and the two of them wandered off towards a bank of benches along the walkway. When they were settled Bill asked Molly what she had said.

She lowered her eyes slightly, in the manner that endeared her to him, and told Bill that she'd told the vendor he didn't know a word of French a week ago. Technically, that was true so Bill smiled back. "You were right. Except for words that make anyone blush, I didn't."

She laughed out loud at that. "Oh, you will have to tell me these awful words in private then, no?"

"No, I most certainly will not." Bill tossed the first chestnut from his packet into his mouth and crunched down. The flavor exploded around his tongue and flooded his taste buds with chestnut. "You were right. These do taste wonderful!"

* * *

'I could sit here or wander around the entire city for weeks with him. He is so wonderful and always puts me at ease.'

As much as Molly wanted to prolong their little walk, she knew that their time left in Paris was limited. Reservations were being made right now to take her home. She was largely torn though. On one hand, she was very worried about her father, but on the other, she wanted her family to meet Bill. Maybe it is time to go?

Wanderlust!

* * *

Molly looked at her watch and then over at Bill. "Shouldn't we go back now and see if they have gotten our trip completed?"

"Perhaps. Right now I just want to sit and hold you for a little while. We need to talk." Bill held her at arms length.

"Oh! This sounds serious." She responded, looking squarely at him and putting on a somber face.

Seconds stretched into tens of seconds before both of them began twitching at the corners of their mouths. Finally, Molly couldn't hold back any longer and snickered. This caused the both of them to break out in laughter and start into a round of kissing.

Once they stopped kissing one another, Bill started talking. "Molly, have you thought of all the obstacles in the way of our getting married? First, you might lose your Canadian citizenship. I am not sure of this though. It could just be as simple as receiving dual-citizenship. You would be issued an American passport with my last name on it." He stopped, looking at her expectantly.

* * *

'Now it comes time to voice all the little concerns I myself have been having over the last few days. I wondered how I would broach the subject, and now Bill has provided a means for me to do so.'

* * *

"I have thought of that, my love. I've thought of nothing but that for days. I cannot imagine any obstacle that we couldn't overcome if we really want to. Oh, I do want to marry you so very much!" She hugged him to her shoulder and sniffled into his neck. "No matter what."

"Then, we don't need to talk any more. What we do need to do is make plans for the wedding. I have to at least tell my parents what's happening. They may want to come up from Montana for the wedding, of course. When I left, I was just completing my second year of college. I do want to complete it because education is very important."

"Oh, I agree. Will it be expensive?" Molly asked, suddenly very serious.

"Probably. But I have quite an amount saved from my firefighting days. More than enough to complete school - and take care of my wife."

"I love the sound of that 'my wife'. I get cold chills all over every time I hear it. 'My wife'. She hugged herself, then him. They kissed again and held it for a long time.

The walk back was cold, but manageable. By the time they arrived at the hotel, their noses were running and their ears were reddened. Bill asked at the desk, but the clerk told him nothing had been left for them yet. The clerk knew they were waiting and told Bill she'd call up to the room the moment the tickets arrived. He thanked her and they went up to their room and stood by the radiator looking out at the street below and the buildings across the road.

Bill stood behind Molly and wrapped his arms around her chest under her breasts. They stood there; absorbing warmth from each other and the heat register until she stopped shivering. He kissed the top of her head.

Wanderlust!

"Would you like a small brandy, Molly?"

"Sure. Why not? Not too much though or I'll start crying again."

The small sideboard held four glasses. Bill unwrapped two of them and poured a small shot of brandy in each, and then came over and held out one glass to Molly. She took and tapped the rim against his. "To my father's health." She proclaimed. Bill echoed her sentiment and they drank.

They were still standing, rocking gently from side to side, ten minutes later when the phone trilled. Bill released Molly and went to answer it. The voice of the manager informed him that the tickets had arrived and were ready for pickup any time they desired. Their departure was for the next day at eleven hundred. Nothing sooner was available. Bill thanked the manager and told Molly the news. She took a deep breath and released it in a long, drawn out sigh. "Damn!" She sighed. "I really wanted to spend more time here in Paris. I may never get back here again."

"Sure we will, my love. I will make coming back to Paris - this very hotel - a priority task for me. You'll see. We'll be back."

"You always know how to cheer me up, Bill. That's one of the many reasons I love you so much." She murmured into his ear as she kissed his cheek. "Do you need me to pick the tickets up? I want to take a nice hot bath right now and just relax. We're going to be on the go starting tomorrow morning for quite a while."

"Sure, Honey. You go right ahead. I'll just be a minute."

Bill took the elevator back down to the lobby and walked up to the desk. The clerk handed him a large packet with their passports, tickets, and a couple of colorful brochures about their trip. They had been booked on Air France, naturally, and he was looking forward to it. He'd heard it was a great airline to travel on; mainly because of the leg room they offered - even in coach where they would be. Bill thanked the desk clerk effusively and went back up to the room.

* * *

While Bill was gone, Molly pulled her clothes off and laid them carefully on the bed. The robe, hanging on the back of the bathroom door, was warm and inviting. She wrapped a towel around her hair to keep from getting it too wet and started the hot water into the tub.

'Hmmm. How about some nice scent? Apples! As before.'

She added a small amount of powered to the water, swirled it around, and then doffed the robe to climb into the steamy tub. She tried a little tune, but it tapered off when she thought again of her father.

'Oh, I hope it isn't too bad for him.'

* * *

He could hear Molly splashing around but not singing or humming. The door was cracked a little to let some of the steam out. Feeling a bit naughty, he crept closer and peeked into the bathroom. Molly was lying back in the tub with a mound of bubbles heaped over most of her body. Her eyes were closed and she appeared to be resting but, while he was watching she deftly used her toes to turn on the hot water tap and let more water flow into the tub.

Wanderlust!

On closer inspection Bill realized that two of the bubbles were actually her nipples showing through the surrounding foam. An interesting development he thought. Maybe, he thought, he could take her mind off her dad if he went about it the right way. He tapped on the door.

"Who's there?" She called without opening her eyes.

"Womb service," Bill replied. "Do you require any servicing today?"

* * *

'Oh, *merde!* What a horrible joke. Well, I can play along with that alsoâ ' "

* * *

"Oh, yes. How fortunate you came by. I have several itches that I cannot scratch. Could you help, please?"

"Certainly, Madam. Let me take a moment to get into uniform." Bill replied in a snooty voice. In two steps, he'd pried his shoes off and was hopping across the room on one leg pulling his pants down. He almost smacked into the edge of the desk as he passed but saved the day (and his tumescent appendage) with an adroit veronica around the table. He tossed the remains of his clothing into a pile on the couch and, completely naked except for a tie around his neck and a towel over his arm, returned to the bathroom door.

"Lafayette, we have returned!" He misquoted. Molly giggled.

"Well come on in then and be prepared to scratch my itch. I see you have brought your manhandle."

When all itches, both his and hers, had been scratched, Bill climbed out of the scented tub and toweled off. Molly ran a bit more hot water into the tub and lay back - satisfied, Bill hopped. "Will you be around the next time I need you?" She asked.

"Certainly. Just as soon as I can sharpen my tool, Madam. I seem to have blunted it somehow."

"You better believe it, Buster!" Molly growled in an American gangster accent. Then she broke into laughter. Bill collapsed onto the edge of the tub and they laughed until they became aware of the amount of noise they might be making.

"Molly. Being married to you is going to be one long, loveable, adventure. And I mean that from the heart."

* * *

Molly had just completed that very thought. Being married to him would certainly be an adventure, if nothing else. He was funny, smart, and very capable. Most certainly capable in the sex department. None of the boys she had been out with were anywhere near as playful about sex as he. She had often played a role in her head when out with others, but had never participated in one for real.

'Well, two can play at this game,' she thought.

* * *

"Maybe next time I will be 'ze Fronch maid' and come to dust your equipment."

Wanderlust!

"You can dust every bit of equipment I have. Anytime. In any way."

"And if I want to just blow across it?"

"That too. Come on, girl. Up, out of there and let's get dry before we wrinkle up like prunes." Bill pulled the plug and water began gurgling down the drain. He stood up to give her a hand.

Molly giggled. "I fear it is too late. You're manhandle has already become wrinkled." She said with mock severity. "Poor thing."

Bill suppressed yet another manifestation of laughter.

Molly put one foot on the floor, and then the other, then, using Bill's outstretched hand, pulled herself into him. They stood plastered together, kissing and running their hands up and down each other's bodies. Molly's breasts pressed into Bill's chest and he pressed himself against her stomach.

They broke apart. "What time do we need to get up tomorrow?" She asked, handing him a towel.

Bill went to get the tickets out and looked at them. "According to the tickets, we depart at eleven hundred and we are to be met here at the lobby at, ummm, nine thirty. We depart from Charles de Gaulle direct to Montreal. How about that?"

"Really? That means we need to get up by at least eight to pack and have breakfast. That's much too early for me. We had better get to sleep soon then I'm afraid. Go get my nightgown off the bed, please."

Molly's nightgown was lying across the bed. It was pink with a white insert down the front. Bill lifted it, and it didn't seem to have any weight to it at all. He wafted it over to her in the bathroom and she let it fall down from her shoulders. It slid down, clinging nicely to the shape of her wonderful body. He handed her the matching robe, which she donned also. And then swept by him, tweaking his protrusion as she passed. "Good things come to he who waits, I expect."

Bill followed her back into the room, donned his silken pajamas, and robe. They settled down on the couch, each with their own book to read. Silence reigned supreme.

At twenty-two hundred, Bill rose, stretched, and announced he was ready for bed. Molly replied that her chapter was about over and she would come to bed when she finished. He kissed the top of her head and climbed into bed, and then scooted over so she could get in without having to walk around from the couch. He kissed the air with a smacking sound, which she echoed back to him. "*Bonne nuit!*" He called. "Good night."

"Good night, my love. Sweet dreams."

Chapter 12: Wanderlust - Chapter 12

[December 19, 1963]

[Hotel Muguët, Paris, France - morning]

Not surprisingly, considering the circumstances and their travels the day before, Molly and Bill slept the whole night through; waking only when the desk rang their room at seven forty-five. Refreshed by their long, and chaste, night, they rose and got dressed following separate trips to the bathroom. In twenty minutes, they were downstairs. Their travel gear sat in a small roll around cart as they ate their croissants and drank coffee.

Before they'd left the room, Molly put two small packages of lace handkerchiefs on their bed, marked with the names of the two young maids who had been so embarrassed the other morning. Bill had added some small bills as a tip also. "I hope they liked the gifts." Molly sighed as she looked over at Bill.

"I'm sure they will, my love. It's probably more than they had hoped from us; especially me, being an uncouth American."

"Oh, stop! You are probably the most 'couth' American I've ever met." Molly answered with a smile. "I can vouch for that."

They waited near the door for the small minivan to take them to the airport. Their last contact with the hotel was Raul, the young porter who handed their bags to the driver when he arrived. Bill palmed him a twenty Franc note and clapped him on the shoulder. "Many thanks, Raul. You take care now." Raul nodded and waved as they drove off.

Bill and Molly rode in silence through the streets which seemed sparsely traveled at this time of the morning. When they reached the main motorway, traffic picked up, but not enough to slow them down. The van, having picked up two other couples before them, stopped at the domestic terminal before their international terminal. The van paused briefly as the driver removed their luggage and sat it on the curb. In moments, they were through the doors at the Air France entrance to the international terminal. Bill tipped the driver who called "*au revoir, Monsieur et Madame. Bon voyage!*" after them as they walked into the terminal.

Air France was ready with their gate boarding passes and directed them to their waiting area. It was quite a hike, but the time passed quickly. They ended up in the company of another couple who told them they were just finishing their trip through Europe. The young lady confided to Molly that she had found herself pregnant a week ago. "It must be something in the water over here." She laughed.

* * *

Molly flashed back to last evening and their frolic in the tub.

'I certainly do remember something in the water; torpedo-shaped as I recall.'

* * *

The woman looked oddly at Molly when she answered "Oh, I hope so."

They passed the time waiting by reading their books and sipping from a joint bottle of water Bill had purchased. In his carry on bag he'd stuffed a half-liter bottle of good brandy. He wasn't about to pay through

Wanderlust!

the nose for drinks aboard the plane. Molly giggled and told him she thought that was delightfully sinful.

When they boarded, they found their seats were aligned with the leading edge of the highly swept-back wing. They waited, but no one appeared to be seated near them which seemed to be a good thing as far as Bill was concerned. Quietly, they removed their coats and sweaters and placed them in the rack overhead. The information folder in the seat back told Bill the plane itself was a French-produced jet called the Caravelle. They were to make the trip across the Atlantic with no stops. This simply was not possible with the propeller-driven planes he was used to, like the one he'd flown in coming back from Germany. Bill was looking forward to the trip; even given the reasons they had for making it.

The plane filled up slowly and, long before most of the seats were taken, the door slammed shut and was locked. Bill's ears popped when the cabin was pressurized after engine start. Being this close to Christmas, he was mildly surprised that the flight wasn't jammed full. Molly looked sadly out the window as they were pushed away from the gate and into the light traffic taxiing to the active runway. The plane lurched forward, and then paused several times until it made a broad left turn and sat in the hold position waiting clearance.

Molly gripped Bill's hand on the armrest when the engines spooled up and the plane zipped down the runway to lift off. Her eyes tightened and tears coursed down her cheeks as she turned to face Bill. "Oh Bill! I hate to leave lovely Paris. I didn't want to leave so soon."

"Don't worry about it, my love. We'll come back some time. I promise." Bill kissed away her tears and put his hands along the sides of her jaw and kissed her deeply. "Now try to enjoy the flight. It's for certain we can't get out and walk."

[December 19, 1963]

[En route, Paris, France to Montreal, Canada]

She smiled up at him and laid her head on his shoulder. "You are such a comfort," she whispered in his ear. She held his hand for a while, and then removed it to delve in her bag for the novel she'd started. Bill dug out his book and opened it also. The stewardess came over to them after the flight reached cruising altitude and asked if they needed anything. Bill asked for two small glasses of ice and a bottle of water. The stewardess nodded, left, and returned with them. Bill thanked her and watched as she moved forward to another group of people. Stealthily, Bill lifted and uncapped the bottle of brandy. Molly held out her glass of ice and he gave her a dollop. He had some himself and recapped the bottle. They toasted each other, and then drank.

About halfway through the flight, the stewardess came back and spent a little more time with them. Most everyone else had drawn down the shades and were trying to sleep. Here and there, small pools of brightness were thrown down from overhead spotlights. Theirs happened to be one of them. She introduced herself, in French, to Molly so she took over. Bill caught phrases here and there - certainly much more than he would have a week ago. It appeared Molly was sticking to their story of newlyweds because the woman wished them '*bonne chance*' as she rose, patted Molly's hand, and walked away.

"What was that all about?" Bill asked. "Were you telling her our tale?"

"I was. No reason to change it now, but we will have to take these rings off after we land and before my mother sees them. I don't want to lie to her. I couldn't."

"So we won't then. From here on we will be completely honest with everyone. Damn! I am so nervous about meeting your parents."

Wanderlust!

"Don't be. My mother is a hopeless romantic when it comes to life. She'll be thrilled I've met someone I care very much for."

"I hope you're right because I won't turn loose of you; ever."

"Nor I, you." They kissed again and snuggled as close as the seats would let them. Bill knew to leave his belt loosely clasped even while seated in case of turbulence so it was a bit awkward. Afterwards, they resumed their reading.

The sound of the rarified air whistling past the thin aluminum and the steady roar of the engines attached outside the back cabin wall began to tell on everyone in the plane. Soon, lights began to go out until the whole compartment was dark. Molly's book slipped from her fingers, but Bill caught it just as it launched itself towards the floor. He put it into the string pouch on the back of the seat in front of him. He sipped one more shot of brandy and then capped it for the time being, laid his head back on the small pillow and fell asleep also.

Bill awoke with a start when the cabin lights came on at half brightness for a few seconds before rising to full strength. The stewardesses were passing out customs forms for everyone to fill out and sign. Molly guided him through the fine print and, even though he had had a bit more dollars than he should have, he didn't declare it. He doubted that they would search them anyway. Molly seemed more and more apprehensive as they got closer to her home city. They had made their initial landfall over the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and were now flying at reduced altitude within an hour from Montreal.

* * *

'I do hope very much my family will accept Bill. Sometimes they can be so provincial. I am sure the first thing they will think of is that I've only known him for such a short time. But, again, how long does it take to know you want to spend the rest of your life with a person?'

Carefully, Molly craned her head to look out the window.

'Here comes the land now. I can see a dark band on the horizon. It won't be much longer now.'

* * *

Molly gripped Bill's hand tightly as she looked out the window and watched the land edge nearer. She was highly agitated and had confided to him a couple of times that she was worried that her parents wouldn't get along with him. He assured her they would become friends. "Oh, I really hope so, Bill. My mother can be a bit, um, protective at times. She means well, but I feel smothered once in a while. My sister will probably throw herself at you." Molly smiled up at him. "She's man-hungry. Just as I was at her age." She added with a wink.

[December 19, 1963]

[Over Montreal, Canada - evening]

In due course, the plane circled the area once, then started around a second time but was interrupted as it was ordered to descend descended rapidly to a landing. Once on the ground, it taxied over to the terminal and shut down. The door popped open and let in the waning light of a Canadian deep fall afternoon. Everyone gathered their belongings, checking under their seats to make sure, and waited patiently for their turn to emerge from the plane and into the gate area. Under the cover of all this activity, Molly reluctantly took off her rings and

Wanderlust!

passed them to Bill - who removed his also - and put them into his pocket.

Finally, Bill and Molly were allowed to exit the aircraft. They walked down a short tunnel and into a largely bare room with a sound-deadening carpet tile floor. This was the international arrival lounge. There was a wall of glass running down the middle of the large room with two doors which were guarded by uniformed customs personnel.

Behind the glass Bill noticed quite a few people tapping, waving, and holding up signs to call the attention of travelers on their side of the room. Molly carefully searched the sea of faces until she suddenly squealed and pointed towards a rather striking, tall woman and a shorter, younger version of Molly herself standing close to a pillar. "There they are! My mother and my sister. See them?"

"Holy cow! Your sister looks just like a miniature you doesn't she?" Bill exclaimed.

"I've never thought that, but, yes she does look like me a little."

Now that he was here, Bill had decided to go the full distance towards making every member of Molly's family like him. "Your mother is beautiful. Nice and tall. I can hardly wait to meet them."

Molly paused and pulled Bill to the side of the stream of people flowing past them, pointed to him and mouthed 'this is Bill'. Her mother's eyes flashed, but she kept smiling so Bill guessed he'd passed the initial test. They shuffled forward again until they were forced to split. Molly was a returning citizen and Bill was an American tourist. They each had two different lines to get into. Bill's went much slower.

When finally standing in front of the smiling customs official, Bill answered his questions cheerfully even though he was exhausted from the flight. His ears were ringing and the dry air had caused him to have a small cough. The official appeared to understand, stamped Bill's passport, and welcomed him to Canada. Bill glanced around after passing through the one-way turnstile, looking for Molly. She came up behind him, took his arm, turned him around, and threw her arms about his shoulders. "And, this is Bill." She murmured into his neck.

Bill shook hands with her mother and her sister and murmured '*EnchantÃ©*' apparently at the right time. Her sister started asking questions first. "Oh! But how wonderful you are!" She clapped her hands as she rose and fell on her toes and grasped Bill on the shoulder. "Molly! How did you meet him? Where did you meet? Where is he from? Molly! Talk to me!"

"Well, how can I do so when your mouth is running over? We'll give you the entire story when we get home." She turned towards Bill and smiled as her sister continued.

"Papa is getting along much better now. He has to use a cane, but he can get up and down without assistance. He's sorry he caused you come home from your vacation so early though; especially when he heard what Francine told him about you." She turned to Bill with a smile.

"Uh, oh. Am I in trouble, then?" Bill joked.

"Absolutely not." Her mother replied. "We are all thrilled to meet you, Bill. We will all get to know one another when we get home. We only live about twenty minutes from the airport. Just a short trip. I am Suzette, Molly's mother, and this," she indicated Molly's sister, "is Denise."

Bill offered his hand, which Suzette took, followed by Denise. The pleasantries over, they went to the carousel to pick up their baggage, such as it was - they had traveled light.

Wanderlust!

Molly and her sister took care of her bags and Bill hefted his backpack to follow them out of the terminal and into the parking garage. They went up two floors to the topmost level and went down three rows of cars before turning in and stopping at a large, red, station wagon. Bill took a deep breath and immediately began coughing. He signaled he was all right, but kept hacking for a moment. When he recovered from his fit, he explained that the dry, smoky, air in the plane had stuffed his sinuses. He said he'd be fine in a little while. The air smelled strongly of kerosene and auto exhaust so he was glad to get inside the car.

Molly, her mother, and Denise began what was nearly a nonstop conversation in French. She felt a little badly that Bill was unable to follow it very well but, considering some of the subject matter, perhaps it best he didn't.

At one point, after a particularly impertinent question by Denise, Suzette called a stop to her questions along that line and changed the subject. Denise was mollified but for only a moment. When Suzette concentrated more on driving, Denise leaned close to Molly and queried her again.

* * *

Molly got the giggles after a pointed question from Denise and called a halt herself to this line of questioning.

'Ah, young one. I am not going to tell you thing of that nature. They are much too personal.'

* * *

Largely ignored for various reasons on the trip home, Bill amused himself by trying to interpret what Molly and Denise were chattering about in French. They spoke very rapidly and, he suspected, in a familial code in the local dialect. Denise alternately expressed surprise, desire, innocence, and not a little jealousy. It was fun watching them. Bill was sure Molly was filling her sister in on all the sights they had seen - and the nights they had spent together. Once or twice Bill felt Denise's eyes on him. He had turned his face to the window, ostensibly watching the city pass by, but he could see the reflections of her and Molly with their heads together.

Suzette drove deftly, changing lanes only when she needed to and rarely exceeding the speed limit, which was in kilometers an hour. This, Bill could understand easily enough and hardly gave a thought to translating it to miles per hour. They rose over a large shopping area on an elevated, six-lane highway. He was fairly sure they were going north to northwest. When they crossed a large river, he asked if it was the Saint Lawrence River. Molly said that it was just a small channel of the river.

They swept into a large interchange where Suzette peeled off into a more easterly direction. They cruised past a huge mall which Suzette identified as the Carrefour Laval - one of the biggest in Eastern Canada. She added that it was the second largest in the province of Quebec.

Another change of direction headed them back northwest. Soon the car descended down to city streets and entered a very nicely developed area. Clean, median-sized houses sat on larger lots than Bill was used to in American cities. A quick right and then a left put them on Rue Aladin. Suzette slowed, entered, and then stopped in the driveway of a very nice split-level brick house directly across from a lively schoolyard. "*Est arrivÃ©*, um, we have arrived." She announced.

[December 19, 1963]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - later in the evening]

Wanderlust!

Bill got out and opened the tailgate to set their luggage on the ground. Molly broke off her conversation with her sister to come and help him. When she leaned close enough, she quickly pecked his cheek and whispered in his ear. "I think everyone will love you as much as I do, Bill."

"I certainly hope so. I know I like your family already. Very friendly. Here, you take this bag and I'll bring the rest." Bill hefted Molly's larger bag and prepared to grab his, but Denise was faster and snatched it up by the straps, grinning at him.

"I will carry that for you." She walked slow enough to let everyone get ahead of her, and then turned to Bill with a whisper. "Are you really going to marry my sister?" When he nodded, she gave him a huge smile. "*Fantastique!*" She pronounced. "I have always wanted a big brother!"

Bill hadn't thought of it that way, but she was right. She would have him as a big brother. He bet himself that she would have that news spread everywhere around her school by tomorrow afternoon. Everyone trooped inside through the door held open by Suzette.

Bill looked around a very well appointed living room. Several nice easy chairs were pulled up to sit across the room from a fireplace. A long, three-cushion couch sat along one wall and a small end table sat between the chairs. He saw no television set, which pleased him very much. He never really was much for watching television. In his dormitory, most of the guys got caught up in programs like 'The Untouchables', and 'Bonanza', but he was never really attracted to them and could live just fine without watching a stupid box. Books were his method of escape.

Molly took Bill's hand and led him upstairs and down the hall. She indicated that this would be their room. "Our room? As in the both of us?" He asked, lifting an eyebrow.

"Surely. My mother is practical. She is also French. She knows without my telling her we have been staying together in a single room. So, why would she attempt to split us up now? Besides, we have no spare rooms. Don't worry about it at all. I'm sure they won't."

* * *

Molly glanced around her room. 'Oh no! All my stuffed animals are on the bed. Bill will think I'm still a kid with them there. Perhaps he won't mindâ ' "

* * *

He shrugged his shoulders and set their bags on the bed, which was a high-sided, four-poster with a canopy over it. The bedspread was covered with stuffed animals of all kinds - real and imagined. "This is my room, Bill. I can move these if you want."

"No. Absolutely not. My sisters collect stuffed toys also. I like them." He picked up a rather shabby fuzzy squirrel. "I bet this is your favorite."

Molly looked at him with surprise. "How did you know that?" She gasped.

"One eye button is a little different than the other, there is a repair down the tail, and one foot is missing."

"Oh. We will have to start calling you *Monsieur Poirot* I can see. You are good."

Wanderlust!

Bill slipped his arms around Molly's shoulders and lowered them to her waist. When he pulled her close, she folded into him. He kissed the tip of her nose and she wrinkled it. "And just where does everyone else sleep? Far enough away so we won't scandalize them?"

She laughed and pointed to the next room. "Denise is there. And my parents are downstairs in the master bedroom down the hall from the dining room. Denise and I share a bathroom so be sure to knock before entering or she may get an education faster than she thinks."

"Or me, maybe? However, I will be sure to do so. How old is she anyway. I'd guess around sixteen."

"She is just seventeen now. Her final year of school before university."

"Ah. She looks a little younger than that. Will we have dinner soon? I'm starving."

"So am I, my love, but not for food. Tonight we will spend some time with my father and plead a tiring trip and come up to bed." She gave him a lingering kiss that included open lips and a questing tongue. They were so involved that they didn't hear Denise at the door until she giggled.

"Woops," Bill exclaimed as they broke apart rapidly. "Sorry about that."

"Don't be." Denise countered. "Mother says you need to help downstairs, Molly."

"Tell her I'll be down right away as soon as I unpack and hang up my new Paris dress."

"Ooooh! Can I see it?" Denise clapped her hands and danced over to the suitcase open on the bed and began hopping from one foot to the other. Yeah, Bill thought, she's 'just seventeen', but all female. Almost reverently Denise held out her hands to Molly who put the low cut black dress into them. "This is beautiful! And so soft!" She held it up to her chest and announced "See, it will even fit me, no?"

"No!" Molly said emphatically. "Nobody but me will wear this dress until I get seen in it at some place very fancy. But, you can wear thisâ " Molly added, pulling a light blue dress from the suitcase.

"Oh, it's beautiful. Did you buy this in Paris also?"

"This one I got in Wiesbaden just before I got on the train - and met Bill. I was wearing it the moment I saw him."

"It was a bit damp though from all that water." He kidded Molly.

"What is this about water?" Suzette asked, poking her head into the bedroom. "Molly, I need help in the kitchen and Denise, you have work to do also. Stop pestering Bill and let him put his clothes up."

"Mother, I'll tell everyone all about it at dinner. You can use this side of the closet, Bill." Molly said as she slid the door open. Then she left the room, towing Denise behind her like a trailer.

Bill used the toilet which he'd wanted to do for a little while now, and then pulled what little he owned out of his bag and hung it up. He carefully folded his underwear and went looking for a bit of space in the chest of drawers beside the closet. Oops! Panties and bras here; hmmm, some twenty-four and thirty-four D's plus some marked in centimeters. The next one yielded space so he packed his things into a corner and closed the drawer again.

Wanderlust!

Bill touched up his hair, patted himself down for loose items, checked his fly, and went downstairs to face what? He didn't know.

* * *

Molly was sitting in the kitchen listening for Bill's tread on the stairs. When she heard it, she snapped the top of a beer and went to him.

'This will keep him occupied. We don't need him just now in the kitchen or we will never get anything done. I'll take him to the living room.'

* * *

Molly saw him first, handed him an ice cold beer and pushed him into the living room. "Here, go sit and let us make dinner. You'll be a distraction in the kitchen. Rumors are flying around like knives from a juggler but I'm not saying a thing." She confided to him. "They've made some pretty accurate guesses but my mouth is sealed."

"Good for you. Besides, something like this should come from me shouldn't it? I would like to ask your father formally to marry you. That's how it's done isn't it?"

Molly leaned back and looked surprised at him. "That would be perfect. You will have to speak very slowly though. My father is about the same with English as my mother."

"Maybe I should ask in French. Would that impress him?"

"It would probably stun him. Not very many Americans care enough to learn French he thinks. Could you do that?"

"Do you have a dictionary handy? I can work on something, and then you could correct my syntax and pronunciation."

"Right there." She pointed to the bookshelf against one wall. Then she blew him a kiss and swept back down the hall to the kitchen. Bill pulled out his little notebook, grabbed the dictionary, and sat down at the desk to begin his momentous speech.

Chapter 13: Wanderlust - Chapter 13

[December 19, 1963]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada]

Bill looked first at some of the common phrases in the back of the dictionary, and then went in search of specific words. He busily scribbled, erased, altered, and read until he had a passable speech done. It probably sounded silly, but he was prepared to do anything to gather the respect of this family. They seemed wonderful to him.

* * *

In the kitchen, Molly wondered how Bill was doing with his proposal.

'It would so impress my father for him to do as he says. I told the truth when I said what he thought about Americans. But Bill is so different. He's been out in the world for a while. And his German! How well he speaks that. Surely he will impress my father.'

Molly busied herself with the details of dinner.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Molly returned and began reading over Bill's shoulder. "Very nice. Very good. Perhaps a different word here, and this tense is wrong." She pointed and read some more. "My, you are a romantic aren't you? Maybe that's why I love you so much." She kissed the top of his head and ruffled the hair of his beard on his chin. "Let me hear you speak this."

Bill cleared his throat and spoke directly to her, looking deeply into her eyes. "*Monsieur Garnet. Je sollicite votre permission d'Ã©pouser votre fille, Molly. Je l'aime beaucoup et continuera de le faire toute ma vie. Voulez-vous me donner cette autorisation?*"

Molly was astonished. "How did you do that? Did you bring that from memory? You just wrote that down now?"

He nodded. "I told you, Molly. I can do languages pretty easily. I also did some acting on the stage and have a very good memory. Let me repeat it several times." He did; and worked on his pronunciation until he had it cold. "Ready? Let's go beard the lion."

"What does that mean 'beard the lion'?"

"It's hard to explain. Just sort of a 'let's go do it before I lose my courage' kind of thing. This is a big step â in both our lives."

"I will give you all the courage you need, my love." Molly bent down and pulled Bill's face towards hers. With moist lips, she kissed him soundly and thoroughly. When she was finished he was ready to wrestle wild boars. "Papa will be sitting with us tonight instead of eating in his room. I will sit you at the opposite end of the table from him. When the time is right, I will tap your knee. Will that be all right, or do you want to pick the right time?"

Wanderlust!

Bill considered her offer and then accepted it. "Nope. That will be just fine, Molly. You know him better than I do. Choose the time and I'll be ready."

They went down the hall, hand in hand, while he whispered the speech softly to himself, hoping fervently he wouldn't forget his lines.

* * *

'Oh, please do not let Bill forget that wonderful speech. Father cannot help but be impressed enough to give his permission. I will be wonderful to be married to such a romantic as he. And acting? Is there nothing he has not done?'

* * *

The two of them reached the kitchen and Bill saw her father for the first time. He was sitting at the head of the table in a dark-colored dressing gown. He had an almost full head of graying hair and a rounded face. His eyes were alert and darted immediately towards the two of them as they entered. He was sitting slumped slightly to his left, presumably because of the stroke. He held out his right hand, and Bill could see he wanted to stand, so he walked swiftly over to grasp his hand before he could rise. "I am very happy to meet you *Monsieur* Garnet. Molly has told me much about you. Please accept my condolences on your illness."

Alain looked deeply into Bill's eyes and nodded, once, decisively. "You are welcome in my home. Please sit here next to me. It tires me to see another standing." He added with a smile and a twinkle in his eye. Bill liked him immediately.

Molly looked at the both of them and then sat down herself opposite Bill. Chatter had stopped when they entered but began anew almost at once. Mixed English and French was batted around the table as dishes of vegetables and plates of meat were passed. Denise was keeping up a running commentary about something or other that had happened at school yesterday but Bill was more interested in her father. He and Alain conversed in low tones in between the passing of crockery.

Alain had asked Bill to please call him Alain, which he did, much to Molly's evident relief. Her eyes shown brightly as she watched her dad and her soon-to-be fiancée interact. Suzette broke in with the question Bill was sure that all of them wanted to hear the answer to: "Tell me, just how did you two meet? I know it was on a train, but Francine didn't tell us the details."

"Oh, yes. Tell us all the details, please!" Denise asked with youthful enthusiasm.

Bill launched into the absolute truth about their meeting. Nobody said a thing while he related Molly's distress at being slapped in the face by a basin full of cold water. This caused a ripple of laughter. He continued with the story, omitting some items he felt it best to remain private, until he stopped on their arrival in Munich.

Denise was beside herself with envy. "Oh, how wonderful! Just like a romance novel. I love it!" Her father looked unconvinced. Bill thought he'd better address that right away.

Carefully reaching out with his toe, Bill tapped Molly's foot lightly. She tapped back, looked directly at him, and slowly lowered one eyelid in a wink. It was a 'go'.

Bill cleared his throat, looked directly at her father, and began his rehearsed speech. When he was finished, no one moved at all. Alain looked as if he was carefully considering what Bill had just said. There was a sharp intake of breath from both Suzette and Denise and Bill held his.

Wanderlust!

He looked at Bill, raised his hand, and placed it on Molly's shoulder; his other on Bill's. He looked between the two and said "*Vous avez ma permission*". He squeezed his fingers into her shoulder, turned to Bill, and nodded - once - decisively.

Pandemonium hit the dining room. Suzette, Denise, and Molly rushed together into a group hug. Bill glanced at Alain and saw tears in his eyes as he watched the ongoing happiness. The girls eventually moved between Alain and Bill and then included them in the mutual celebration. Bill even got a little teary himself at all the joyous squealing that filled the room.

Alain held up a hand for silence, and then spoke to Suzette who went out of the room and brought back an ornate, glass and gold-encrusted liquor decanter. Denise went to the sideboard and brought back five balloon glasses. Alain filled them solemnly and passed one to each person. Once they were all ready, he held up his glass and intoned "*Pour votre bonne sant  et de mariage   venir!*" He tossed his back and everyone else followed suite. It was official. Molly and Bill were engaged. Bill felt like he could run around the world just now. He felt the need to call his parents as soon as he could.

After dinner and the telling of their complete journey through Europe from Munich to Zurich to Paris, Bill asked if he might use the telephone to call his parents. "But of course," replied Suzette. "They do not know?"

"No, they don't. They probably think I am still knocking about Germany. I need to let them know of this development."

"But, will they approve?"

"They will. Is there a hotel nearby where they could stay if they come up here?"

Suzette thought a moment and then told him that there was a good motel just a few minutes away called the Motel Ideal. She added that their friends from Saskatchewan stay there when they visit. "But first, you must see if your parents approve, no?"

"Well, they had better because I am going to marry Molly even if they don't approve." Molly's mother's face brightened and she touched his cheek with her fingers.

"I think you will be very good for Molly. You are a fine young boy, um, man." She led him to the phone and quietly closed the doors to the living room so he would have privacy. Bill dialed the phone.

"Hello?" It was his sister, Paula.

"Hi, sis. Is anyone home right now?"

"Bill!" She squealed. "Mom's home, and so am I, but everyone else is out or at work. Where are you? This doesn't sound overseas."

"Montreal, Canada. Something's come up." Bill responded.

"Canada! What the heck are you doing there? You're supposed to be in Germany." She sounded confused. "What's up? You sound somehow   different."

"I am. I've met a girl. She's wonderful. I asked her to marry me." So much for breaking the news slowly.

Wanderlust!

"WHAT!" Paula slapped her hand over the mouthpiece, but he could still hear her shouting. "Mom! Get on the extension. It's Bill!"

Bill waited until he heard the click of another phone joining the conversation. "Hi, Honey." Bill's mother, Beth, said. "What's got into Paula? She is positively quivering to tell me something. I can see her dancing around the phone in the kitchen from here. Have you gotten back from Germany so soon?"

"Mom. I've met the most wonderful girl. Her name is Molly Garnet and she's from Montreal. That's where I am now." Bill paused and took a breath. He released it slowly and spoke. "Mom, I've asked her to marry me."

Dead silence from his mother, but the sounds of suppressed speech from his sister could be heard. "Um. Well, this is a surprise. Where did you meet her?"

"On the train down to Munich from Rhine-Main. It was completely by chance. She just appeared and I fell in love immediately and totally. Mom, she's wonderful."

"Yes, that's what you said." She answered dryly. "So, I'm confused now. How and why are you in Montreal? Other than wanting to be with this girl, that is. Why aren't you still in Munich?"

"Long story. Her dad had a stroke while we were in Paris andâ " "

"Paris?" Beth interrupted. "Now I am really confused. Maybe you'd better start from the beginning. Let me go sit down."

There was silence for a moment and then Beth said "I'm ready. From the top - as they say."

Bill related the whole long tale from wash basin to Paris. Beth asked her son a couple of questions during the monologue, but basically kept quiet. Finally, after he ran out of steam, she said "Well, you're certainly old enough to make your own decisions. The money you earned is all yours to do with what you want, but I, we, your father and I, had hoped you would use it for college. Oh, pooh! Now I've started on the guilt thing and I'm sorry. I'm very happy for you, Honey. When is the wedding?"

Bill was struck speechless. He hadn't thought a thing about when it would take place. "Ah, well, Molly and I haven't really given that much thought. I've just met her parents today and formally asked her dad at dinner this evening, so things are kind of up in the air. I guess I'm asking if you and Dad want to come up here and take part. Do you think he can get leave?"

"I don't know. We didn't go anywhere this fall so maybe he can. I'll have to check. Any other â surprises I should know about?" Bill could tell by the way she said it, that she was thinking 'pregnant'.

"Nope. Just what I've told you. Mom, I'm so happy. Molly's a wonderful girl and I just know you'll all love her as much as I do. We want to honeymoon in the States. We can come down by train, or fly, and then take my truck. Before I forget, here's the number at her folk's house." Bill read off the number to his mother from the sticker on the front of the phone. "Call me back after dad gets home. Bye Mom, Paula. I love you." Bill hung up.

Then he sat back in the chair pensively, contemplating everything that had happened to him in such a short time. In barely two weeks he'd gone from a single, carefree college student taking exams to an almost married guy with responsibilities. Frankly, he was a bit scared. What if Molly and he couldn't make a go of it? What would happen then? Doubts began assailing him from all sides. His college education? Where would they live? How would they live? Could he get a full time job instead of just summer work? All those and more

Wanderlust!

were chasing themselves around in his head. He heard a tapping on the door.

"Bill? Are you still on the phone?" It was Molly.

"Come on in, Honey. I just hung up." She slid into the chair sideways and sat across Bill's legs, leaned in and put her head on his shoulder. He turned to meet her lips. They kissed a very long time until they were both gasping for air. "My goodness!" She exclaimed. "Was it that bad?"

"No. On the contrary. I think my mother is thrilled. My dad was still at the office, but I expect they'll call when he gets home in aboutâ!" Bill glanced at his watch and did time zone math. "âtwo hours."

* * *

'Mon dieu, I am so relieved. I knew my family would like Bill, but I was so worried his parents wouldn't like me. After all, I am interrupting his college education now. Now that everyone knows, maybe we can have some time alone.'

* * *

"Then maybe we need to take some time out for ourselves. I could use a nap right now; can you?" She teased him with a tongue to his earlobe.

"To sleep, perchance, to dream?" Bill quoted.

"To dream, perchance, to sleep." Molly misquoted. "Let's go lie down."

Bending forward, he swept her up into his arms and carried her to the door. "Your wish is my command."

Running contrary to all his expectations they both did just that - nap. Molly let Bill settle down in the easy chair in her room and then carefully stretched across his lap from one arm of the chair to the other. This was her favorite position. So, with her arms holding him loosely around his waist, she laid her head on his shoulder. They held a whispered conversation for a while but suddenly Bill realized he was talking to himself. A soft snore which escaped from Molly was the last thing he heard until there was a tapping on the door.

"Molly? Bill? A telephone call is for you, Bill." It was Suzette.

Bill acknowledged Suzette's information, blinked the sleep out of his eyes, and lifted Molly up to lay her gently back into the chair. "I'll be right out." He called.

Bill verified his clothes weren't too badly rumped, brushed back his hair, and opened the door quietly. Suzette had already gone back downstairs so he followed her. The living room phone was off the hook so he sat down and picked it up. "Hello?"

It was Bill's father, Paul. "Your mother tells me you're in Montreal. Some sort of story about meeting a girl and bringing her back with you. I think she's a bit confused. So, what the story?"

Briefly, Bill filled him in on his adventures vis-Ã-vis Molly and their ultimate plans. Bill's dad listened calmly, interjecting an agreement every once in a while, until Bill ran out of steam. "So. Do you want us to come up there for your wedding, or wait until you start traveling down here into the States on your honeymoon? We, your mother and I, can do either."

Wanderlust!

"Well, I'd sure like to have the both of you here, but can you get leave?"

"Unh." He grunted to himself. "I hadn't thought of that. Maybe I can. I can check tomorrow and give you a call back. Is there a hotel or motel nearby where we can get a reservation?" Bill told him about the Motel Ideal and what the desk had said about having quite a few rooms available. "Okay then. If I can get leave, we'll get up there somehow. Once our plans are finalized, we'll call back with schedules and you can book us a room. Have you thought about all the legalities for marrying a foreign national?"

Bill mentally slapped his forehead; he'd forgotten that. "Dad, you make it sound so â€¦ so, clinical. She's a wonderful girl who just happens to be Canadian. Things will work out just fine. Do you think we might need another official wedding down there? I don't know if a Canadian wedding is enough to get her a passport."

"I can check on that at the legal office tomorrow. Anything else?"

"Not that I can think of. Dad. I'm so very happy. Her family is just great. I know you guys will fit right in. Oh, by the way, it's not going to be a really big wedding. Molly and I decided a while back that none of us can really afford a huge wedding. It'll just be a quiet ceremony at the City Manager's office. Just as official and binding as a big church wedding. Molly tells me her folks aren't especially religious so that's a big relief for me." Bill lowered his voice. "I was hoping they weren't Catholic. Not that there's anything wrong with that," he quickly added.

"Nah. Doesn't bother us at all either way. I'm really happy for you, son. Here's your mother."

Bill's mother returned. "Hi, Honey. I was listening on the extension. With no fancy wedding I won't have to bring really good clothes. I think I can fit it all into one bag that way. Your brother and sister are crushed that they can't go, but school will be starting. They're moping around the house so be sure to bring them something when you get here." She chuckled. "I mean besides a new sister."

"Molly has a sister too. Her name is Denise and she's seventeen and real cute. Maybe we can get Tim interested. I'll take some pictures and bring them down with us. Wouldn't that be something?"

"We'll see. Tim is dating a girl right now, but they seem to be cooling it recently. Maybe he would. But, that's neither here nor there. What is important at the moment is you and Molly. We'll call again after your father checks on getting leave and talks with the base legal office. Gotta go."

"Okay, mom. Hugs to all. See you." Bill hung up.

* * *

'That sounded friendly enough. So Bill's brother is available, eh. I wonder what would happen if we could get he and Denise together.'

* * *

Molly, who had been standing in front of him shamelessly eavesdropping, asked him how old his brother was. He told her that he was twenty. She looked thoughtful and smiled.

"Yes, that would be something wouldn't it? Two members of the same family marrying two members of another family. Very cool!"

Wanderlust!

"Cool indeed. You heard? They'll call back tomorrow. Probably in the late afternoon. They're two hours behind us."

"I heard. I just can't believe this is all happening. So wonderful!" Molly threw her arms around Bill as he stood up. They kissed deeply and hugged tightly to one another. "I love you." She said with passion.

"I love you too, Molly Garnet soon-to-be Stiles." Bill said with equal passion.

Chapter 14: Wanderlust - Chapter 14

[December 20, 1963]

[Montreal, Canada]

The next few days passed in a blur. Bill and Molly were swept up into events pertaining to their upcoming wedding. They had settled on a day - two weeks away, the 3rd of January - and confirmed it with the City Magistrate's office. The distaff side of the Garnet household began scurrying around both in the house and out - running off in the car on odd errands. Bill volunteered to keep an eye, and ear, out for anything Alain might need. During a mid-morning lull, Alain called him into his room and asked him to sit and talk a while. Bill was secretly flattered Alain wanted to do this, so he sat attentively in the comfortable chair opposite the bed and mostly listened. Alain's English was good enough to understand, plus he spoke slowly - gathering his thoughts before each sentence. Bill thought he might be thinking in French and translating.

Alain began by telling Bill something of his family's history. How his relatives had come from a remote village in France that didn't exist any more. They were pretty poor, but when they immigrated to Canada they managed to build up a thriving business in the grocery field in just one generation. When he eventually passed away at the age of ninety-two, Alain said, his father had seventeen grocery stores scattered all over Montreal. Most were owned by a large chain group now, but three remained under family control.

It was Alain's hope that Molly would marry a nice local man who would be ready to take over the business when he wasn't around any more. He paused briefly in his narration to look at Bill significantly, and then added, "I have nothing but hope that you and Molly will find your happiness, Bill, so please don't worry that I am ungrateful to her - or you. Molly told me yesterday that finding you was the best thing to happen to her. I must agree that my impression is the same. I want to wish you both my best."

Bill choked up a little at that statement. He had never before met anyone that had such an effect on him as Alain had. Alain meant this from his heart and Bill took it the same way. Bill looked at him solemnly. "I appreciate that, sir. I will do my very best to let Molly retain all her family ties. We have not decided yet just where we will live. If I go back to college, then for a while we will be in Missoula, Montana. After that? Who knows? We might just decide to come back up to this beautiful city and I will be ready to enter your business. I don't know about the laws concerning work by Americans up here, but I'm sure something could be worked out. If I did, then I would have to go back to the States for thirty days each year to maintain residency. I don't lose my citizenship, but I can lose my state residency."

Alain allowed that he was sure that something could be worked out should that come to pass. He appeared much happier after they had spoken. He held out his hand for assistance and Bill helped pull him to a sitting position. When Bill handed him his cane, he struggled a bit, then stood. Bill was ready to help, but Alain waved him away. "See. I am getting better each day. I want to be able to stand throughout the entire ceremony. It is important to me."

"It will be very important to Molly also, Sir. She is a very determined young woman. I wouldn't want to cross her."

Alain laughed at what Bill had just said. "She is that; and more. Do you suppose we could find the ingredients for two cups of tea?"

"I'm sure we could." Bill replied.

Wanderlust!

They went out into the kitchen and located everything they needed for tea. Bill put the water on to boil while Alain sank into a chair. He looked a little grey to Bill, but once the tea was steeping in his cup he perked up some. The two of them were laughing over a funny tale Alain had just told when Molly came home.

"*PÃ´re! Vous sentez-vous suffisamment bien pour Ã´tre hors de son lit?*" She asked if he felt well enough to be out of bed.

"*Bien sÃ´r. Bill et moi Ã©tions juste avoir tes.* We are having tea." He answered. "We have been looking at your baby pictures." He added with a huge wink towards Bill.

She looked horrified, glancing between her father and Bill. "*Non!*" Bill couldn't keep a straight face however and began to break into a smile. She caught this and began to giggle also. Soon all three of them were laughing. They were still in full cry when Suzette and Denise arrived.

"What is all this?" Suzette said with her hands on her hips. "Have you been at the wine again?" She shook her finger at Alain.

"No, my love, just telling Molly something about her baby pictures." Replied Alain.

"*Ah, je vois.* Shouldn't you be in bed?" She asked her husband.

"I feel just fine. Just a little tired, but not tired enough to go back to bed. The tea has helped."

"Now, father," Molly said in a scolding tone. "You shouldn't try to do too much at first. You might have a relapse. At least go sit in the big chair in the living room. Will you do that for me?" She batted her eyes at him.

"If I must. Having three clucking women in the house can be a chore at times." He said, muttering to himself and subtly winking at Bill as he rose to his feet. He clopped slowly but steadily down the hallway with his cane and settled down in the chair. Denise brought over a small Ottoman and lifted his feet up onto it.

It was obvious to Bill that his family loved him very much and would be devastated should anything happen to him. Denise fluttered about, arranging his pillow, tucking in the blanket, and bringing him his cup of tea, freshly filled. Finally he looked up at both girls. "Why don't you and Molly take Bill out to see Montreal? I know I could use the rest." He said with a chuckle.

Denise thought that was a capital idea and went off to get her coat. "I get to drive!" She shouted from the hall. "You two just sit in back and make out."

Molly colored slightly and called out to her sister. "Denise! Stop that!" Bill had to hide a smile at Molly's discomfiture.

"Sounds like a plan to me," Bill muttered in her ear as she passed.

"Ah. You are just as bad as she, Bill. But I will sit in back with you."

"*Wunderbar!*" Bill replied. "*Kommen Sie. Lassen Sie uns nun gehen.*"

Alain's eyes widened in surprise. "You speak German?" He asked. "I did not know that. I have several German friends I would like you to meet. Maybe I can set up a luncheon soon. Anyway, go now and have fun. Try to be back by dinnertime."

Wanderlust!

Molly kissed her dad, and then took Bill's arm. They all put their jackets on and went out into the car that Denise had already started. By the time everyone got in the car, it was warm and toasty. They exited the driveway and turned back the way they had come from the airport. Bill's sense of direction was telling him that they were headed back south and into the center of town.

"Montreal seems a lot like Paris to me." Bill commented. "All the street names are in French and a lot of the advertising signs I can see are also in French. Looks like I'd better take an intensive course in French."

"I'll be happy to give you extra instruction, Bill," Denise shot back over her shoulder. "We can study in my room."

"You just drive, sister mine. If anyone teaches him French it will be me. *Comprendre*, youngster? You just pay attention to the road."

"Okay, but I still think it would be fun." Denise said petulantly, but with a smile.

* * *

'He does *not* get shared with anyone! French lessons. Humph!'

* * *

Molly and Bill looked at each other and shared a smile. She leaned towards him and whispered in his ear that Denise was quite taken by him so he was to prepare for a bit of hero worship. Bill whispered back that he would be on his best behavior towards her.

They drove down, around, and under a cloverleaf and then took the next exit. This was the huge mall that they had passed on the way from the airport. Up close it was even larger. They wandered around the parking lot for a bit and finally lucked out at a car just backing out of a spot. Denise slipped in, they all got out, and then she locked the car up. With Molly on one side of Bill, and Denise on the other they linked arms and headed inside to the warmth.

The place echoed with the sounds of hundreds of people rushing to and fro gathering up items for Christmas. The trio joined the crowd and wandered down a seemingly endless corridor lined with festively rigged shops. Denise wanted to go into a fashion jewelry store so Molly and Bill told her they'd be over in the next store, which happened to be a clothing store.

Denise pushed the door open and entered her store of choice. Molly and Bill walked to the next door down the hall and went in. The whole place smelled of wool to Bill. There were thousands of styles of woolen sweaters in all shades of color. Molly went to a table marked with a sale tag and began sorting through them. Bill watched her hesitate on a nice, light blue sweater but after looking at the price tag, she set it back down. She looked further at a few more sweaters and then moved onwards to the next table.

Bill watched her go on, intent on her shopping. He backed up a couple steps and snagged the sweater. He realized he couldn't very well put it inside his coat to hide it from her so he just kept it down by his side. He called to Molly that he was going to use the facilities. She didn't even look back but, instead, just waved at him over her shoulder.

Bill turned and went up to the clerk and told her that he was buying it for his fiancée but she wasn't to know. With a knowing look, the clerk read the tag and rang up the purchase. Bill suddenly remembered that the only money he had was US dollars. Sheepishly, he tendered a bill which the clerk took with nary a ripple.

Wanderlust!

The last he'd heard, the US and Canadian dollar were practically at a parity with one another so that was not really a surprise. The clerk laid the sweater down flat below the counter and did things to it. When she was done, she lifted a plain brown paper packet and put it on the counter. "*Voilà*, *monsieur*. Your fiancée, she is very beautiful."

"*Merci*. I think so also." Now, armed with the receipt, Bill pushed the packet down into the inside pocket of his coat. When he looked around the store, he couldn't see Molly. The clerk tapped on his shoulder and pointed towards the back of the store. "There, *monsieur*."

Bill smiled at the clerk and returned to Molly's side. "What are you grinning at *monsieur* Cheshire cat?" She said when she looked up.

"Oh, nothing. Just watching you shop. I'd better get used to it shouldn't I?"

"So many things we don't know about each other. Bill, is this right for us to even think of marriage?"

* * *

'Oh, what a time to have doubts. I do love him so very much, but in all honesty I know very little about him and his family. And his family! What must they think of me after I diverted him from his vacation? *Mon dieu*, I am so nervous.'

* * *

Bill put his arms around Molly, careful to not let the paper of the wrapped sweater crinkle, hugged her to him, and then kissed her forehead. "Yes, but that's what the entire meaning of marriage is, Honey: Discovery! Discovery that I will leave shaving cream on the wash basin. Discovery that you will put your cold feet on my back at night. The whole thing is an adventure!"

"I am! I suppose you're right. I just want us to be happy together, that's all." She said softly.

"We will be, Molly. Trust me, we will be. I love you so much. I could never stop."

"And I, you, my love." She kissed him back.

When they broke apart, two women were staring at them from across the aisle. One of the women looked significantly at the engagement ring on Molly's finger and smiled deeply back at them. Molly blushed and Bill felt his ears redden also. He smiled back at them sheepishly.

Molly eventually chose a very nice yellow scarf with a trefoil design in green. When the two of them went up to the clerk, it turned out to be the same one but she pretended to not know Bill. He paid for Molly's scarf, but with Canadian dollars. This was not missed by Molly who gave him a strange look. He could see the mental wheels turning and asking herself 'where did he get that money? We haven't been out of the house yet?'

So Bill decided to go proactive. "I asked Denise if she would change a twenty for me."

Molly nodded her understanding and they left the store. In passing, Bill caught the eye of the clerk who smiled and winked; as in 'Nice recovery, Casanova.'

Denise rejoined the two of them outside the sweater store. Bill quickly sidled up to her and filled her in on what he had just told Molly. She grinned at the conspiracy and told him his secret was safe. The seemingly

Wanderlust!

endless corridor did, in fact, end. The way was blocked by metal standards with warnings strung between them. Apparently there was still construction going on so they went back and tried another branch. By the time they'd covered even a small part of the mall, Bill was dragging. His feet were tired and he wanted to sit down. Naturally, there were no places to do so except for a few scattered benches which were all taken. He reflected that mall-crawling take much more energy than just hiking.

Denise suggested that they either go somewhere else, or go back home. Molly and Bill voted to go elsewhere; maybe to a tea room or something like that. Denise said she had just the place in mind and that it was not far away. They went back, located the car, and entered traffic again. They swept inwards to the city and exited, after about two or three miles, down a ramp to city streets. Bill felt they seemed to be headed towards the river they'd taken the bridge over before. Denise turned several corners into increasingly smaller streets until they were on a definite one-way street with the river visible at its foot. She pulled over in front of a warmly lit little bistro and killed the engine.

"How about this? I come here all the time. Lots of Americans are usually here studying. There is a school for doctors nearby. This is how I taught myself to speak English so well. Besides, I like to flirt with them."

"I thought so." Said Molly with a knowing smirk. "Well, let's go see how the tea is."

[December 20, 1963]

[Teashop, Montreal, Canada - afternoon]

The trio entered, found a table, and sat down; Molly on one side of Bill and Denise on the other. Denise looked around, but Bill thought she didn't see anyone she knew because she frowned and then verified that observation. "Darn. Nobody I know is here."

"Aw. Too bad." Bill commiserated. "Guess you'll just have to put up with me then as the token American." Molly sputtered a short laugh at Denise's face as it fell.

The waitress showed up and they ordered three pots of tea. Bill ordered Earl Grey and Molly said "the same". Denise wanted some Oolong tea. In what seemed like seconds, the waitress was back with their order, tea bags already steeping in the pots. Bill poured his into a waiting cup.

"Somebody's been drinking my tea," said Denise. "And it's all gone."

Bill picked up on that and added "Somebody has been drinking my tea and it's all gone."

Molly looked from Denise to Bill and back, not getting the reference. But, then it dawned - Goldilocks and the Three Bears. "Somebody has been drinking my tea and they're still here!" She said emphatically.

The three of them broke up into peals of laughter, causing heads to turn and smile at them. They quieted down and sipped at their tea and just watched each other. This was the calmest Bill had ever seen Denise. She always seemed to be running around with her hair on fire so seeing her in a pensive mood was rare. "What's up, little one?" Bill asked.

She lowered her eyes and spoke softly. "I wish I could meet someone as wonderful as you are, Bill. I am so happy for Molly, but sad for myself."

"You'll meet someone, Denise." Bill said softly. "I guarantee it. You're bright, funny and good looking to boot. If it weren't for us being on the same train, Molly and I would never have met. She could have tried to

Wanderlust!

complain to the porter by herself while I just sat in my compartment. Or, I might never have even been on the train. I did decide to catch it at the very last minute. Life is full of opportunities and chances and diversions. Just follow them and see where it leads you." Bill put his hand on top of hers. She smiled up at him, and then nodded once.

"You are so very nice, Bill. It will be thrilling to have you as a brother."

"At your service, *ma petite soeur*." He lifted her hand and brushed the knuckles with his lips. "Never stop looking."

Molly put her hand on top of the both of theirs and they paused for a moment; each with their own thoughts, until Molly spoke up. "Our tea is getting cold. Do we want more hot water?"

"I do." Said Denise quickly.

"I do," Bill echoed. Molly caught the waitress's eye and pointed to the three pots. She came over and gathered them up to come back a minute later with steam coming from the spouts.

"*Merci*," Said Bill. She nodded to him and walked away.

They added hot tea to their cups and sat back in reflection again. None of the three spoke at all. Molly looked at her watch and announced that they'd better be getting back home. They drank up, paid at the cashier's booth on the way out, and piled into the car. Denise retraced her route back to the huge superhighway and they went north again to the suburbs.

Dinner was almost ready when they got back. Bill went upstairs briefly to unload the wrapped package he'd hidden from Molly. He slipped it into his bag and went back downstairs. Alain was up and about, but ultimately in the way of progress so Bill escorted him over to the table and the two of them sat down. They chatted a little about Alain's grocery businesses. He found that among the three separate markets, one was set up as a general grocery and the other two were specialty stores; of the two special stores, one sold items from Great Britain and the other was more Continental. Bill mentioned that he had been in London for a while (not telling him it was only for three weeks) and that he'd spent three years in Germany. He added that he spoke colloquial German and was considered not to have an accent.

"I have need of such a person. My buyers go to places like Germany, Spain, Holland, and even France, all but one do not speak German; at least not well. I have a feeling that you would be of a great help to me."

"Well, I guess that I could certainly give it a try Alain. Maybe when Molly and I come back from our honeymoon, we'll see what I can do for you."

"Alain' sounds so formal for someone about to become a member of my family. Could you please call me Papa? I have waited over the years for a male voice to call me that. I would be grateful."

"My pleasure indeed - Papa." Bill said, toasting him with his coffee cup. Alain raised his in return. They drank.

"My goodness. You two are certainly looking solemn tonight. What have you been talking about?" Molly asked, coming in from the kitchen with a load of baked chicken on a plate.

"Your father has asked me to refer to him as 'Papa' and I told him I'd be honored."

Wanderlust!

"Wonderful! Thank you very much." She said, smiling down at Bill. "And to you for asking." She pivoted and kissed her dad on the forehead. He looked embarrassed, but smiled in any case.

Dinner was swiftly brought to the table and they all started in. There was a minimum of talking at first, but as the meal wore on, they began idle chatter. Denise told everybody of her visits to the little tea room and some of the Americans she'd met. Suzette raised an eyebrow. "So this is where you go on some afternoons? To the tea room?"

"Yes, mother. It is a great place to meet people and try out my English. We went there this afternoon, but there weren't any guys there that I knew." Her tone added a silent 'darn it'.

Molly said "I swear, Denise. You're so boy crazy. You just wait. Something will turn up when you least expect it. Look what happened to me. Here I was covered in cold, wet water floundering around in my nonexistent German, when Bill showed up. One minute you're alone and the next - poof!" She snapper her fingers in the air.

"Oh, I know something like that could happen. But I wish it would happen soon."

"Well, don't rush things, Denise. Finish your education first and then see what happens." Suzette said. "Anyone want strawberry pie?"

Bill looked at Molly, who lowered her eyes and started to flush around her neck. They both knew how much he liked strawberries - and where. "I'd love some." He decided to float trial balloon, and added "Mama."

Suzette stopped in mid-rise from the table, looked at Bill and then to Alain, who nodded. "That certainly sounds nice to me for some reason. I like it!" She turned for the kitchen and Bill caught Molly's misty-eyed glance at him. He winked at her.

* * *

'Now I am going to cry. He didn't have to do that, but I know Mama appreciated it very much. I think maybe they both miss not having a boy in their family.'

* * *

[December 20, 1963]

[Laval district, Montreal, Canada - evening]

A winter day that far north ends pretty early in the evening. Darkness fell while they were eating and both Molly and Bill excused themselves, telling everyone they were fairly tired. Bill offered to either wash or dry the dishes, but Suzette was having none of that. "Go on up and get some sleep. Molly and I have a lot of shopping to do and a short time to do it." Molly kissed her mom and dad; Bill thanked them both for the dinner, and the two of them went upstairs to Molly's room.

Molly closed the door behind them, turned to Bill, and stood on her tiptoes to kiss him. They stood there for a long moment, just tasting each other. Finally, Bill broke away. "I have something for you. Do you want it now, or later?"

"Now, of course." He reached into his bag and handed her the plain, flat package. She looked at it curiously, and then ripped it open. The sweater fell out into her hands. "Oh, Bill! It's wonderful! Thank you." She threw

Wanderlust!

her arms around him again and they did some more smooching. "But, it was so expensive."

"Don't worry, my love. I think I can creak by for a while on what I have. Remember, what I have is also yours in a very short time."

"I have a little saved up myself; almost four thousand dollars."

"I have a little more than that, Molly. Just over twenty-one thousand. And, I can get more if I want. My dad has promised me some money for, as he put it, either my education or my family, whichever comes first. Looks like family will be first doesn't it? Every bit of it is yours."

"*Mon Dieu!* That is a large amount of money isn't it?"

"Not very. I can earn more if I want. It's kind of dangerous fighting fires, but the pay is very good."

"Do fires happen very often down there in Montana?" She asked, showing some concern.

"Some years none at all, but others, yes, they do happen from time to time. Usually in the late summer to early fall, when the timber is very dry. If we all follow rules, we aren't in much danger. I get extra pay because I jump." He realized then that he shouldn't have said that, because Molly looked confused, then her eyes widened and she turned a bit pale.

"You mean 'jump' as into a fire? *Mon Dieu! Un parachute?*" She repeated. "I shall be very worried if you do this."

* * *

'Worried? I shall be petrified every time he does this thing! I must do my best to keep him from this; but, it is his choice, no?'

* * *

"Then I won't. I can earn enough just staying on the ground. No more jumping because you don't like it. I promise."

* * *

'Oh, thank you. Thank you, very much!'

* * *

"We will talk of this later then. Right now, I am very tired and ready for bed. How about you?"

"I am also. Would you like to finish our little bottle of brandy? I have maybe four shots left in it."

"Yes, I would. I'll go get some glasses. Be right back."

Molly dashed from the room and Bill took the time to hit the bathroom, clean up a little, and put on his sleeping shorts. As he was turning back the cover of the bed, Molly returned, glasses clinking in her hand. He sat on the bed and held out the brandy bottle. She let him pour a largish dollop in each glass. Then, when he'd corked the bottle and set it down, she lifted her glass to him. "To our long and prosperous life together, Bill

Wanderlust!

Stiles."

"I know it may be bad luck to call you Missus Stiles now, so I'll echo that sentiment. To our long and fruitful life, filled with love and happiness, Molly Garnet."

They linked arms and drank, albeit a little awkwardly. At least they didn't spill any of the amber liquid. Bill scooted backwards on the bed and stretched out on the far side, pulling the covers partially upwards. Molly looked around a little hesitantly, and then grinned sheepishly. "I feel like I'm sneaking into bed and my mother or father will come banging on the door and find me."

Bill snickered. 'Bad move', he thought. But then Molly stopped, stared at him, and then snickered herself. Soon they were giggling like a couple of teenagers on a heavy date. She slid in beside him and threw a leg over his calf. Her lips brushed his ear, and then she kissed his earlobe. "Make love to me."

Bill had learned that, with Molly, when she said something like that she could either mean in a physical sense, or a cerebral sense. As tired as she was, he opted for the latter. They cuddled together with her head on his shoulder and her arm lying lightly across his chest.

Bill lifted her hand to his lips, and kissed it. "Definitely, but maybe tomorrow morning though. I am now totally relaxed - and exhausted. You should be also, my love. It's been a very long day."

"I am. Sleep well, my love." She kissed him on the cheek and he felt her relax against his side. Bill waited, listening to her soft exhalations until he knew she was asleep. He closed his eyes, taking a last look at her sleeping face and slept himself.

Chapter 15: Wanderlust - Chapter 15

[December 24, 1963]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - Morning]

Bill woke up slowly. First he cracked an eye and determined that at least morning had arrived. What hour it was he wasn't sure. He was reluctant to open the other eye because there was a mop of golden yellow hair across it. Molly was snuggled up hard against him and had managed to push him right to the edge of the bed. It appeared that Molly was already awake because he felt her fingers sliding down his stomach. When they found what they were seeking they stopped.

* * *

'I feel delightfully sinful this morning. It seems very strange to have a man in this room. Funny; I never ever had a man in this room before and yet, now, it seems so natural. Oh, it *is* true about men in the morning; just as Mama says.'

* * *

"Oh, my." She chuckled softly. "What have we here?"

Bill remained silent, feigning sleep, until she squeezed. Then he groaned and said "careful there, Molly."

She wiggled around until she was lying on her side facing him. "Do you know what time it is?" She asked.

"Do you care," he countered.

"Not really." She said seductively as she moved around until she was fully atop him. With care, she found him again and took him inside her. They moved together slowly for fifteen minutes of ever-increasing passion until they reached mutual satisfaction.

In the afterglow, Molly lay back and stretched her arms upward after fluffing her pillow. "Bill," she said. "Did you, as a child, open your gifts on Christmas eve or on Christmas day?"

Bill answered her without opening his eyes. He was still savoring what they had just shared. Reluctantly, he answered. "On Christmas morning, the twenty-fifth. Why?"

"We open ours on the evening before. So, we have all day to just sit around the house and do exactly nothing except have fun. We've all done our shopping, and now there is nothing left to do but relax. Sometimes we play card games, but mostly we just read and sip eggnog. At around three we have a nice meal, wash dishes, and then go into the living room to pass out the gifts."

"Sounds like our version too; only we have breakfast, wash dishes, and then pass out gifts. Christmas breakfast is always made by the men of the house: pancakes or waffles, toast, eggs, bacon or sausage, and lots of fresh fruit for toppings. You know, what we do after we're married is up to us. We can start our own tradition."

Molly entwined her fingers with Bill's and said softly, "'our own tradition'," she quoted. "How wonderful that sounds. What shall we do?"

Wanderlust!

"Well, I kind of liked what we already did. How about that for a tradition?"

Molly pulled a chest hair, making Bill wince. "That's horrid," she said with mock severity. "Think of something better."

"Better? I can't."

"You know what I mean. You're just being obtuse."

"Ah. Mister Obtuse, that's me. Oops. I gotta go." Bill jumped out of bed and headed for the bathroom. He spent ten minutes with his toilet, took a quick shower, and returned to the bedroom. Molly was lying on her side with her arms wrapped around both pillows just watching him as he dressed.

"Do you have any idea how much I love you?" She asked with her eyes closed.

"Hopefully, the same amount that I love you, Molly. Every time I think about how much different my life would have been if I hadn't taken the train or not gone out into that passageway, I shudder. We will have a good life. That you can take to the bank."

Bill moved over to the bed and swatted Molly lightly on her rump. She jumped and her eyes snapped open. "Wife beater!"

"Better get up and into the bathroom before Denise gets up."

Molly sat up quickly. "Yes, you're right. She can take an hour in there." She slid out of the bed and walked across the room in the nude. On the way by the closet, she snagged her robe but only carried it into the bathroom. She turned and blew a kiss to Bill's low whistle.

Eventually, the whole household drifted into the kitchen. It was probably that the 'kids' were older now that the conversation didn't consist of endless requests to hurry up or open presents. Coffee and a light breakfast was served; after which, everyone drifted off. Alain and Suzette went into the living room to talk; Denise headed for the telephone and began calling her friends. Molly and Bill decided to go for a walk.

The air was crisp and smelled fragrant with the tang of wood smoke. Bill breathed deeply. "Despite that the smell of wood smoke can indicate a big fire, this smells great. There are some places now that have restrictions on when you can start a fire even in your own home. Houses in some of the deep valleys of Colorado, for instance, are not allowed to set a fire if the wind is less than five miles per hour."

"Why would they do that?" Molly asked.

"Because if the wind isn't strong enough to circulate the air, the smoke just lies along the ground and can become an actual choking hazard. It's called an 'inversion'."

"Oh. Is that bad?"

"I've seen inversions that hold the smoke down low and keep it there for days. That's what all the smog in Los Angeles is - an inversion."

"I thought that they like to joke about it, but I never thought it was real."

"It certainly is." Bill said. "Take a look down over the city. See how the buildings sort of rise above the fog?"

Wanderlust!

She held a hand to her forehead and looked. "Yeah, I can see that."

"Well, that's most likely not fog but wood smoke and car exhaust. If a breeze comes up later today, all that will be gone and you can see the city again."

Molly put her arm around Bill's waist. "You're so smart."

* * *

'I am going to learn so much just being with Bill. I wonder if there is anything he doesn't know.'

* * *

He laughed. "Not really. I just listened when my dad explained things to me. He's the OIC of a weather detachment and knows all about that kind of stuff."

"What's an 'OIC'?"

"Sorry, it means Officer in Charge, or CO - Commanding Officer. He's the boss."

"Oh. Good job to have." She pointed. "Look! Over there. A sledding hill. Want to go?"

"We don't have a sled, do we?"

"No, but we can watch - let's go!" Molly tugged on his sleeve until they were walking quickly over the field towards the small hill.

They stood, along with others, at the top of the hill and watched kids as they rode down on all sorts of sleds. One enterprising kid had appropriated a cardboard box and was in the process of customizing it. He'd removed the top, cut down the sides and front, but left the back full-size. Then he and his friend jumped into it and asked for a push. They got more than they bargained for.

The box had frozen to the snow - at first - but once it broke free it shot down the hill rapidly. Somewhere under the snow lay a snag which caught one corner and started the box spinning. Before they reached the bottom, it was spinning rapidly and the kids were hanging on for dear life laughing loudly.

Once they hit bottom and the box stopped they tried to stand up but fell over repeatedly. "They're dizzy!" Cried Molly. "Look at them trying to keep their feet!"

Bill laughed also and related a tale from his youth concerning him and a sled called a Flying Saucer. He described the sledding properties of the saucer and its tendency to spin just like the box did. Explaining that he had spun so much he got sick. "It wasn't much fun," he concluded.

They stood for a while, conversing with the other parents and friends standing nearby, until they heard a hail behind them. It was Denise and a friend. They were pulling a very long toboggan.

"Molly! Bill! Look what we have!" She shouted. "Want some fun?"

She pulled up at the top of the hill, waved the two of them forward, and pointed out seating. "Heaviest in back - Bill, that's you - then Molly, then me, then Auriel. Oh, sorry, this is Auriel, my friend. "*Auriel, c'est ma sÅ ur, Molly, et son projet de loi fiancÃ©e.*"

Wanderlust!

"*EnchantÃ©*." Bill responded, taking her mittened hand and shaking it. Molly did the same. "You want me in the very back?" He asked Denise.

"Yes."

"Okay." Bill stepped over the frame and sat down, rearranging his legs so that they stuck out to the side. "Come on Molly, you're next."

Molly backed up to Bill and allowed him to assist her into settling up against him. Once that was accomplished, Denise did the same to Molly. Finally, Auriel sat in front. They all pulled their legs inside the framework and called for some assistance in shoving off. Again, there were plenty of volunteers.

Several people stepped up and began pushing hard. The toboggan moved slowly at first, then with gathering speed. Shouting lustily, its passengers flew down the grade throwing snow everywhere as they accelerated quickly. Everyone was hanging on tightly to the person in front of them. Auriel was holding fiercely to the front rope.

They reached the bottom and began slowing down. Auriel screeched and pointed to a small bush that they were headed for. Bill slammed the heels of his boots down into the snow, showering everyone with it, as they began braking. They stopped only a few inches short of running directly over the bush. Everyone was laughing loudly. With care, they all untangled themselves and began walking back up the slope towing the toboggan.

Bill and Molly spent almost three hours on the hill with Denise and Auriel and their toboggan. They loaned it out several times to others to take a break from sledding. Several bottles of wine and a large urn of coffee appeared; these having been brought from nearby houses. A party atmosphere developed and continued until nearly noon. Reluctantly, Molly, Bill, and Denise left for their home and lunch.

Stomping their feet on the front porch, the three of them announced their arrival. Once inside, they found that lunch was almost ready. Swiftly, they laid out the plates and silverware and then carried the food to the table. Alain and Suzette sat at opposite ends and the three kids filled in the sides.

During the meal, Suzette told everyone that she had talked to Lili, Molly's older sister. "Lili is driving over from Ottawa tomorrow. They are leaving very early so they should get here around ten or so. She will have both the kids too!"

"Wonderful! I haven't seen any of them for a long time. How long can they stay?" Asked Molly.

"Unfortunately, not long. A few days. She has to get back to work between the holidays." Said Alain. "Still, it will be nice to see them again."

Bill turned to Molly. "This is your sister with the two children?"

"Yes. She has a boy who is five and a girl, three. She's a widow. Her husband was in a terrible auto accident two years ago as he was coming home from work. Very sad."

Bill was appropriately saddened by this news. So young to be widowed - especially with two kids. "I'm sorry." He said.

"No need to be, Bill. She's come to terms with it now, I think. She gets weepy at times, but that's to be expected. We try and keep things upbeat around here. The children are young so they sprang back quickly."

Wanderlust!

Suzette explained. "But, enough about this. What shall we do after we wash dishes?"

"Cribbage tournament!" Shouted Denise. "I want revenge!"

Molly leaned over to Bill and explained that she'd cleaned Denise's clock the last time by almost two hundred and fifty points. "Do you play cribbage," she asked him.

"*Absolument. Je joue tr s bien au cribbage!*" Bill announced with a smug smile.

"*Merveilleux! Comment sons!*" Said Alain, rising to his feet slowly. "Denise, you set up the table; Molly, get the cards and boards. Bill, go to that cupboard, and bring out the whisky. We will have an after-lunch drink." After catching the look Suzette shot him, he added "Just a small one - and only one, my dear." He said with a grin.

Having strong spirits so early in the day was new to Bill so he just sipped his whisky and soda slowly. Alain did the same. They broke into two teams of two - Molly opted out for the time being, content to just watch - and played for a score of one-hundred. Alain, playing against his wife, won first and waited for the outcome of Denise and Bill. Bill's win followed the laying down of a strong twenty-eight hand which put him over the top.

Alain and Bill fought neck and neck throughout their game until Alain won on an exceptional hand by only seven points. They took a break and then began again. This time, Alain played Denise and Bill played against Suzette.

Suzette turned out to be a canny player and bested Bill by a margin of almost thirty points. Alain won handily against Denise by about the same margin. Bill noted that she had a tendency to overplay her hands and try to reach for extra points in the crib card. He filed that information away for later.

The afternoon moved pleasantly along, they changed partners several times more, which allowed Molly to join. The final total had Alain in the lead, followed closely by Molly, then, surprisingly, Denise. Bill and Suzette were tied for last.

They ate dinner early, washed dishes, and then retired into the living room. Denise played Santa Clause and passed out a gift to everyone and they opened them in turn. It was obvious to Bill that every gift was chosen carefully. Alain was given a very nice, turned wood, cane with a silver handle. He allowed he probably wouldn't need it, but they all saw that he kept it handy all evening.

Denise received a music box that played a French lullaby. Inside, under a lid with a small tassel for a pull, she found a silver necklace with rose-colored pendant. She had to put it on right away.

Suzette's favorite present was a very soft cashmere sweater in off-white. The label was in German. Molly and Bill exchanged just one gift each. She gave him a golden pocket watch and he gave her a pendant done up in chased silver with inlaid stones.

Soon, the only presents left were those for Lili and her kids. They would remain under the tree until Christmas day. One by one, each of them began to stifle yawns until Suzette finally gave in and announced she was going to bed. She pulled Alain to his feet and they left the room. Denise gathered up her gifts and kissed both Bill and Molly goodnight as she went upstairs. That left only them in the room.

Molly slid sideways on the couch until she was nestled up against Bill's right side. He held out his arm and she laid her head on his shoulder. "A wonderful night, no?"

Wanderlust!

"A wonderful night, yes." He replied. Have you told your older sister about me?"

"Of course. She hasn't heard the whole tale, but I gave her the broad picture. I'll tell her all about it tomorrow. Are you sleepy? Really?"

Bill hugged her to him. "No, not really. I would just like to sit here and hold you for a while. We haven't been alone all day and I missed you." He bent and kissed the top of her head.

Molly sighed and looked up at him. "I love you." Then she kissed him on the lips. It was a long, slow kiss that Bill felt to his toes. He returned the favor.

"What say you and I clean this up a little and then turn in?"

"What say we just turn in? This can wait until tomorrow."

"A good idea. Let's go." Bill lifted her off his lap and set her on her feet, then stood. Taking her by the hand, they went upstairs to her/their room and slipped under the covers a short time later.

Outside, it started to snow lightly.

Chapter 16: Wanderlust - Chapter 16

[December 25, 1963]

[Laval district, Montreal, Canada - Morning]

Bill and Molly woke within seconds of each other due to the noise coming from their shared bathroom with Denise. She had dropped something and was hopping about in presumably bare feet trying to pick it up. When Bill replayed the sound in his head, he thought perhaps the drinking cup. Fortunately, it was plastic, but it did make quite a sound when it hit the tile floor and bounced around.

"Oh, *merde!*" Her muffled voice shouted. She kicked the cup yet again.

"Denise!" Said Molly, scandalized by her sister's outburst. "*Votre langue!*" She chided.

"Sorry," Denise came back, clearly not sorry at all. "My hands were slippery. I have it now. You need the bathroom?"

Molly turned to Bill and raised an eyebrow. He shook his head and burrowed down under the covers again.

"No," Molly called to Denise. "We will in a little bit though."

"All right. I'll be another ten minutes I think."

"Fine." Said Molly and snuggled up to Bill. "We need to help get the house ready for Lili and her children. I don't know where we're going to put them. Luckily, they will only be here for one night."

"Umm hummm," replied Bill, his attention beginning to wander at the sight of one of Molly's breasts peeking out from under the sheet. He reached out and touched a finger to it; then began to circle it.

Molly jumped, and then smiled. "So! You have other ideas?"

"I might." He placed his palm on her stomach and rubbed another circle and then slipped his hand lower.

* * *

'Oh, how delicious! Just touching me makes me tingle. But wait! Ah, Denise is just next door. Just maybe we can â | but no, we must not!"

* * *

"My sister is in the very next room," she hissed. "*Non.*"

He rolled onto his side and pressed himself against her leg. "Pleeeeeease? I'll be quiet."

"I know that, my love. But I also know I will be the one to make noise. Go take *une douche froide.*" She giggled. "That will cure it, no doubt."

Bill feigned resignation, but slipped out from under the covers. With evidence of his ardor strongly preceding, he started for the bathroom. Molly threw a pillow at him. "Wait until my sister has left, *Idiot!*"

Wanderlust!

Bill snagged the pillow, sat down in a chair, and put it on his lap to hide himself. "There! I shall wait calmly right here."

* * *

'Even in such a state he can laugh at his misfortune. This is truly the sign of a gentleman.'

* * *

Molly sighed and pulled the covers up over her head and began chuckling. "Whatever am I to do with you?" She said, somewhat muffled.

Bill just laughed and sat back.

Soon, Denise tapped on the connecting door and said she was leaving for her room. Bill went into the bathroom and did his morning routine. Once completed, he padded back into the bedroom and patted Molly on her butt. "Your turn, my love. Tempus fugits."

Reluctantly, Molly threw off the covers and got out of bed. Bill watched her as she straightened her nightgown around her legs and pulled on a robe.

"You look beautiful today, Molly."

She hid her face. "Oh, *La*. How you talk. Go downstairs and have some coffee ... or something. I am not pretty yet."

"In my judgment, you are; but I will do as you ask."

Bill went downstairs and walked into the kitchen. Denise was already there at the stove heating water. "Want a couple of hard-boiled eggs?" She asked.

"Yes. I would like that. Don't drop them," he added with a smile. She gave him a 'look'. Clearly, she was not in a good mood.

"What's up, Denise? Something bothering you?"

She came over to the table and sat down next to Bill. "Yes. I have to have both of Lili's children in my room. Yours is bigger, but nooooo, I have to have them."

"It's only for one night. And they are your niece and nephew. Come on, smile!"

She remained staring at the table but when she looked up, she began laughing. Bill had scrunched up his face into a nearly impossible smile - almost a grimace. "Oh, all right! I'm glad it's only for one night. Lili has to sleep on the living room couch which opens into a bed. I guess I could have been put down there."

"See." Bill said happily. "All better now. The eggs are done."

Denise hopped up and pulled the eggs off the burner and ran cold water over them. As they were cooling, she pulled two small bowls from a cabinet and set them on the table. Into each, she put two eggs. She added two pieces of buttered toast and sat down. Silently, they ate their meal, wrapped up in their own thoughts.

Wanderlust!

The rest of the family began stirring and soon were eating their own meals. Dishes were washed and the kitchen generally cleaned up. Suzette went out to the paperbox at the curb and brought back the newspaper. It was in French, but Bill laid claim to a section of it so he could puzzle out the articles. He ended up with the fashion pages.

At almost eleven, the doorbell went off signaling the arrival of Lili and the kids. General clamor ensued for at least ten minutes as coats were shucked and hung and boots pulled off to be stored in the closet. The whole time, Lili kept up a running commentary in rapid French about her trip. Bill caught an '*imbÃ©cile*' or two and a clear reference to the shady parentage of a fellow driver. She also said that the snow was worse further west.

The kids, Ã mile (the boy) and Martine (the girl) were sent to the kitchen for warm cocoa and marshmallows while the adults talked in the living room over coffee. Bill thought the kids were both very cute and once the enforced captivity of being in a car for three hours wore off, they would settle down.

The sleeping arrangements were given out. To which Lili had no objection. She did thank Denise for the use of her room however which, Bill was sure, helped soothe her ruffled feathers at having to share.

Molly suggested that the children might like to visit the sledding hill. This was greeted with enthusiasm by both Ã mile and Martine who flew to the closet and began to dress up for the outdoors again. Soon, Molly and Bill were herding the kids to the hill, dragging a sled behind them.

After two trips from further down the hill so as not to get up too much speed, Bill was piloting the sled, and it began to veer from the packed area into freshly fallen snow. Within seconds, he hit a pile which flew up into the air and covered both he and Ã mile. Sputtering, but laughing, Ã mile brushed the snow off his face and hands and demanded another run.

Meanwhile, Molly and Martine had rendered themselves almost helpless with laughter. When Bill and Ã mile arrived back at their starting point, Molly began brushing snow from Bill's reddened face. She dug handfuls of the cold stuff from within his coat collar, laughing and giggling all the while. Martine, not to be outdone, pushed Ã mile into a snowbank just for effect. Soon, everyone was laughing but ready to go back home.

When the foursome got back to the house, it had been decided that everyone would go out for lunch at a local restaurant. To this end, they all piled into two cars, made the short drive, and pulled into the parking lot. On the ride over, Bill had asked if the children were being taught English in school. Alain told him that English was the primary language in every school except for private schools here in this province. Private schools, he explained, could choose any language as their primary language.

Bill allowed that something like that would certainly teach someone French quickly. Alain nodded his agreement. Suzette complimented Bill on how fast he was mastering it. "Just *un petit peu*." He said with a smile. "I'll work on it."

Lunch mostly consisted of keeping the kids in their seats and eating. Alain would glance at each one sternly and they would settle down for at least five minutes until they began to get rambunctious again. Since there were other families with children in the area, nothing was thought of it at all. Eventually, they all finished, the bill was paid, and everyone got back into the cars for the trip home.

When they arrived, the kids began clamoring to open presents. Lili looked at the other adults, who nodded, and told the kids to go ahead and get one present each. They ran to the tree and pulled out wrapped gifts. They each knew what their name looked like so within seconds they had a few in front of them.

Wanderlust!

After promising to open them slowly, both children began ripping paper off with glee to find out what they had. Stuffed animals and pull toys seemed to be predominant. Martine had received a stuffed doll which looked a lot like Raggedy Anne who she promptly named Simone. A mile couldn't seem to make up his mind which of the several gifts he liked the best. At the moment, he was leaning heavily towards a sailboat for his tub.

After the shredded paper was cleaned up and the kids put down for a nap, the adults sat around the living room and talked. Lili insisted that Molly retell her story of how she had met Bill, so she stood up and acted out the whole sink disaster. By the time she was finished, even Bill was chuckling at her skills at storytelling.

"I predict that this will become a family legend at the very least," said Bill, pulling Molly down into his lap and kissing her.

"*Oui*, no doubt." She said, coming up for air. "Almost as good as HÃ¶rst and his romance in France during the war."

"What?" Asked Lili. "Who's HÃ¶rst?"

Bill took over and related what HÃ¶rst had told them of his romance with his wife - the celebrated stoner of tanks. He told it with such skill that even Molly, who'd heard the story herself, had a tear in her eye when he was done.

"That is the most romantic thing I believe I've ever heard," said Lili. "So sad that she is no longer with him."

"I don't know, Lili. He seems happy enough now. He probably makes a good living driving Ziggy around for the tourists." Said Molly. "I don't know how much we paid him," she added, giving Bill a significant look. "But I think it was a lot. We did get a very good free meal from his uncle at his restaurant though. It was delicious."

The talk moved onwards, touching on Lili and how she was coping after the loss of her husband, Henri; then further to how things were going for the whole family here in Montreal. Alain announced that Bill was considering joining his company in the position of European buyer. They all congratulated him and wished him well. The talk turned to where they planned on going for their honeymoon so Bill took over and sketched out their rough plans for travel out to the California coast and back to Montana.

"Tell me about Montana, Bill," coaxed Lili. "Is it much like the Ottawa area, or are there many more mountains?"

"It is quite mountainous, Lili. In the high plains, where Great Falls lies, it is almost flat, but to the west are the Rocky Mountains. In the space of an hour's drive west, a person can go from around three thousand feet, um, that's about a thousand meters, to over eleven thousand feet - three thousand three hundred meters."

She looked at him wide-eyed. "Really? That is quite tall. Do you ever go into them?"

"Oh sure, lots of times. We have a family camping trip almost every summer up in the mountains at a place called Benchmark. There is a lodge, a nice heated pool, tennis, golf, and all sorts of activities for everyone."

"Sounds wonderful, Bill" said Suzette. "I'd like to come down there some time and visit."

"Well, you'd certainly be welcome that's for sure. Maybe we can plan a trip next year."

Wanderlust!

"I think we may just do that," said Alain, stroking his chin. "If I can ever get over this pesky condition of mine."

"You'll be fine, you old horse," soothed Suzette. "Just take things easy from now on. No more working late." She kissed the top of his head as she stood. "More coffee anyone?"

Bill held up his mug as did Molly and Lili. She returned shortly with the pot and refilled their mugs, then sat the pot down. "There. Anyone want to play some Monopoly?"

Everyone thought that sounded like a good idea so the board was set up on the coffee table and everyone gathered around on pillows or footstools. Denise was enlisted as Alain's helper since he couldn't bend down to the board.

The game ended around dinnertime. Bill and Molly went upstairs to wash up, as did Denise, and then came back down to help out in the kitchen. Suzette was just putting the finishing touches on her pot roast and scooping potatoes into a big bowl. Molly and Denise shuttled back and forth to the dining room carrying the food. Soon, everything was ready and dinner was begun as soon as the two children appeared after their nap.

Following dinner, the kids played pick-up-sticks on the wooden floor by the living room window while the adults talked. They all agreed that this year was a very good year for everyone involved. Lili said she might be able to make it over for the wedding, but not to count on it because she had other commitments in Ottawa. She didn't say definitely, but Bill got the impression she might be seeing someone.

Eventually, everyone ran down and began to excuse themselves for bed. Alain and Suzette left first for the back bedroom, followed by Denise, who wanted to use the bathroom before Molly came up. Lili, Molly, and Bill chatted some more until Lili's head began to droop a little.

Bill stood. "Looks like we'd better leave the living room, Molly. Lili needs to get some sleep. I'm betting the kids will be up pretty early."

"Oh, I hope they sleep in a little. I could use it." Said Lili, shaking her head.

Molly hugged Lili, then she and Bill left the room after pulling the drapes for her. On the way upstairs, Molly pressed her hand into Bill's back, and then patted him on the butt. "You go first for the bathroom, and then I'll follow. *D'accord?*"

"*D'accord.*"

They closed the door to their bedroom and Molly crossed over to the bathroom door and tapped. Hearing no answer, she went in. Bill pulled his clothes off, got into his sleeping shorts, and went to the desk to read a little while Molly was away. He finished a chapter and then Molly came into the room smelling of roses.

"Oh, yum." Bill said, sniffing the air. "You smell scrumptious."

"What is this 'scum...scrum...?'"

"Scrumptious. It means 'tasty' or 'really great'."

"Oh. Silly. It is just the shower soap I use."

He poked his nose into her hair and sniffed deeply. "Smells wonderful to me."

Wanderlust!

Bill watched Molly turn back the bed covers after carefully setting the stuffed animals on her chair. He noted that she saved her ratty favorite and laid it on her pillow. "Ah, I am replaced already. Oh my."

"He will always be in my heart. I've had him since I was eight years old. You, my love, I've only known for, what..." She did the math. "...eleven days." Her hands flew to her cheeks. "*Mon Dieu!* Can that be true? Just that short a time!"

* * *

'That cannot be right! But it is. It was the thirteenth we met to be sure. I feel sometimes like I have known him all my life and yet there are some times I am learning something new about him. Somehow, I feel my life will not be the same at all.'

* * *

Bill thought back and confirmed in his head that it had been exactly that - twelve days. "We were meant for each other, Molly. No doubt. We met on that train for a reason. I needed a reason to stop my wandering around. Heading for Europe was my way of escaping from my world. Not that it was too bad, but just ... different. I needed a direction and now I have it. You."

He bent over and kissed her deeply, sliding his hands under her shoulders to pull her upright. "But, now I must go..."

Molly gasped. "What! Go? Go where?"

"To ze Cazzbahhh," he said in a phony French accent, pointing to the bathroom.

Molly threw a pillow at his retreating back. "*BÃ¢te!*" She called after him.

He spent fifteen minutes washing up and brushing his teeth. While he did, he reflected on the day they met. To his surprise, he remembered only now that the day they met was Friday the Thirteenth! How odd that he should meet Molly on that particular day. When he returned bedside, Molly was feigning sleep. He crept into bed, slipped a hand under the covers, and tickled a breast. She giggled and gave up the pretense.

They lay back and cuddled. Molly put her head on Bill's shoulder. "You have made a real hit with Lili. She usually is a bit reserved with someone she doesn't know."

"Well, maybe she's just thinking that since I'll be her brother-in-law very soon she'd better get used to the idea."

"*C'est possible.*"

"Anyway, I like her a lot. She's had a pretty tough time what with the two kids and all. Did you get some vibes about her maybe having a boyfriend?"

"Vibes?" Molly asked.

"You know, vibrations; sort of a 'feeling'?"

"A feeling? You mean like this?" She groped him. "That kind of a feeling?"

Wanderlust!

"Ah, not exactly. You know what I mean. You are being obtuse."

"So now you call me a thick head?" Her eyes twinkled. "You shall pay for that *Monsieur*." She squeezed, making Bill grunt.

Bill did some undercover work also and their playing turned a bit more serious. He started kissing her neck and left a trail of them down her chest - pausing at her breast - until he had reached her navel. His tongue darted out and flicked inside it. Molly jumped. He continued downwards until he reached what he sought. Molly surrendered to his ministrations with a deep sigh and a moan.

Quietly, but with great passion, they made love.

Chapter 17: Wanderlust - Chapter 17

[December 30, 1963]

[Montreal, Canada]

The past few days were hectic to say the least. True to her word, Suzette kept Molly on the go from daybreak to dusk. Denise kept pace with the both of them whenever she could. Alain and Bill found things to do while the women were out. Alain talked a friend into letting him borrow one of their cars and, after a secret check to see if he could get into the car, they announced that the two of them were going out and meet a few people.

Alain directed Bill's driving as they traveled all over town. For the most part, they stayed in the northern suburbs, but occasionally they dipped into town proper. Downtown Montreal did turn out to be the same as Paris; right down to the European traffic signs. Since Bill was no stranger to them, he could get along without too much prompting from Alain. One of the places they went was what he called his 'headquarters'. There, Bill met his employees. Alain had a good eye for beautiful women Bill was soon to discover. His secretary, Josette, was a raven haired woman of about thirty-five that flirted with him playfully. In private, he explained that she was probably his most loyal employee - and happily married.

Bill also met one of Alain's buyers. Two of them were out on the road, but his Continental European buyer, Francois, was back in town. Francois started out in French-accented English but then, at a prompt from Alain in French, he changed into German. Bill took note of the change in language, and slipped into German to keep right up with the conversation, figuring that Alain was probably comparing the two of them. Francois's diction was slow, perhaps because he was translating in his head. Francois was astounded that Bill was not a native German; adding that he thought Bill could pass as a native.

Alain joined the conversation so they switched back to English. "Bill here is marrying my middle daughter, Molly, on January third of next year. When they return from their honeymoon in the United States I am thinking of asking him to accept a position of a buyer for the continent." Bill watched Francois's eyes widen slightly and his brow furrow. But Alain continued. "You, Francois, would be moved upwards to manage the entire team. Would you accept this?"

Francois thought for perhaps thirty seconds and then gave a great smile. "Of course, *Monsieur* Garnet. I would be happy to accept should this come to pass."

"Excellent!" Proclaimed Alain. Handshakes were given all around and they chatted some more about routes and cities that Francois usually went through. Bill asked him how he traveled and Francois told him what he wanted to hear.

"By train, *naturellement*. I always travel by train. Everything else takes too much time, or not enough. By train, one can relax, rest between visiting offices, and prepare for the next."

Alain had Bill tell Francois how he happened to meet Molly. Francois thought it was quite extraordinary that such a thing had happened. He also added ruefully that nothing like that had ever happened to him.

The soft chiming of the clock in Francois's office signaled that it was time for lunch. Bill and Alain left Francois's office and waved at everyone at their desks on his way out of the building. They both got back into the car and drove to a restaurant that was Alain's favorite. They had a wonderful beef soup with crispy bread and noodles. Fortified, they then took a tour of his three shops. They were open at the time and one of them had quite a few customers in it.

Wanderlust!

Bill looked around each store and thought that Alain, and his buyers, had a good eye for what the purchasing public would desire. His goods were specialty items, priced a bit higher than normal, but grouped as they were in one store he made money at it. Most of the items were foodstuffs, stored in either tins or vacuum packed in plastic. He tended more towards things that weren't too spicy, sweet, or salty; however, there was a special area set aside for chocolates from around the world. This, he explained, was what everyone wanted secretly. He chose a small box for himself and indicated Bill should pick one also.

"What flavors does Molly like? I'd like to get her something nice."

"She hides it well, but I think she likes dark chocolate." Bill nodded and picked up a small, green, box labeled '*chocolat marron*' which he knew meant dark chocolate. "Ah, good choice," observed Alain.

He showed the cashier what we had chosen and she wrapped up the items. Bill saw no cash change hands. It must be good to be the boss he concluded. Thusly armed with placating gifts in case Suzette got mad at Alain, they headed back home.

[December 30, 1963]

[Laval district, Montreal, Canada]

As predicted, Suzette was practically tapping her foot as they came through the front door. "I was very worried about you, Alain. You left us no note or anything telling us where you had gone. Luckily, Josette called to tell you that she'd returned from lunch and said you had been at the office. Shame on you!"

Alain looked crestfallen, but smiled sheepishly and tendered the packet of chocolate he'd taken from the shop. Suzette, somewhat mollified, relented and pecked his cheek. "Very well. Consider yourself scolded." She said with a smile.

By this time, Molly and Denise had appeared but before either one of them could open their mouths Bill offered the small green box to Molly. She pointed her finger between her breasts and said "for me?"

"Of course. I also know that you, Denise, don't like chocolate very much, but I promise to find some cinnamon drops for you very soon. Okay?"

"Okay, but I'll hold you to it then." Denise said, sticking her lower lip out in a pout.

Everyone went into the living room and sat down. Alain and Suzette started a conversation at one side of the room. Molly, Denise, and Bill started another at the other end. Molly began: "It is supposed to be bad luck for the groom to see the bride's wedding dress before the wedding, but I think that since all I'm wearing is a new suit that it would be all right. I have it laid out upstairs on the bed. Denise and I have been trying to decide what to use for accessories. Do you want to help?"

"Sure. What I know about fashions isn't much, but I do know what looks good to me and seems to go together. Let's go."

The three of them went upstairs and into Molly's room. She pointed to a dark blue woolen skirt and white sweater combination that Bill could tell immediately would enhance her golden hair and trim legs. The skirt was deeply pleated (his favorite kind) and had a wide black patent leather belt for the waist. The sweater was slightly fuzzy. That was about the extent of Bill's knowledge of women's clothing. It appeared to be not quite white but, instead, a very pale yellow. Bill picked it up and held it against Molly's chest, moving his head from side to side, and then pronounced it perfect.

Wanderlust!

"Now, we have 'something blue' and 'something new' so we now need 'something old' and 'something borrowed' for you." Bill observed, almost to himself.

"What is this you are talking about? Old. New? What?" Queried Molly.

"It's a saying we have below the border about weddings: 'something old - something new - something borrowed - something blue'. It pertains to what the bride wears when she is married. You have the new top and blue skirt. Now you need to borrow something and wear something old."

"I have it!" Denise pronounced with a finger raised into the air, and took off for her room. When she returned, she held out a silver pin the size of a fifty-cent piece. "You can borrow my pin. See how it fits right in with the blue skirt?"

There was a blue stone set in the center of the pin, surrounded by yellow stones and green leaves. It was perfect. Molly solemnly added it to the left side of the sweater, which was now lying back on the bed. "You are right. It's perfect. Now, what about 'old'? I'll have to think about that for a while. Maybe Mother can suggest something."

"I'm sure she can," said Denise. "I'll go check." She left the room.

Molly turned to Bill and asked what he thought. "I am imagining you dressed in that, standing by my side in front of the Magistrate very soon. I will be dressed so handsomely, with my beard trimmed just so, that all women will faint when I pass by them. And you will be so beautiful that they all wish they were you." She snickered, paused, and then laughed outright.

"Thank you. I needed that." Molly said, not the least bit put out at his levity. "Things have been such a rush lately that I am so very concerned that things won't go like we planned."

"Well, stop worrying, my love. Things will go as they will go - no more, no less. It's called Karma. Just stay away from loose washbasins and you will be all right. Look what happened the first time."

She snickered again, and threw her arms around him. "That's why I love you so much, my darling. You always know just what to say." They kissed gently and then again a little more forcefully. Denise took that moment to re-enter the room and clear her throat.

"Whoops. Would you like some more time?" She said, not meaning a word of it but, instead, leering suggestively.

Molly jumped back a foot, smoothed her skirt down over her hips, where it had mysteriously been riding up a little, and said "no, Denise. You can come in. We were just discussing the future."

"I bet. How about this?" She held up a tiny little golden watch that Bill judged had to be at least a hundred years old. It had a patina of age, but had been well cared for. It was even running and had the correct time.

"That's perfect!" Cried Molly. "She turned to Bill. "This is what my mother wore when she got married to Papa. Her mother before her wore it also. Now, I get to wear it when I get married." She began to tear up and suddenly drops fell from the corners of her eyes. "When I get marriedâ" she repeated softly, and then sniffled. Denise looked slightly embarrassed as Bill took Molly in his arms again and held her tight.

* * *

Wanderlust!

'When I am married? This cannot be happening to me, but it is. I so hope I can live up to what Bill expects of me. Oh, *merde*, now I am sniffing again.'

* * *

Bill ran his palm down the back of her head, smoothing her hair. "Molly. Molly. You're handling things just fine. I'm the one who should be a nervous wreck. My parents are due tomorrow and I have to face them. I want them to love you as much as I do; and they will. Just hang in there, Honey."

She looked up at him and he bent to kiss the tears away. She smiled a tentative smile and kissed him back. "I'll try. Everything is happening so fast now. I feel like I'm not coping with it very well."

"But you are!" Bill responded with force. "I'm the one who should feel badly. I've done hardly anything to help. Except maybe keep your father out of everyone's hair."

That did it. Both girls began smiling. Denise put her arm on Bill's shoulder and impulsively pulled him in for a kiss. "You're the best brother I've ever had." Then she realized what she'd said and all of them broke up. The tension was gone; although, Molly did look at her sister with a raised eyebrow. It was just a kiss, and not even on his lips, just his cheek. Bill encompassed them both and they just stood there for a moment. Denise broke away and left the room.

Molly spoke. "Denise has got to find someone soon. She's convinced that she's unlucky and that she'll be an old maid. She's only eighteen for goodness sake."

"Yes, but at eighteen life stretches ahead of you seemingly forever. She's bought into the idea that if you don't find love young you will never find it. She'll grow out of it."

"I hope you're right, Bill. She's such a dreamer. If whoever finds her doesn't treat her right I'll have something to say about it."

"And I also. I'll be a part of the family very soon you know."

"How could I forget, my love. But, I need you to crusade for me, not Denise."

"Consider you crusaded for. I would walk willingly into a den of dragons for you. For Denise, it will have to be just one, very small, fireless dragon."

She smiled up at him and kissed his cheek also. "You always know what to say and when to say it." She repeated.

After dinner, everyone sat around the kitchen table and played cards for a while, then Suzette ran them all off and up to bed; stating that tomorrow was going to be very busy. "As if today wasn't bad enough," Molly added under her breath as she and Bill went up the stairs.

[January 1, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - New Years Day]

Today, as Bill had already anticipated, was going to be extremely busy. Even he was involved in the hubbub. The other day, as he was browsing through the mall he saw a great looking suit that wasn't too expensive. It was off the rack, but fit him perfectly so he bought it for the ceremony.

Wanderlust!

Now it was time to go meet his parents at the airport. Since there would be the two of them and their luggage, just he and Molly went to get them. Molly was very nervous at the prospect of meeting Bill's parents. He tried to calm her, but he could tell she was worked up.

"Molly, don't worry about a thing. My mom is a pussycat and my dad hasn't bitten anyone in a couple of years - unless you count junior officers."

She fixed her gaze on him and tried to stare him down. Since he was driving, he couldn't look at her though so it didn't work. "I can tell you're looking at me, but I can't look back. Just be yourself, Honey. You'll be just fine. How can they not like you? After all, how do you think I felt at meeting your parents at first? Nervous? You bet!"

Molly reached over and patted the back of Bill's hand. "Okay. I'll try to be calm. But it won't be easy."

Briefly, he glanced at her and smiled. "Atta girl."

[January 1, 1964]

[Montreal International Airport, Montreal, Canada]

They parked in the short term lot, locked the car, and hurried into the terminal. At one of the flight kiosks they found a screen that indicated his parent's plane would be ten minutes late so they had time to go to the international waiting area and stand behind the Plexiglas window. When they arrived in the hall, there were two customs agents opening doors, turning on machines, and checking paperwork. With a thin, dry-sounding whistle, the small jet pulled up and parked. Molly and Bill stood and watched passengers enter the gate area. Out of his peripheral vision Bill saw Molly edging back behind him. He reached around her waist and pulled her up to his side. "Chin up, my love. It will all be over in minutes." She gave him a wan smile and nodded.

Tired-looking people began straggling down the Jetway, pulling carry-ons and herding kids ahead of them. There was a lull, then another group. Bill saw his dad appear, leading his mother through the crowd. "There they are!" He exclaimed, pointing to them for Molly. She trembled just a little so he held her tighter. He could tell that she was really apprehensive about this meeting.

It was apparent that they didn't see the two of them however because they went down towards the customs area. Molly and Bill followed at a more leisurely pace because they would be held up for a bit. Molly was still nervous so he tightened his grip around her shoulders and nuzzled her neck. She jumped, but turned and smiled up at him. They watched as his parents passed through customs, got their passports stamped, and then looked around for their son and almost daughter-in-law.

Bill's mom spotted him first and tugged on his dad's coat sleeve. They headed over and stopped in front of Bill and Molly. "Goodness, Molly. You're beautiful!" She said, throwing her arms around the two of them and hugging hard. "My son has very good taste. This is my husband, Paul and I'm Beth. We are very happy to be here for the wedding."

"I - I am very happy to meet you, um, Beth. And you too, *Monsieur* Stiles." Molly said in a nervous stammer. "Bill has told me much about you."

"Please, Molly, call me Paul. I have to echo what Beth just said, you're a knockout."

Molly blushed. Bill kissed his mother and shook his father's hand. "Nice trip?" Bill asked.

Wanderlust!

"A bit bumpy, but nice enough. We only checked one big bag so where do we go to pick that up?" Paul said, looking down the long hallway.

"Over this way. We'll take you there." Bill linked his arm firmly into Molly's on his right, and his mom on the left. "Allons-y!"

"*Vous parlez trÃ¨s bien FranÃ§ais. Probablement un bon professeur.*" Bill's mother said, looking significantly at Molly. Molly leaned forward, looked across him to her, and grinned.

"I am amazed at how fast he picks up languages. You should have heard him in Germany. Oh, but you probably already know that. How silly of me."

They all had a laugh over that one. "You'll have to tell us the whole story of how you met. Bill just gave us the short version. I want to know how it all came about. Sounds like something I'd like to write about or maybe do a spot on my radio show."

Molly looked at her with eyes wide. "You have a radio show? How wonderful! What kind is it?"

"Sort of an editorial thing. I call it 'Idle Musings'. They give me fifteen minutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday just to talk about anything I really want. Last week, I described my weekend in a snow cave last winter."

"A snow cave! *Fantastique!* Oh, tell me about it too!" Molly begged. By the time they had reached the baggage carousel, she and Bill's mother had bonded very tightly. They rattled back and forth in French and English with abandon, letting Bill and his dad search for the bag. When it came around, Bill fished it off the belt and dragged it over towards the women.

By the time he got there, his mom was just finishing up a sentence. "â land that's why I just knew I'd like you very much. Oh, here's the bag. Ready to go?"

"What's just why?" Bill asked.

"I was telling Molly that there was only one girl you brought home that I approved of and that was Virginia." Bill goggled at her and sputtered a bit but she let him off the hook. "I asked Molly if you'd mentioned her before. I wouldn't do that to you, Kiddo. In a way, Molly reminds me very much of her. Don't you think?"

Bill thought that over and replied that he didn't see the resemblance at all. Molly grinned at his discomfiture. She did, indeed, know all about Virginia and how she and Bill had lost their virginity - to each other - on the train to Paris. She was enjoying his squirming. "But, that's all past history," Bill said quickly. "Now, I have only one person to care for with all my heart. Just a few more daysâ " He said with feeling, taking Molly by the hand and squeezing it. "Are we ready to go?"

"I am." Paul said. "I've been sitting for a few hours and ready to stretch my legs. How far out are you parked?"

"Not too far. We only have about a twenty minute drive to Molly's house for something to eat and then I'll run you over to the motel. We've made a reservation for you and put a hold on a car if you want one."

"That's a good idea, Bill. Makes it easier to get around. Can we go to the motel first? I'd like to drop these bags off so we won't look like hoboes at Molly's parent's house."

Molly spoke up. "Oh, that's no problem, um, Paul. We can do just that."

Wanderlust!

Everyone arrived at the car and Bill and his dad loaded the bags into the rear. Molly and Bill's mom were engaged in a conversation so they slid into the back seat. His dad got into the passenger seat. Once all the doors were closed, Bill started out. Molly kept up a running dialogue on what they were passing and where they were within the city. Paul said he'd been to Montreal once before, but it was before the war and he didn't remember much at all.

Beth looked out the window and took in all the French named streets and storefronts. "It looks just like Paris doesn't it?" It was the same exact comment Bill had made a few days ago.

Chapter 18: Wanderlust - Chapter 18

[January 1, 1964]

[Motel Ideal, Montreal, Canada]

Eventually, Molly, Bill, and his parents pulled into the parking lot for the Motel Ideal. The girls kept chattering so Bill and his dad walked into the lobby and went over to the clerk to identify themselves. The clerk verified Paul's reservation and then handed him the registration form to fill out. When Paul asked about the car, the clerk had him fill out some more paperwork and passed the keys over to him. He pointed out the window to a nice silver Chevrolet. "That is the one, *Monsieur*. Slot number fourteen."

"Thank you very much. We'd like to put our bags in the room now. Will that be all right?"

"Certainly, Sir. Your room is ready now. Will you need a bellman?"

"No. Thanks for offering. We can handle it."

They left the lobby. Bill went back to the car, backed out of the spot and pulled around to number forty-seven. "This is your room, Mom. Let me get the bags and the door."

He hopped out, opened the rear door, pulled the bags out, and ran them over to the room. His dad pulled in next to him in his car and helped. "Nice car isn't it, Honey?" He said to Beth.

"Looks good to me. Let me freshen up a little and we can move on to Molly's house." She took Molly by the hand and went into the room. The two guys stood around outside and brought each other up to date on their lives. Paul had taken a week's leave so they were in no great hurry to get back. Their plane flight wasn't until after the wedding so they thought they might like to drive down to Niagara Falls and see them from the Canadian side for a change. Bill told him he thought it was an excellent idea.

Bill gave him a thumbnail sketch of Molly's parents: Alain's stroke and how much better he was getting, and everything else they'd done to make him feel like one of the family - even though he'd actually BE one very soon. Paul said he'd anticipated meeting them the whole trip.

The girls came out, locked the door, and everyone split up for the trip to Molly's house. On the way over, Molly started gushing to Bill about how much she liked his parents. And, that it seemed so exciting to be rushing about all the time doing things. She was practically bouncing on the seat with pleasure. Bill was very glad to see her like this because he was beginning to genuinely worry about her. It was nice to see that his, and her, fears were groundless.

[January 1, 1964]

[Laval district, Montreal, Canada]

They arrived and once they were all out of the cars, they walked up to the front door. It opened and Suzette waved them inside. Bill did the introductions and everyone shook hands or hugged in the Continental fashion. Denise, for once, was very quiet. That would probably change, Bill thought, when his mom got started on all the crazy things she'd done.

Wanderlust!

In an hour's time, they were all sitting in the living room and conversing as if they had known each other for years. Alain was interested in what Bill's dad did for the Air Force and, surprisingly, his dad seemed to want to know how Alain's business was structured. Since his dad was about to retire; well, in maybe two more years or so, he'd been looking for some sort of job to keep himself busy. None of the things he'd found so far were getting his attention, but maybe something as exotic as being a buyer, or partner, in Alain's business would be a good thing. Heck, Alain could even start a store down in Great Falls.

Molly, Suzette, and Beth were all comparing notes about weddings, engagements, dresses, and all that sort of thing. Bill was fascinated by how fast Molly had pushed her fears aside and taken to his parents. It was amazing watching her. Even Denise got into the act. Bill's mom pulled out some photos of their family and passed them around. Denise looked at one fairly recent picture of Bill and his brother out in front of the house. Denise's reaction was evident on her face. Molly turned to Bill and, using her hand as a shield, smiled and winked. Phillip, his brother, was in deep trouble he thought.

Denise also found out that Bill's sister was eighteen also and wanted to meet her somehow. Paul and Beth invited Denise down to their house for the spring break before she went back to the University here in Montreal. Now, Bill knew, his brother was going to have to be careful. Denise would be able to wrap him right up. He also knew what type of girls he liked, and Denise was right in the middle of that group.

Dinner was discussed, but Bill's parents wanted to take everyone out to a nice restaurant. The Garnet's protested, but finally gave in. Bill's dad can be pretty persuasive when he wanted to be. Once it was settled, Alain selected a small, cozy German 'dinner house'. Apparently, these were places where they don't have menus or waiters or anything like that. It was similar to visiting a friend's house. You ate what they had prepared for the evening meal. One never knew what was being served on any given night. Bill's mom had heard of them, but never gone to one, so she was thrilled to get the chance.

They had to take both cars to get there. Before departing, Suzette called to make sure they had room. They did, but just barely. They only had eight more chairs, and the family group was seven in all. Dinner would start promptly at eight.

Altogether, there were fourteen guests at a huge trestle style table with a heavy cotton tablecloth and large, bulky silverware. It was very Old Worldish. Their host, once he realized that everyone spoke at least a little German, continued in that language for the whole meal. Bill translated for Molly and Denise what they couldn't gather for themselves.

At the end of the meal, everyone at the table felt as if they were friends of the family also so they were allowed to take part in the traditional giving of presents to the bride at the wedding rehearsal dinner. They hadn't a real rehearsal, but what the heck. Bill's dad stood, tapped on a water glass, and cleared his throat.

"Friends of the family. I am very happy to see that my son has finally settled down. Especially with such a beautiful and gracious lady." A tip of his head to Molly. "And her parents; who have raised her with obvious pride." A tip to Alain and Suzette. "I, we, welcome her readily into our family and hope she will consider us her other mother and father. I raise my glass to you both. *Bonne santÃ©!*"

Everyone around the table echoed the 'good health' toast and drank. He continued: "I have an announcement to make and it concerns both my son and my soon-to-be daughter. My wife and I have purchased a very nice, slightly used, Volkswagen camper bus and, when they come through Great Falls on their honeymoon, we will sign it over to you both as a wedding present. That way, you can use it on the rest of your honeymoon and afterwards."

Wanderlust!

Stunned silence. Bill thought his dad had always been a little tight with a buck, and for him to do this really surprised him greatly. He looked at him, standing there, and finally rose to his feet. "Dad. I - I don't know what to say. We accept with all our thanks." They shook hands over the table.

Tears welled up in Molly's eyes but she managed a quiet "Thank you. Thank you very much."

Up until that moment, our other guests hadn't known that this dinner was special. They may have guessed from the conversation, but until Bill's dad made that announcement, they couldn't have known for sure. In turn, they offered their congratulations to Molly and Bill and wished for a long and successful marriage. At that point, our host rolled out a big, silver, ice-filled bucket with two bottles of champagne in it. He popped the corks and filled our glasses. Everyone but Molly and I stood and toasted us. Bill stood and toasted them back, adding his thanks for their addition to their dinner.

After that, everyone just sat and sipped the wine and chattered about pretty much everything. Their host and his wife came over and sat with the group. He asked Bill how he came to speak such good German. He told him pretty much the whole story of his being a dependent of his dad over in Bitburg and how he had hung around all the youth groups until he was accepted as an equal. Most of them were a bit leery of Americans because of their reputation as boors, he ventured, but after he'd made friends with them - and learned their language instead of the other way around - they accepted him. They all laughed when Bill told them his nickname became 'Ami'; which was short for '*Amerikaner*'.

About an hour after that, they all decided that it was time to break up and go home. Handshakes and holiday wishes were exchanged between pretty much everyone and then people began drifting outside. The Stiles/Garnet party were the last to go. Their host and his wife stood at the door and made sure we knew that they were welcome back any time. Alain didn't make a big production of it, but Bill saw him and Herr Buckmeister with their heads together right after they all left the table. Bill's suspicions were confirmed when Alain refused any money from his dad. He had decided to pay for the dinner instead. His dad asked Alain if he was sure, and then stopped protesting. They shook hands very solemnly, one father to another. Each added a second hand over the other. It was a very emotional moment and Bill saw Molly beginning to tear up again. She wasn't the only one.

[January 1, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - late evening]

Back home, everyone sat around the living room and talked, but not for long. It had been an extensive day for all of them, topped off with a heavy meal. Tomorrow was going to seem longer yet due to wedding preparations. Everyone needed their sleep. Bill's dad said he was good for finding the motel again. And, since he had an even better sense of direction than his son did, Bill didn't worry. Paul and Beth took off. Alain and Suzette said their good nights and went to bed themselves. Molly, Denise, and Bill sat in the living room for a bit longer.

"Bill? If I give you a picture of me would you show it to your brother?" Denise said earnestly.

Molly was mortified. "Denise! That's shameful. What if he already has a girlfriend?"

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that. Does he?"

Bill didn't know, so that's what he told her. "The last time I heard anything from him along that front was that he'd just lost a girlfriend when she moved away. But that was a couple of months ago. He could be involved again if I know him. I can find out, though."

Wanderlust!

"Would you? I think he's really good looking. Not as good as you, but right up there."

"Denise! That's enough, now. Isn't it about your bedtime? Especially after all that wine and champagne?"

She giggled. "Well, maybe I'm just a little tiddy." Now there's a word Bill hadn't heard in a long time 'tiddy'. "I guess I'd better go off to bed. Good night, brother." She giggled again and moved in to kiss him. Molly eyes narrowed, but relaxed again when it hit his cheek.

"Good night, Sister." Denise said as she walked slowly up the stairs.

Bill heard her door close and said "Now, my love. It's just the two of us. How was your evening?"

* * *

"I couldn't imagine a more perfect day than this one. I love your parents so much - especially your mother. She has done so much with herself. And the gift! What a gift. A car! An actual car. That is so fantastic."

* * *

Molly leaned back and rested her arms on the back of the couch. "I am overwhelmed. Your father actually gave us a car?"

"Not just a car, but a camper bus. This means we don't always have to spend money for a motel wherever we go. We'll have a fantastic honeymoon. We can just stop wherever we want and make camp. It'll be great!"

She looked doubtful. "I've never been camping before. We never went. Is it fun?"

"Great fun. We'll stop at grocery stores to get food. Put it in an ice chest, or the refrigerator, and when we find a place to stop we just set up the stove and cook. Nothing to it. We can also make our own privacy as we go. Montana will be a bit cold, but further south it will be warm enough for us. There won't be a lot of other campers either now that school is back in session."

She leaned back further which caused her breasts to stand out more. Bill tore his eyes away from them before she looked up again. "But how will we sleep? Sleeping bags are only for one person aren't they? I've gotten used to having you next to me. Very close, no?"

"Ah." He said with a large grin. "I have news for you. I own a special set of sleeping bags that zip together and makes a double-size bag. Nice and toasty for us. We can sleep as close as we want. You'll love it."

Molly yawned. It was a delicate yawn, but nevertheless a yawn. "Ooooooh. *Excusez-moi!* Time for bed I think."

Bill went around and turned off all the lights then went over to her and held out his arms. She lifted hers and wrapped them around his neck. In one swoop he picked her up. Carefully, he walked to the stairs and carried her all the way up and deposited her on the bed. By the time he'd gone back to close the door and changed into his night clothes, she had fallen asleep.

He went to her and began unbuttoning her blouse and loosening the belt at her waist. She woke once, giggled, and went back to sleep. He peeled her out of her skirt and blouse, loosened her bra, and then took it off. He decided to leave her panties on because he loved seeing her in them. She woke just enough to know he was putting her to bed and scooted over to let him in. Bill turned her to face away from him, put his arm around

Wanderlust!

her waist, and spooned her.

They fell asleep almost immediately. Bill's last conscious thought was that shortly she would be his wife. His wife! What a wonderful prospect to dream on.

Chapter 19: Wanderlust - Chapter 19

[January 2, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - Morning]

The next morning, after sleeping later than usual next to Molly's warm body, Bill went downstairs after washing up and found his father and Alain conferring over coffee at the kitchen table. There was a pad of paper between them and at least one full page of notes was visible. Suzette and Beth were flitting about the kitchen in the middle of making tea. Suzette was the first to spot Bill.

"Good morning, Son. Would you like some breakfast?" She asked.

"Definitely," he replied. "I can fix it myself if you want. Is the tea water hot?"

"Maybe. I will fix it. Some eggs and bacon perhaps?" She touched the teapot with a finger. "Yes, the tea water is hot. Over in that cupboard you will find the tea."

Bill walked over and pulled the door open. Aligned in neat rows were quite a few boxes of tea. He chose an Earl Grey blend and packed a tea ball; then dropped it into a large mug. Suzette poured hot water over it and he let it steep.

"Bill," said Paul. "Alain and I have been thinking of things that might be a snag for you working up here. We've made a list and need your input."

Bill added two spoons of sugar to his tea, sat down next to Alain and reached for the pad. "Let's see what you have already. I've been thinking about it too." He read the list, which contained about six or seven items. The only one he hadn't thought about very much was where they - he and Molly - would live. They certainly couldn't live here in this house.

Alain spoke up. "There is a very nice apartment in a building across from my business office that will be vacant in about six weeks. It is a small apartment, one bedroom, but it does have a room to use as an office and a large living room. I have been in it. It used to belong to my secretary but she is moving to another building. And you could stay here until it comes free."

Paul nodded. "Looks like a nice place from what Alain says. Second floor with a small balcony off the living room. It looks down on the street."

Bill thought back to when they'd visited Alain's office and tried to remember what the street looked like. "What about parking?" He asked.

"There is a small parking garage at the end of the block." Alain said. "You can park on the street, but you have to remember what day it is so you can move the car for street cleaning. It is better to use the garage. It's what my secretary does. It doesn't cost much per month."

"Is the whole thing very expensive?" Bill asked, worried that he couldn't afford it.

"We can work with that on your salary," said Alain with a smile. "You will be able to afford it."

Wanderlust!

Paul pointed to the couple of items concerning the working permits. Alain explained how they worked - which was quite different from American work permits. They could be renewed, six months at a time, for up to five years. After that, the person had to leave Canada for ninety days and then re-enter. At which time, another five years of work permits would be established. It was a great system.

"Well, so much for than, then," said Paul. "Looks like there isn't any real barrier to taking the job then, Bill. Have you given any thought to college?"

"I, ah, thought I might get into the swing of purchasing and then see what courses here in Montreal would help prop up that type of work." Bill said. He turned to Alain. "Do you have the equivalent of an MBA up here?"

"A what?" He asked.

"A Masters of Business Administration. It's a degree that teaches deeply into economics and there is a specialty aimed at international business. That might be the best thing to try for."

Alain agreed with a nod of his head. Bill's dad asked his son if he were planning on a full-time or part-time degree.

"I imagine that the part-time would be better - if that's offered. I can check on all that after the honeymoon. It's too much to think about right now.

"I agree," said Paul. "Now, about your trip. Have you figured out where you're going?"

"We thought we'd take a plane down to Great Falls, pick up the bus - thank you again for that - and just drive west with no real destination other than California. Who knows?"

Being a military man, Bill's dad put a great deal of trust in planning. He said he'd have to find a good road atlas and give us an idea what would be the best routes to take. The three of them continued to take notes on the pad.

In the background, Suzette and Beth were comparing notes on food. Having just described how to make a batch of holiday treats called Futchins, Beth was writing down the instructions and contents for use by Suzette. Since Beth was never much of a 'measurer', Suzette was having problems translating a 'pinch' into something she could write down. They finally agreed on a common unit of measure called *un petit peu*. This caused a burst of laughter which the men joined into after being told what it referred to.

"I wonder if Molly is up yet. I'd better check so she won't miss breakfast." Bill said, getting up and heading for the stairs. When he got there, the door to Molly's bedroom was closed. He pushed it open and went inside. Glancing around, he didn't see Molly but heard someone in the bathroom. Without thinking, he pushed the door open and said "Boo!"

Denise gave a shriek and grabbed for a towel to cover up. She wasn't completely nude, but dressed as she was in thin panties and a bra she might as well of been. "Out! Out!" She ordered. "Shame on you!" She spun him around and pushed him out the door; then slammed it.

Red-faced, Bill slunk back into the bedroom and sat down on the bed heavily. Molly came through the door in her robe. "What is going on?" She demanded. "Why did Denise yell like that?"

"I, um, thought it was you in the bathroom and ... I ..." His voice faded out in embarrassment.

Wanderlust!

"Pushed the door open and went in; right?" Molly said with mock severity.

Bill looked up and searched her face. She was standing there, tapping her foot, and glaring at him. As he stammered out the rest of the story, Molly began to snicker. By the time he was finished, she was in stitches. Bill didn't think it was so hilarious, but apparently Molly did. He heard the bathroom door open and Denise came out - this time in a robe - and joined the laughter at Bill's expense.

Behind Bill's back, Denise flashed her robe open to let Molly know what she was wearing. This sent the two women into another gale of laughter. Sensing that the better part of valor was to beat a hasty retreat, Bill gathered up as much dignity as he had left and oozed out the door.

For a full-court press wedding, theirs would have taken weeks of planning. But, since this was to be a civil wedding at a government office, there really wasn't much to get ready for other than plan out who wore what.

Molly had already picked out what she was going to wear. Denise was going to be the Maid of Honor so her clothing should compliment her sister's. That only left the groom's side - Bill. The suit he purchased the other day seemed like a good choice. Molly had already complimented him on how it looked so he was also apparently set.

Bill had put the two wedding rings back into the original box. Molly was wearing the engagement ring from that set. She hardly took it off. Suzette had called down to the Prefect's office to determine if they allowed champagne inside their office. Being mostly a French staff, she found that not only was it allowed - it was expected. That went down on the list of things to buy.

Flowers had been mentioned, but not actually looked in to. Now Paul and Beth spoke up and said that they would provide all the flowers and especially the bridal bouquet. To this end, Paul left in his rental car, taking Alain with him, to buy flowers and champagne.

By the time they got back, it was almost time for everyone to leave again. This time, they were headed over to Alain's office for a New Year's party with his staff. After promising not to drink very much, Alain was allowed to circulate through the meeting room and personally greet everyone who worked for him. All three stores were closed and every one of the employees was at the party. He introduced Bill to pretty much everyone in the room as his soon-to-be son-in-law. He made sure to let each store's purchasing agent know what Bill's job would be once he got back from his honeymoon.

Bill could tell that Alain was a great employer. He was genuinely liked by everyone who worked for him. Some of his employees had worked with the firm for almost twenty years and most were over the ten-year mark. The party itself was only scheduled to run for two hours, but it lasted for almost four. Everyone seemed reluctant to leave. It finally began to break up when Suzette noticed that Alain was sitting down much more than he had been at first. It was time to leave.

The Garnet family, en masse, said their farewells, dressed up in their winter coats, and drifted out the door to go home. Denise drove since both Alain and Suzette both had had a bit too much champagne. Bill had managed to parlay two glasses of the bubbly into the entire four hours so he drove his parent's rental back home.

When they arrived, they all headed for the kitchen and began boiling hot water for tea and also preparing a big pot of coffee. The dining room table was where everyone ended up as they drifted in and out from the kitchen. Soon, conversation began to wane and thoughts of dinner surfaced. The decision was finally made to just 'wing it', as Bill's mom called it. Plates of cold cuts, bread, and condiments were put on the table and they all made their own supper.

Wanderlust!

Upstairs in Molly's room, Bill and she were having a discussion concerning Bill's interrupted education. Molly spoke in favor of continuing it. "Bill, I wish you would reconsider putting off your college indefinitely. College is very important and education is always taken into account in the job market."

"I know, Honey. But I don't want to just not go - I want to put it off for a while so I can give my full attention to you."

Molly put her arms around Bill's shoulders. "That's sweet, but I still think you should make plans to go this spring. I'm sure we can find some place to stay. What was the town again?"

"Missoula. And, I wouldn't be too sure of that. There are lots of housing for students, but nothing I'd be happy living in. Most of them are fleabags or so poorly furnished it would be like living in a garret. Not something I want for my new bride." He kissed her on the nose.

Molly wrinkled that same nose. "Oh, they can't be that bad. Can they?"

"Well, maybe not as bad as all that, but housing is pretty expensive and I wouldn't have any job down there unless I could find something like dishwashing or clearing tables."

* * *

'Maybe I could find something to work at. Even with other young girls going to college, there should be somewhere for a full-time worker. A waitress perhaps? Or possibly hairdressing. I do Denise's all the time. Let me ask.'

* * *

"I could find something to do couldn't I?"

Bill held her at arm's length, his protective (and chauvinistic) side appearing. "No! I will not have you working to support me. That is just not right. I have some money right now, and can maybe get more, but I don't want to spend it right now for education. I want to be able to go on our honeymoon and not think about such things. Can we put this discussion off until we get back?"

* * *

'Goodness! That was not a good idea. I love him for it, but how will we live then? I will ask later, as he says.'

* * *

"Absolutely!" Molly said, and kissed Bill lightly on the lips. "We will talk of it no more. Do you want the bathroom first, or shall I go now?"

Bill released her and sat down at the desk. "You go ahead; I want to do some more trip planning. My dad bought a nice road atlas today and gave it to me."

Molly leaned down and kissed the top of his head. "All right. I'll go first, then. I may be a while because I want a nice, hot, bath with bubbles. Do you want to scrub my back?" She smiled coquettishly.

"Call me when you're ready."

Wanderlust!

"Don't worry. I will." She closed the door. Shortly, Bill heard water running into the huge tub. Fantasies danced in his head.

Molly called from the bathroom and Bill went in and knelt by the tub. She handed him a huge sponge and he began washing her back. His touch included a bit more than her back, however, and soon things got a bit more complicated. Somehow, his clothing got misplaced which allowed him to slide into the tub behind her. She lay back in his arms, pulling bubbles up onto her chest and flicking her fingers in his face.

Bill's hands were a bit busy also, sliding carefully across her tummy and along her rib cage until they began to nudge the underside of her breasts. His erection, trapped between her back and his stomach, caused Molly to giggle.

"Later. I'm sure Denise can hear us in here and we don't want to stunt her growth."

"I have a feeling that we wouldn't be stunting any of her growth; quite the opposite, I think." Bill ventured.

"Perhaps you're right. But, just the same..."

"Okay. I'll stop." Bill pushed forward on Molly's shoulders to relieve the pressure. Then he whispered in her ear. "But I refuse to go soft; so there!"

Startled, Molly gave an explosive laugh and then covered it with her hand. "Stop! You're bad."

"Yes, very bad." Bill hissed as he carefully got out of the tub and picked up a towel.

Once he had dried off, she checked his growing beard in the mirror and pronounced it didn't need a trim. He brushed his teeth and left the bathroom - the front of his towel leading the way.

Molly finally came out of the bathroom smelling of roses. It wasn't too strong because Bill smelled of the same scent. He'd put on his sleeping shorts and made up the bed for the night. Molly crept across the room, wrapped in her little blue nightgown that Bill liked so much, and slid into bed next to him.

She cuddled up next to his side and put her knee over his thighs so she could lay her head on his shoulder. He put his arm around her and kissed her forehead.

"Je t'aime et je t'aimerai toujours." He murmured.

"Et je Suis pour toi toujours, mon amour." She responded. *"Vous devenez trÃ¨s bonne en FranÃ§ais, n'Ãªtes-vous pas?"*

"Je l'espÃ¨re. Comme dit ma mÃ¨re, j'ai un bon professeur, non?"

Molly giggled at that. "Yes, I guess you do."

"My dad said that during the Korean War they used to call the girls that the GI's slept with 'pillow dictionaries'. Same principle, but vastly different circumstances to be sure."

Molly pulled a chest hair. "You better think so, Buster!"

"Ouch. How would you say that in French?"

Wanderlust!

"What? Ouch? *AÃ~e!*"

"No, silly. 'Pillow dictionary'."

"Dictionnaire oreiller."

"Ach, so. Ich verstehe."

"Oh, stop showing off you goose. Kiss me."

And he did.

Chapter 20: Wanderlust - Chapter 20

[January 3, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - The wedding day]

A splendid day dawned outside. The sun was barely up when Bill woke. He was very keyed up. This was The Big Day for he and Molly. Today, at eleven in the morning, the two of them would stand in front of the Magistrate and say their vows. She was still asleep, sprawled over half the bed, arms spread wide, and face down with her head buried in the pillow. Bill slipped out of bed and closed the door to the bathroom quietly behind him. A quick brush of his teeth, a little clipping of his beard, and a very short shower later, he went back into the bedroom.

He knelt beside the bed and began smoothing his palm up and down Molly's spine. She stirred, turned to face him, and smiled. Bill thought she lit up the room every time she did that.

"Good morning, my love. Did you sleep well?" She asked sleepily.

"*Bonjour, mon amour. J'ai tr s bien dormi.*" He whispered back. "*Je t'aime.*"

"Oh my. You are learning very fast. And, I love you too, very much, my darling. What time is it?"

He turned the bedside clock around so she could see it clearly. "Just seven? Ooh. Let me sleep a few minutes longer, please?"

"I'll give you ten minutes more and then out you come. We have a very busy day today."

She seemed to become aware that she had virtually no clothes on. "Hmmm. I don't rememberâ Did youâ take my clothes off last night?"

"I did indeed, but since it was before midnight I thought it was okay to do so. I won't peek today though. I'll be back up with a mug of coffee and a croissant in ten minutes." Bill patted the blanket over her butt and stood. By the time he reached the door, she was back asleep.

It took Bill almost twenty minutes to get the coffee made as he was the first one up, surprisingly. He was thinking that either Denise or Suzette would be up by now but neither was. Once the coffee was brewed and a hot croissant buttered, he went back upstairs. Molly had woken herself up and was in the bathroom. He could hear Denise talking to her. No actual conversation, but just girlish tones and giggles. No doubt mapping the day out.

Molly and Denise emerged wearing robes from neck to ankle. "Shoo, Bill! We need to get your bride ready. Go downstairs and boil an egg or something." Denise commanded, pushing against Bill's chest and forcing him backwards to the door.

He raised a finger to halt her advance and began to quote:

"As Shakespeare wrote in King John:

**'Therefore, to be possess'd with double pomp,
To guard a title that was rich before,**

Wanderlust!

**To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light
To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."**

"Somehow, I just knew you could quote Shakespeare." Murred Denise. "How do you do that? I can't remember a thing even after I'd just read it."

Molly spoke up. "He told me once that he used to be a member of a Shakespearian Group. He's done all kinds of plays. Don't get him started - except out the door, Denise!"

Bill tossed an abbreviated Romeo's 'parting is such sweet sorrow' speech over his shoulder as he made tracks to the door. Just outside, he heard Denise say to Molly "If you don't take him, I will. *Mon Dieu!* He quotes Shakespeare."

Smiling, Bill went back downstairs and actually wanted to boil an egg or two. Or, at least he started to. Suzette was bustling about the kitchen banging pots and rattling pans. He offered to help and got a grateful glance. "Here." She handed him a knife and a slab of bacon. "You do the bacon first, and then we will scramble some eggs. Will a dozen be enough?"

"Probably, if we all have a second helping. Molly and I have had a cup of coffee and a croissant each. I'm still a bit hungry though so eggs are fine. You have a big bowl?"

She opened a cabinet and pulled out a nice mixing bowl. He cracked the entire crate of eggs into it and began beating them, and then set that aside to get to work on the bacon. It was a slab and hadn't been sliced yet. Just the way Bill liked to have it. He picked up the knife and began cutting strips. Suzette watched him for a moment then spoke. "My goodness, you do that very well, Bill."

"Lots of practice, Mama. Every year for a number of years I butcher my own Elk and deer. The key is a very sharp knife and a steady hand."

"After last night, my hand is anything but steady. How much wine did we drink?"

"Five bottles, I think. Plus the champagne. All for a very good cause I expect."

"Certainly! But, oooh, my poor head. It is pounding."

Bill scrounged around the kitchen for the ingredients of a Bloody Mary - including a small dollop of vodka - stirred it up in a glass and offered it to her. She sniffed, stuck out her tongue, and dipped it into the glass. "You just drink it down, Mama. All of it at once." She asked. Bill nodded.

She wrinkled her nose, but tipped it up and drank. She gasped for air when she was done and set the glass down on the table. With both hands planted on the edge of the table, she carefully rotated her head about. Various snaps and crackles were heard. He went behind her and began massaging her neck muscles with his thumbs on either side. She groaned but he could sense she was feeling better.

"*Bonjour, bonjour, bonjour, Ã tous.*" Boomed Alain's voice from the open door. Suzette jumped a little but Bill continued rubbing. "What have we this fine morning? Ah, eggs and bacon. My favorite."

Wanderlust!

"Is he always this cheerful in the morning?" Bill asked Suzette in a stage whisper.

"*Oui*. Unfortunately. It is a curse."

"For me, it is not." Replied Alain. "You go ahead. I'll get some coffee." He limped over to the pot and poured a mug. With raised eyes he asked the two of them if they wanted more. They both nodded and he poured. "Ah! It is a fine morning! If you will notice, I am not using a cane."

Bill thought there was something different. "So I see. Is that wise?"

"I called the doctor yesterday and he said if I felt like it I could go without but not to get to overly tired or I could fall. That would not be very good."

"Indeed." Said Suzette. "Bill, would you call the girls for me?"

"Sure will." He went into the hall and halfway up the stairs. "Denise! Molly! Breakfast is ready!"

"*Un instant. Nous sommes Ã peu prÃ©s habillÃ©s.*" Denise answered.

"What's that about dresses?" Bill called back.

"I said 'we are just about dressed'." She said again.

"Okay. We'll be waiting for you both then. *Vite, vite.*"

Bill went back into the kitchen and helped load down the dining room table with the goodies. A huge mound of toast and croissants sat in the middle with the platters of eggs and bacon on either side. Everyone dug in the moment Molly, still in her encompassing wrap, and Denise got there. He felt somebody playing footsie with him. Both girls sat across from him so it could be either one. Bill figured it was Molly as he didn't need any complications with Denise. He liked her - very much - but only as a sister-in-law, nothing more.

That got him thinking an idle thought. If his brother did get involved with Denise, and they got married, would that make her his sister-in-law-sister-in-law twice over? Very complicated to be sure.

Breakfast was over and the dishes were being stacked for washing when the doorbell went off. Bill's parents had arrived. Lots of smiles, handshakes, and the presenting of flowers to Suzette from his dad. She sent Denise off to get a vase with water for them. After placing them on the window sill, they all sat down to talk.

Bill grew more and more nervous as time went by. It was silly of him, but for some reason he had a bad case of jitters. He'd been out in the big world for over six years now, and he was nervous?! Molly seemed to sense this and moved over next to him from the chair she was on. She took his hand and smoothed the back of it; then leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Thank you," he murmured. "I needed that." She just smiled back at him with those deep blue eyes. He began to calm down immediately.

Alain and Paul seemed to be in deep discussion as well as Beth and Suzette. Occasionally, one of them would ask a question of either Molly or Bill, but generally speaking the three younger ones kept to themselves. As Denise, Bill and Molly talked, Bill couldn't help but think to himself just how unbelievably lucky he was. Molly was positively glowing with good health and good cheer. He had to blink back sudden tears of joy as he watched her talking animatedly to Denise. He also had no hope of translating their rapid-fire French so he just sat back and idly rubbed Molly's back and shoulders.

Wanderlust!

Molly turned to Bill and smiled. "Denise just asked me if you had the rings. That would be a disaster if they went missing."

He made a show of patting every pocket, turning them inside out, and placing a panicked look on his face.

* * *

'What is he doing now? Oh no! He has lost the rings? We must find them quickly! But wait. Why is Denise smiling?'

* * *

Denise caught on, giggled, and that started Molly off. She looked at Bill and giggled also. "What in the world is so funny?" Beth asked from across the room.

"I tried to pull Molly's leg but it came off in my hand, *ma mÃ´re*. She asked me if I had the ring set, so I made a production of searching for them. Fell kind of flat."

"What is this 'pull my leg'?" Denise asked. "I have never heard this before."

Molly retorted with mock surprise. "All those American boys and you have never heard this? It means to joke with you; to make a funny."

"Oh." It was clear she didn't see at all, so Bill explained it a bit further.

"It actually means, Denise that I attempt to do or say something that means the opposite of what I really mean. Like, when I stood up and patted all my pockets for the rings. I was 'pulling your leg'."

"But what of it coming off?"

"Well, that's where you turned the tables on me and began giggling. That's the 'came off in my hand' part. I tried to joke, and you didn't fall for it."

"Ah! Now I truly do see what you mean. Hmmmm. Pulling your leg. I will have to remember that and try it out at the tea shop."

Bill leaned forward towards Denise's ear. "Say that to the right guy and he'll be putty in your hands." He whispered. She colored at the thought that conjured up.

Suzette stood and motioned to Molly. "Come, my daughter, you should begin dressing." She pushed Alain in the chest as he started to rise also. "*Non!* The women only!" All of them in the room stood and trooped upstairs. "Alain, perhaps the three of you should go ahead of us to the Magistrate, no?"

Bill glanced at his watch and saw that she may be right. No way could the ceremony start without Molly, but he remembered that Molly had told him her family was very traditional. He knew he probably wouldn't get to see her again until they stood before the Magistrate. Paul helped Alain to his feet; they all donned their coats and gloves, and then Alain called upstairs. "We go now. Eleven hundred - sharp!"

"We know, we know," Denise's voice floated back down. "Now go!"

Wanderlust!

They went. Taking the smaller of the two cars, they drove slowly down the street then accelerated onto the elevated highway towards downtown Montreal. With each passing mile Bill got more and more nervous. He began to fidget. His dad was driving and caught his eye in the mirror. He smiled and winked. Bill blinked back at him. It was beginning to finally sink in that in just a short time he would have a wife. A wife! Of course, he knew how it had happened, but just knowing that didn't calm him one bit. Good thing he wasn't a nail biter or he'd have chewed his fingers to the quick.

They parked in the municipal lot and locked up. Alain dropped some coins into the slot and turned the crank. Two hours. Before that expired, Bill knew he'd be married - or a melted down wreck. He stopped at the water fountain and drank a good deal of cold water. That seemed to help a little. The butterflies were kept at bay and he felt a lot better.

[January 3, 1964]

[Magistrate's Office, Downtown Montreal, Canada]

The three of them entered the Magistrate's outer office. It was paneled in dark wood; walnut, Bill guessed. There was a desk near the window flanked by the Canadian flag on one side and the flag of Montreal on the other. An elderly lady was typing paperwork. She looked up and smiled at them. "One moment, please. You are the Garnet wedding party?"

"Some of us," Bill answered. "The rest to follow very soon. I hope." He added under his breath. She had good ears. She smiled again and patted him on the arm as she passed.

"Do not be nervous. We have done hundreds of these before."

Bill suppressed the obvious answer of 'yeah, but I haven't' and just smiled back. She tapped on the ornate door and was told to come in. She announced them and held out her hand for them to enter.

The office was a bit larger than the outer office and smelled of pipe tobacco. The same dark wood paneling was on three sides but the fourth side was almost all glass. It looked out over a huge square with statues, pigeons, and lots of people. They were all introduced to the Magistrate who spoke excellent English. He welcomed them to Montreal and told us how thrilled he was that Monsieur Garnet and his family had chosen his office to perform the ceremony.

Many smiles and handshakes later they were asked to sit. The secretary came in from the anteroom bringing a tray with cups of coffee, cream, and sugar. They all took some. The caffeine finally killed the butterflies in Bill's stomach. The Magistrate's phone buzzed and, when he picked it up and listened for a second, he informed us that the rest of the party was in the outer office and the wedding would begin very shortly.

[January 3, 1964]

[Magistrate's Office, Montreal, Canada - 1100 hours]

Bill was directed to stand in an open area in front of the magistrate's desk. The magistrate himself stood behind a small lectern and smiled at everyone. Then Bill heard the door behind him open so, with great care, he turned.

* * *

'Mon dieu, he looks so handsome standing there. Oh please don't let me cry. Please. Please.'

Wanderlust!

* * *

Molly was beautiful. She was heavenly. She had an enigmatic grin that showed off her fine, white teeth. Bill's heart leapt and began beating hard in his chest. He barely registered that Denise was decked out in her finest also. He did catch her slow wink however.

Alain took Molly's hand and tucked it in his elbow. The two of them walked towards Bill slowly. Suzette was already sniffing into a tissue. Beth was doing practically the same thing right next to her. Paul, stoic as always, was standing at parade rest, taking it all in. When Alain reached the magistrate's desk, he took Molly's hand and put it into Bill's outstretched palm. Bill closed his fingers and guided Molly to his left side, and then they both turned to the Magistrate.

He began: "*Mes invit s, nous sommes r unis ici aujourd'hui* !" 'My guests, we are gathered here today!'

The ceremony, spoken only in French, as was proper for this province, lasted a brief fifteen minutes. Bill's dad, acting as best man, handed him the ring at the appropriate moment. Bill slid it onto Molly's finger as he parroted the words given to him by the Magistrate. More words were intoned and then Molly turned to Denise who handed her Bill's ring. "With this ring, I wed thee." She said in English, looking fully into Bill's face.

* * *

'Oh yes. With all my heart I take this man to be my husband; forever.'

* * *

Bill kissed her and it was over. Tears of joy, laughter, relief, and sadness overwhelmed Suzette and Beth. This got Denise misty-eyed and even Paul and Alain weren't immune. Bill had to admit that he felt the same tendencies himself, but fought them. Instead, he hugged Molly to his side and they both beamed into the camera wielded by the administrative assistant. Several shots from different angles were taken. She informed them that the pictures would be available this afternoon if they wanted to pick them up, but they could be mailed also. She also said that the third picture, the one with just Molly and Bill, would be given to the newspaper.

The assistant left, but returned quickly with another tray. This time it was loaded with champagne flutes, small, but very nice glassware. "*Sant !*" Said the Magistrate, and they all drank. Everyone stood around for a few moments, sipping the wine, and then the outer door opened and a very pretty girl entered with, presumably, her mother. Another wedding was due to be performed in moments. The merged Stiles and Garnet families had to make room for them.

Handshakes and shoulder slapping ensured as they took their leave. Alain and Paul lingered behind a little and Bill figured they were paying for the wedding. Bill turned to Molly just as she turned to him; reached out and pulled her tight to him. "Oh, Bill. I am so happy," Molly sniffled in his ear.

"I don't think I could be any happier than I am right now, Molly. My whole life is right here in my arms. I'll always love you." They hugged even tighter and kissed a long, drawn out, kiss of pure passion. After a few moments, Bill's mother came over and hugged them also.

"I am so proud of you, Honey." She said to her son. "Molly is a wonderful girl. I am thrilled to have her in the family." She was joined by Paul, Alain, and Suzette. They all stood around the newlyweds. Bill's dad cleared his throat but indicated that Alain had something to say.

Wanderlust!

Alain swallowed a lump in his throat then spoke. "Bill, my son, I want you to know that Suzette and I consider you a complete member of our family now. Everything we have is yours. Your father and I have pooled our resources and would like to present this to you." He held out a key with a metal tag on it. The tag read 'Parc Suites Hotel'. "We, both our families, have reserved the bridal suite for three days for you and Molly. We know you wanted to head out on your honeymoon right away, but, please indulge us and stay here for a while and enjoy Montreal."

This time Bill did break up a bit. Alain and Bill embraced in the French style, and then Molly joined them. Paul hovered a bit, and then put an arm across Bill's back. "I â lwe â l would be happy to do this for everyone." Bill responded. Molly was softly crying into a tissue. She just nodded.

"Well, for goodness sake! This is a wedding, remember. Be happy!" Cried Denise. "So, go check in!" This broke the tension and they all smiled and went down the hallway to the parking lot.

Denise pulled two small bags out of one car and put them into the other. Alain handed me the keys to it and hugged me again. "Take care of my little one, Bill."

* * *

Molly watched Bill, yes, her husband now, and her father as they embraced. She stifled more tears and smiled. 'So. Now I start a new life with a wonderful man who will love and defend me. Please, God, let me live up to his expectations.'

* * *

"I will with all my heart, Papa." Bill beamed at him; then opened the passenger door and handed Molly into it. As they did, Denise sprinkled rice over their heads. She also pulled Molly's collar open and stuffed some down her back and then stuck a bunch into Bill's pocket.

"There. That will give them something to talk about down there in the lobby!" She said with glee. "I wish I could be there to see it."

After goodbyes all around, and some more sniffing on the parts of their mothers, Molly and Bill drove off. He handed her a tissue and she dabbed at her eyes. With a final sniffle, she turned to him, beaming. "Do you know where to go, my husband?"

"Of course not, my wife. I am just driving. Surely something will turn up. We men will never ask for directions, you know."

She giggled and looked at the key again. "Turn right at the next corner and go straight on Rue University but don't go on the causeway; stay under it." At Rue Prince Author they turned right again and went down to Avenue du Parc. This, Bill figured, due to the similarities in name, was the street the hotel was on. At the next block, he pulled up under the marquee and hopped out. There was a roller cart there being pushed by a bellboy. A car attendant jumped into the driver's seat and drove away after their two bags were put on the cart. The freshly minted married couple turned and entered the hotel.

[January 3, 1964]

[Parc Suites Hotel, Montreal, Canada]

Wanderlust!

It was an opulent lobby. All polished brass and plush furniture arranged in small sitting groups. The desk was across the expanse of the open floor. It was warm in the lobby and, before Bill realized what would happen, Molly opened her coat and flapped it off her shoulders. A cascade of white granules rattled to the floor. All conversation stopped for a distance of about thirty feet around them. Molly turned bright red. Not to be outdone, or undone, Bill did the same and made sure that he added to the cascade of rice from his coat pocket. They had made a grand entrance. Several people sitting or standing around clapped politely and smiled as the two of them stepped over to the desk.

"*Bon aprÃs-midi, Monsieur et Madame!*" Said the desk clerk with a huge grin.

"I'm, ah, sorry about theâ" Bill stammered, indicating the rice on the floor. "I, ah, we, um, just got married." 'Boy, talk about stating the obvious,' Bill thought. Hell, now he was getting red around the collar. Molly was beyond help.

"That, *Monsieur*, is evident." He said with a quiet chuckle. "Do not worry about it at all. It will be swept up immediately. You would be *Monsieur* Stiles, correct?"

"Yes. I really am sorry. We are Mister and Missus Stiles."

"We have been anticipating your arrival. We have you in the bridal suite. Top floor. The bellman will take you things up if you will just sign here and follow him." Bill signed, took Molly's arm, and they beat feet. Just as Bill turned, the desk clerk hit his bell and announced for everyone to hear "The Honeymoon Suite, Carl." All in definite capital letters.

Now, even more enthusiastic clapping sounded around the newlyweds. Bill felt like he could walk on air. He had Molly at his side and they were going up; in the hotel and in the world.

The elevator dinged as they hit the top floor. The bellman led them down a carpeted hallway which deadened their footfalls. He had taken the key from Bill and was now opening the door. Bill thanked him and assured him that he could take it from here while palming a tip. The bellman smiled, tipped his hat, and walked back down the corridor. "Are you ready for this?" Bill asked Molly, preparing to lift her over the threshold.

* * *

'Oh, am I ever ready for this.'

* * *

[January 3, 1964]

[Bridal Suite, Parc Suites Hotel, Montreal, Canada]

"I have been ready for this for many years. Now it all comes true." She held out her arms and encircled Bill's neck as he put his arms behind her knees and shoulders. Shifting his weight slightly, he did a smooth lift. She hugged him, nestling her cheek into the hollow of his throat. "*Je t'aime, Mon Mari*" she whispered and he echoed "*Je t'aime, ma femme*". Bill carried her all the way into the huge suite. There were two couches arranged around a low table, a desk against the far wall, a double-wide picture window with a gorgeous view of the river and, most importantly, a giant four-poster covered bed.

Bill wavered between the bed and one of the couches, reluctant to even put Molly down. The bed finally won. He laid her down gently and bent to kiss her. "You have no idea how much I love you, Molly my wife."

Wanderlust!

"Perhaps only as much as I love you, my husband." She repeated it in French, which, to him, sounded way cooler. "*Peut-Être que, autant que Je t'aime, Mon Mari.*" They kissed again, much longer and with considerably more passion. He opened her coat and lifted gently on her shoulder so she could slip out of it. Then the other arm. Bill stood and peeled his coat off also; tossing both to the couch.

Bill bent back down, took Molly's left hand, and kissed the ring he had just placed there not two hours before - this time for real. He started kissing his way up that arm until he reached her neck. With infinite slowness, he unbuttoned the top button of her pale blue blouse and kissed the skin thus exposed. She groaned and attempted to pull him closer. "Not yet, my love. I want this to be as perfect as I can make it. As if we had never done this before - and we haven't - not as man and wife."

Carefully, Bill unbuttoned each button and moved the focus of his kisses downwards. When he reached her new, lace-topped bra he stopped. "Surprise," she said, grinning up at him. "This one opens in front." And so it did.

"*Mon dieu,*" Molly gasped. "Look above us!"

Hidden a filmy curtain of lace, the entire overhead canopy of the bed was mirrored. There were string pulls on both the front bedposts that allowed the curtain to be drawn aside. Molly began to grin and then dissolved into honest laughter. "Oh my. That is too much. Shall we open the curtain?"

"Of course. The better for our enjoyment, my love."

And it was.

* * *

Molly lay back and caught her breath. "This is infinitely better now that we are married. He is such a gentle man when making love, but I know he can be stern when necessary also. Oh how I love him so.'

* * *

Afterwards, as they lay back, panting from delicious exertion. Molly crawled up and laid her head on Bill's chest looking up at him from below. Love shown from her eyes as she kissed each of his nipples and bit one gently.

"It will be better, much better, next time I think." Said Molly with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh, my god. I don't know if I can survive." Bill said in mock terror. He kissed her and tasted of himself. "And now, it is time for a nice, hot bath - if we have a bath, that is. We haven't even checked that." He said with a laugh. Bill stood up next to the bed and, completely nude, walked to the bathroom, peered in and said "Wow!"

"What?" Molly asked. He heard the bed creak slightly and then she padded over to him. She looked in also. "Oh, my goodness! A Jacuzzi!" She shot past him and began turning valves to fill it. From behind she looked just as good as she did from the front. And Bill knew she was now his wife forever.

Chapter 21: Wanderlust - Chapter 21

[January 3-6, 1964]

[Parc Suites Hotel and Montreal, Canada]

Mister and Missus Stiles spent the entire three days in glorious bliss. They wandered about downtown Montreal during the day and returned to the hotel for lovemaking whenever the mood struck them. They took their dinners, as well as most meals, in the hotel's excellent dining room. The first day of their stay, they ate there and were waited on by a young guy barely older than Bill. His name turned out to be Andre and only by accident did he trigger gales of embarrassed laughter from both Molly and Bill.

Since they had ordered a Chinese dish, Andre innocently asked them if they would like rice with it. Thinking back to that afternoon when they'd dropped rice all over the lobby, the two of them broke into smiles, then snickers, and then full-scale laughter. He looked puzzled until Bill filled him in on what had happened; then he laughed also. From that evening onwards they would always get asked if they wanted rice with whatever they ordered. It was an event to be treasured they were sure.

In their meanderings about town, they located a great department store that sold traveling coats. Molly tried on several but it wasn't until she'd got into a dark blue jacket that she decided she had to have it. The blue perfectly complemented the golden yellow of her hair and the deep blue of her eyes. It would do nicely. Bill bought it for her.

Then, they went looking for something to buy Bill. He gave Molly two hundred dollars and told her to go wild. She looked at him carefully. "Are you sure we can afford this?"

"Of course. I told you, Molly, that everything I own belongs to you. We need traveling clothes, so go buy traveling clothes. I am especially interested in things we can wear in the camper when we start our honeymoon in it."

"Ah. Then we need flannel things?"

"Flannel would be good, but nothing too garish. Some flannels can be pretty ugly."

"You would look very nice in a brown-checked flannel shirt and dark jeans. With your beard and a stocking cap you would look like a lumberjack, a *bÃ»cheron*. Let's go look for something like that."

They did; and they found it. An outfitter's store down near the river had just the items. Molly bought Bill three shirts of varying colors but with the basic theme of checks or squares, and four pairs of denim jeans. He had to admit: he did look good in them. All he needed, but wouldn't get, was a pipe and he'd be Mark Trail. Bill had to explain who that was to Molly.

[January 6, 1964]

[Parc Suites Hotel, Montreal, Canada - Noon]

All too soon the newlywed's brief stay at the hotel was over. They sadly packed and rang down for a bellman and to have their bill prepared. The door buzzer sounded and Bill let the bellman and his cart in. He gathered up the bags and set them on the cart. Molly took a last look around and with eyes glistening with tears she turned and left the room. Bill hugged her to his side in the elevator and kissed her forehead. "We're on our

Wanderlust!

way, my love. A short flight to Montana and we start the second part of our honeymoon."

"I know, Bill, but it still seems sad to be leaving here." He kissed the corners of each eye and then her lips.

"Perk up. Now you get to go back and be interrogated by Denise. Be sure to tell her about the mirror."

Molly looked horrified. "Oh. And she will ask too." Molly giggled. "She won't get anything out of me though. My lips are sealed."

Molly cracked up when Bill wiggled his eyebrows at what she'd just said. "Oh, you're horrible!"

At the desk, they were pleasantly surprised to find that every bit of their bill was already taken care of. The manager even came out of his office to bid them goodbye. He told the two of them that their parents had told him they weren't to pay anything for their three day stay. Since Bill had been planning to add a nice tip for the chambermaids, he simply gave the manager a hundred dollars and told him to make sure they split it evenly. He said he would take care of it for him. With a handshake for Bill, and a hand kiss-heel click for Molly, the manager bowed them out of the hotel. "*Bonne chance!*" He called and they waved back.

Their car was brought to the marquee and the attendant hopped out. A five-dollar bill for him and away they went back to Molly's house. On the way there, Molly said very little. When Bill asked her what was up, she was evasive; but not overly so. Bill put it down to bridal nerves.

[January 6, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - afternoon]

"Mama! Papa! We are home!" Molly called at the door. "Anyone home?"

Denise came crashing down the stairs two at a time and Suzette came in from the kitchen. Everyone hugged and kissed each other dutifully and Molly asked where her dad was. Suzette answered. "He's gone to his office. The doctor cleared him to go back to work for a bit each day. He's been like a bear pacing around his den with nothing to do; pacing back and forth and growling at everyone else. He finally called the doctor and bullied him into letting him resume work. I was glad to see him go, the grouch. That is correct - 'grouch'?"

Bill laughed and nodded. "It is indeed. My father had the mumps once and had to stay in the bedroom for eight days. My mother said it was like living in a mountain lion's den by the time he was released. He was always growling about something."

Denise had taken Molly's arm and was towing her up the stairs. When Bill started to follow, Denise froze him with a glance. "No. This is just us girls here. You go read a book or something."

Sounded like a good idea to him. He went into his bag and produced a brand new road atlas for the United States and began mapping out the route they would try to take on their honeymoon trip. He wanted to visit his high school friends in California, but other than that destination things were pretty much in the air. He thought that perhaps Molly might like to go through Denver or maybe Golden. Neither one of them had much of a desire to go to the eastern US, even though Bill had grown up there. Molly told him once that she thought it was just too crowded. She wanted to see the old west, as she put it.

They would be starting in Great Falls. Then they would drop down through Wyoming to get to Golden through Boulder. Since it was a very long drive, he decided to break it up into two days with a stop in Sheridan, Wyoming. They'd go east down through Billings and then to Sheridan. Then, after a straight shot

Wanderlust!

through Cheyenne they'd get into the Denver-Golden area. Bill knew that area very well and knew that taking US40 westward through the mountains west was a very thrilling drive. Once they got to Grand Junction it was a clear run on US 50 all the way to Reno, Nevada. That route would give Molly a taste of the desert. She told Bill that she'd never seen a desert up close. They'd get a really close look at one this way. It was pretty arid, even in the winter, across Utah and Nevada.

When they left Reno, they'd cross the Sierra mountains and finally arrive at San Francisco to head north on 101 to get to Bill's old high school town of Petaluma. He had loads of friends still in that area; even some old girlfriends. Planning anything after that would just have to wait until they figured out where they wanted to go from there.

Whispering and giggling, Denise and Molly came back downstairs. As she passed Bill, Denise gave him a big grin. In turn, he gave Molly a 'what the heck?' look. "Later." She said. "Girl talk." He knew better than to mess with that; it could wait.

Bill and Molly had an early flight the next day so that meant they had better make it an early night. After dinner, which was excellent, they sat in the living room and talked with the rest of the family - Bill's family now. Alain related some interesting information on his parents, his business, and Canadian politics. Bill found it fascinating and listened to it carefully since there was a very good chance he would be coming back up here and signing on to Alain's business. Bill had thought about it many times and concluded that he could do a whole lot worse than come up to Montreal to live. He knew his parents would be mildly disappointed he didn't continue his college education, but he could actually finish that in Canada. Montreal had excellent universities and even branches of American universities.

Talk slowed, and then everyone began to show signs of fatigue. Alain got up first and took Suzette with him into their bedroom. Denise kept chattering but it was plain to see she was also wired on the coffee she'd been drinking. In mid-babble Molly shushed her. "Denise! I think we should all go to bed now. We'll all be up early in the morning." A frown furrowed Denise's brow, but she brightened up immediately. She rose, threw her arms around Bill, and kissed him right on the lips.

"Goodnight, Brother." She chirped. "Take my sister to bed."

* * *

'What a thing for her to say. Even after all the time I've been married, it still sounded naughty.' Molly tittered to herself. 'Take my sister to bed - indeed!' She began to blush against her will.

* * *

Molly reddened slightly, but then shook it off. "Goodnight, Denise. See you in the morning." She and Bill watched Denise go up the stairs. Molly shifted over and sat across Bill with her legs over his. "Now, my husband, how about some smooching for us?" She kissed him warmly and with much enthusiasm. Her tongue flicked out and slipped past his lips. She had the sweetest tasting tongue he'd ever had in his mouth.

"Come on, Molly. We'd better be going up also. Tomorrow comes pretty early for us. We can neck on the plane. I think we're way in back."

She stuck her tongue into his ear and then blew into it. The sudden chill made his break out in goose bumps. "Ooh. That really gets to me when you do that, you know."

"Yes, I can tell." She said mischievously.

Wanderlust!

She was right, too. He had begun to get a little uncomfortable under her rump. "Whoops. Time to get you to bed I think," he sighed. "Terrible, but someone has to do it."

She hit him on the shoulder. "Tough. One more remark like that and you can carry me up."

"I can do that anyway. Want me to?"

"No. Denise will be watching. I'm sure. Let's just go up and rattle the headboard. That'll shock her." Molly said with a smirk.

"I doubt that. She seems like she's pretty plugged into the scene, sexwise, for someone of her age."

"Yes, she is. That's pretty much what we were talking about earlier upstairs. She wanted to know all the details. I, of course, didn't give her any. I especially avoided any mention of a mirror above the bed. This just made her want more. She's probably going to grab the first guy she meets at the tea shop next time and jump on him. Is that right? 'Jump on him'?"

"Sort of. You probably mean 'jump his bones'."

"Yes. That's what I meant. She's really boy crazy. I hope she doesn't get hurt."

"I don't think she will. She's a pretty level headed kid with just a small wild streak but if it comes right down to it, she'll think twice about letting a guy talk her into sex."

"Oh, I hope you're right, Bill. I'd hate for her to get hurt." She repeated. "Maybe she will meet someone as great as you?"

Bill cleared his throat and looked pompous. "There's nobody as great as me don't you know." He got a dirty look in exchange for that. She took his hand and led him up the stairs to their bedroom. They undressed, did their evening toilet, and climbed into bed. Once there, they whispered pillow talk for a while concerning everything she'd told Denise. Bill found that she had told her a few clinical details of their first night in the hotel. Somehow, hearing her tell him what she'd said turned him on even more than when he'd actually done it. No mention of the mirror though.

Her voice tapered off into simple sibilance as she fell asleep. They'd both been running hard for three days - not to mention the nights - so it wasn't surprising they both drifted off. Bill woke once, feeling her fingers as they softly slid around his stomach and downwards, but didn't wake fully enough to do anything about it. Her soft intake and exhaust of breath never varied so he figured she was doing this in her sleep. 'Let her sleep,' he thought to himself. 'She needs it'.

[January 7, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - early morning]

Bill woke the next morning in a completely understandable state, concerning the circumstances of late. He groaned and then rolled towards Molly's side of the bed. When he groped around, she wasn't there. He heard the shower running though, and ambled over to the door. In the seconds before he popped the door open he heard Denise singing.

'Jeez, that was close,' he thought, sighing with relief. He waited until Denise left the bathroom. Still, he wondered where Molly had gone. He reached over and tapped Denise's door. "Denise? Do you know where

Wanderlust!

Molly is?"

"She's downstairs helping Mama prepare breakfast. She got up really early and let you sleep."

"Thank you." He looked down - still visible - then headed for the shower. After turning on the cold faucet full blast, he stepped in. When the cold water hit him, it took his breath away. It also cleared up his problem immediately. He turned up the hot water to balance things out. Denise forgotten, he finished showering and wrapped the towel around his middle and trimmed his beard.

"Bill! Molly says breakfast is ready." Denise called through her door.

"Tell her I'll be right there."

"Okay." He heard her hall door close and her footsteps down the stairs. Ruefully, he thought about how young Denise really was. She was going to make a wonderful wife for someone. He also wondered, for the thousandth time, what it was that women talked about when the subject was men. Probably very similar things guys talked about when they were one-on-one with a close male friend.

Breakfast was light. Bill had a fluttery stomach for some reason and didn't eat much. Molly hardly ate anything at all. This was unusual for her. Bill wondered if she was coming down with something. That would be a heck of a note to have her get sick on their honeymoon trip. A real bummer, as the surf crowd would say.

Molly and Bill went back up and packed. This time she took two suitcases and a huge purse and travel case with all her makeup. They were going to be on the road for at least three weeks or more so they'd need it all. Once they got to Montana, though, they could push things into the nooks and crannies of the camper. Bill hefted the cases and declared that they might have to pay extra for one of them due to its weight.

Chapter 22: Wanderlust - Chapter 22

[January 7, 1964]

[Montreal International Airport, Montreal, Canada - Forenoon]

As it turned out, their combined baggage weight just squeaked by. Bill thought it was the brightness of both their rings that the agent saw when she looked down at the scales. The agent had started to say something but then dropped her gaze and got busy issuing their tickets - weight forgotten. Fortunately, Great Falls was an international entry point for the States, so they had a direct flight from Montreal with no stops. They would be on a turboprop but that was okay with both of them. They were in absolutely no hurry. The entire Garnet family went out to the gate with Bill and Molly and sat and talked in a desultory manner for a while. Bill went and got a couple of magazines and a bottle of water for Molly. She sounded dehydrated to him.

Bill got out their passports and handed Molly her new one she'd gotten at the American Embassy few days ago. She was so proud of it since it had her new name. She opened it and just stared at her new picture, name, and signature. She'd come so close to messing up and signing her maiden name but caught herself at the last instant and changed it to Stiles. She smiled up at Bill when she caught him watching her. She took his hand and squeezed it. 'I love you' she mouthed at him.

The gate attendant announced the flight. It was time for them to go. Suzette began sniffing and Denise was already in tears. They all said goodbye to Molly, hugging her close, and then turned to Bill. Suzette kissed him on the cheek and whispered in his ear. "Keep her safe, Bill. Have a great trip." He whispered back that he would do just that. Denise kissed him on the lips with a loud smack and hugged him. Alain shook his hand and then pulled him into a one-armed embrace. He told Bill to take care of his little girl. He said he would. It was time for them to go.

Lifting their one carry-on bag, Bill took Molly by the hand and they went down the walkway. She turned back at the last minute and waved - a tentative wave - but a happy wave. "Bye!" She shouted. Everyone waved back. Once aboard, they worked their way down the aisle to their assigned seats. They were indeed near the rear of the plane. There was only one seat behind them and that was apparently reserved for one of the attendants for take-offs and landings. They wouldn't be bothered at all.

After Bill stowed the bags in the overhead bin, he let Molly take the window seat. She settled down and pulled the seat belt tight in her lap. Then Bill sat down and did the same. He took her hand and squeezed it; she returned the gesture and turned to him. He kissed her on the forehead and then on the lips. "We'll be back again." He said with conviction. "Right now, this time belongs to us; the two of us, and only us."

She put her head on his shoulder and sniffed a couple of times. "I know, but I - I'm justâjust so happy right now." She reached down, lifted his left hand, and kissed his brand new ring. She looked up at him with shining eyes. "Just think. Not too long ago neither one of us knew the other person existed and now we've found each other."

A shadow fell over us from the aisle. "I'll bet you two are newlyweds. Am I right?" The attendant said, smiling down at them.

"Does it show that bad?" Molly asked, with a wan grin.

"Yes, I'm afraid it does, Honey. You've got yourself a fine young man here. Never let him go." She said wistfully. "I did and I'm really sorry."

Wanderlust!

Bill looked up at her and estimated she was probably nearing retirement age - for an attendant. She had tiny crow's feet at the corner of each eye and just a hint of roughness about the backs of her hands. She was, by no means, really 'old' though. Her name tag read 'Janice'.

"Thanks, Janice. I will do my part also." Bill said up to her. "We got married four days ago."

"Oh, goodie! I win! I bet the other girls you hadn't been married more than a week. You get champagne - on us. As soon as we get up to cruising altitude I'll bring it back." She leaned in conspiratorially. "I might even be able to find a couple of seats up front." She whispered.

"Oh, don't bother. It's a short flight," Molly said, blushing a little.

"Our pleasure." She said, rising and heading back up the aisle.

They watched others as they filed on board and took their seats. It didn't appear to be a very full flight as perhaps half the seats were filled. Bill thought that they didn't really need first class because there wasn't anyone sitting within two rows of seats from them. Besides, it was nice and private back here.

"I almost hope she can't get us into first class." Said Molly. "It's not as busy back here as farther forward."

"I was just going to say that!"

She giggled and pulled her book out of her large purse. Bill heard the second engine begin to whine and then the propellers spooling up to a sustained roar. This was a small turboprop. The door slammed and the plane was pushed back from the gate. After it pivoted around, it started to taxi towards the runway. Molly tried to read, but her attention kept wandering to the window. Bill gently took the book from her fingers and told her to go ahead and watch her town. She nodded and pressed her nose almost tight against the plastic of the window.

The plane did some turning, squealing when the brakes were applied, and then held at the threshold for a moment. The engines were adjusted through their range and then they pulled the plane onto the runway, and turned to face the distant end. With a final release of brakes and a surge of engine power it rolled with increasing speed down and lifted off.

[January 7, 1964]

[In flight between Montreal, Canada and Great Falls, Montana]

Molly was intent on the scene below them as the plane banked to and fro over the city. They followed the river for a bit, then turned more or less southwest and began to climb. A soft chime sounded as we went through ten thousand feet and the attendants unstrapped and began to move about the cabin. The one sitting behind Bill and Molly started up the aisle, stopped, and then turned to Bill.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"I'd like a soda of some kind." Bill said and then turned to Molly. "What do you want, Honey?"

"The same please. Thank you."

The attendant nodded and moved forward to tend to the next set of passengers. Bill watched her progress up the aisle. Molly's attention was still outside the window. Bill couldn't see much, but it looked like they were

Wanderlust!

going to go right over Niagara Falls. The river was definitely below them and they appeared to be staying at around the same altitude.

The intercom clicked on with a short buzz and a male voice spoke. "Folks, I'm going to bank a little to the right and give you a good look at the Canadian-American border at Niagara Falls. When I do, it will be right below you on the right side. I requested this little detour from traffic control in honor of our newlyweds back in twenty-seven A and B. Congratulations!" He clicked off.

Heads craned around and searched for Bill and Molly as the plane tilted to the right. Molly and Bill looked down and got a breathtaking view of the falls below them. There was a scattering of muted applause - it was hard to hear over the engine noise - to which Bill unhooked his belt and stood, smiling and waving. Molly tugged at the back of his shirt, blushing, until he sat back down. "You're horrible!" She whispered to him.

"No, I'm not. I'm very proud to even be seen with you, Molly. I will always feel that way." He leaned in and kissed her. The plane chose that moment to bounce and their teeth bumped together.

The attendant brought Bill and Molly their sodas - Cokes - and two ice-filled glasses. They pulled their tables down and set the glasses on them. Bill thanked the attendant and she went back up the aisle. They were alone now. Bill re-clipped his belt, but left it loose enough to reach out and put his arm across the back of Molly's neck. He hugged her to him and she put her head on his shoulder. They sat like that for a while, sipping their sodas until nothing but ice remained.

Two new attendants passed down the aisle carrying a small bottle of champagne and two glasses. They stopped at row twenty-seven and made a production of popping the cork. One held the glasses and the other poured the bubbly. Bill handed the first over to Molly and took the second for himself. "*Votre santÃ©!*" said the first, echoed by the second. Bill and Molly held up their glasses and clicked them together.

"Thank you very much," Bill said. "Molly and I appreciate it."

"Yes, thank you." Added Molly.

They sipped, and then the attendants moved back up the aisle, leaving the bottle on Bill's tray. Half an hour later, glasses refilled for the second time, they sipped even slower, conversing in low tones, leaning in towards each other.

Once the bottle was empty, and conversation had waned, Molly's eyes drooped and she fell asleep. It was probably just as well, as the flight would take a while - nearly six hours. Eventually Bill dozed also.

"Would you like anything else before we tidy up for our approach? We should be on the ground in about forty-five minutes." The attendant asked after waking them. Molly shot Bill a glance like 'don't even say what you're thinking' and told her that they were fine. The attendant moved forward and knelt next to the couple up from them; presumably asking the same question.

[January 7, 1964]

[Great Falls International Airport, Great Falls, Montana - afternoon]

The rest of their trip was uneventful. They landed in Great Falls and Bill waited for Molly as she cleared customs. They'd prepared themselves for this eventuality by going to the US Embassy in Montreal and getting her new temporary passport proving she was married to a US citizen. She had her old Canadian passport and the paperwork so she wasn't detained very long. A sympathetic middle-aged lady at the desk just glanced at

Wanderlust!

the documentation and asked Molly a question. She pointed to Bill and he waved. The lady smiled, nodded, and stamped. Molly was through!

Bill's brother was waiting at the exit from the Customs area. Molly saw him first and nudged Bill. "Oh, I bet that's your brother. He's very cute!" She pointed. Bill said that it was indeed, and waved. His brother waved back.

When they got through the doors and moved out of the main stream of passengers, Bill's brother moved closer and tentatively hugged Molly. "Welcome to our family Molly. I'm Phillip." She kissed him on the cheek. He turned to Bill. "Mom says your wife has a sister who's a real knockout." He turned to Molly. "Is that right?"

"She does, and she is." Bill answered for her. "She also hangs around with college kids up in Montreal so you'd have to be smart to meet her." Since he'd already graduated from a two-year college at twenty-one he was smarter than the average bear.

"Bill, what a terrible thing to say!" Molly blurted, shocked.

"Ah, he's used to it. Did I ever tell you he's already got a college degree?"

Phillip grinned and dug a toe into the tile floor like an embarrassed small boy. "Aw, shucks," he chuckled. "We say that a lot here in Montana."

"Now I know I'll fit into this family well. You're just as nutty as your brother." She linked her arm into Bill's and the three of them went down the corridor to baggage claim.

The warning bell sounded and the turntable began moving. It wasn't too long before their bags all showed up. Phillip and Bill took charge and dragged them over to one side until they could locate a porter. Phillip found one. The porter loaded up his cart and wheeled it out to the curb with everyone following. They waited while Phillip went to get the car. When he pulled up at the curb, they stashed the bags in the trunk and got in for the ride out to the base.

On the way, Bill explained that Malmstrom Air Force Base is a SAC, or Strategic Air Command, base. "It is fairly strict on who can, and who can't, have access to the base. Fortunately, all the cars in my family have officer's stickers on them and a tiny little spread eagle signifying a Colonel. No gate guard is going to seriously impede a Colonel's family unless he wants to end up counting palm trees in Lakanookie, Alaska."

[January 7, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana]

The house was warm and alive with the sounds of music and merriment. They'd arrived during Bill's sister Paula's birthday party. She was turning eighteen and all that this entailed. There were what appeared to be hundreds, but probably only ten, teenagers dancing away in the living room and about the same number hovering over the dining room table gobbling up food.

Paula saw Bill and squealed with delight. "Bill! You're here!" She flung her arms around him and hugged tightly. She pushed back and then noticed Molly standing behind him. "Oops. Sorry. You have to be Molly because you're so beautiful. Welcome to our family." She held out a hand, but Molly closed the gap and hugged her.

"Thanks, Paula. And congratulations on your birthday. Being eighteen is a big deal isn't it?"

Wanderlust!

"You bet! Go get some food. We have tons of it." She spun away from them and back out into the middle of the room, swaying to the sounds coming from the speakers of the Hi-Fi.

Molly spoke up over the music. "I love her already, Bill. She's a ball of fire."

"She may be now, but I bet she'll be pooped by tonight. Let's get something to eat."

They were waylaid after filling a couple of plates by Bill's mother and father. They re-welcomed Molly to, as they put it, 'our nut house'. Bill's mom took Molly upstairs to stow their luggage and freshen up. Bill and his dad went into the kitchen and located the bottle of bourbon. He fixed them a couple of drinks with ice and then they sat at the table.

Paul spoke. "The camper is out back if you want to see it. You mother and I fixed it up real nice I think. You have about a two-week supply of staple foods but you'll have to get your own fresh stuff. I've added a big block of ice to the icebox already. If you stop at a dairy, you probably can get dry ice. It lasts longer than regular ice."

"Thanks, Dad. Much appreciated. Right now, Molly and I just want to rest a bit. The flight was long."

"Of course. Go on up. We can survive tonight on what's left after the thundering herd leaves." He smiled. "That is, if there *is* anything left." Bill slapped him on the back, knocked back his drink, and headed upstairs.

Chapter 23: Wanderlust - Chapter 23

[January 8, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - Morning]

As it turned out, Molly and Bill didn't go to see their new camper until the following morning. By the time they'd talked themselves to a standstill, had dinner, and Bill had called several of his friends on the phone, it was time for them to get some sleep. One of the persons he called was a girl that he'd taken out several times before. They had had good times, but never really hit it off together. She was thrilled to hear he was married and made him promise to come by the next day and visit. He voiced his concern about that activity to Molly but she seemed to take it in stride. "Well, go ahead and meet with her. Do you want to go alone?"

"Nah. I think she really wants to meet you. In a way, she's a lot like you; funny, sexy, and a great person to be with. But, and this is very important, I'm in love with you - not her. Remember that."

Anyway, they woke up fairly early and ambled down to the kitchen for some sort of breakfast. Bill's dad had already left for the office so the coffee was still hot. Bill had grown accustomed to morning croissants so when he discovered a whole package of them in the refrigerator he held them up to Molly. "Hey, look what I found! Croissants. Want one?"

"Oh, yes, please. I've been dying for one." He put four of them on a cookie sheet and popped them into the oven for a bit. He knew that when hot, with a little butter and jelly on them, they were hard to beat. The two of them sat and munched, holding hands across the table.

Bill's brother joined them. "Hey, guys. What's on the agenda today? Seen the camper yet?"

"No, not yet." Bill replied. "I wanted Molly and me to see it together. We'll go out back after we get dressed." He watched his brother over the brim of his coffee cup as he surreptitiously checked out Molly pretty thoroughly. Nothing that angered Bill, but a frank appraisal that, after he nodded almost to himself, he actually approved of. Even his brother thought he'd made a good decision.

Molly and Bill finished their breakfast and went back upstairs to dress. The wind was blowing fairly hard outside, with a promise of snow in the air. It being early January, Montana gets pretty cold. "Better put on warm stuff today, Honey. I think it will snow before evening."

"Okay. Are we going out in this?"

"Sure are. We have to buy a few things for our trip. Plus, neither one of us have seen the camper yet. We need to drive it and check things out. Like, how good the heater is, and if it has a safety pack in it. We don't want to break down and freeze to death."

"Well, I know all kinds of ways to keep warm." Molly said with a hint of a smile. "Nice ways."

"Mmmm. So do I, but the Highway patrol frowns on that sort of thing on the roads." Bill countered.

"Wait. You said 'we' need to drive it. Does that mean me also?"

"Well, sure it means you. You do have your driver's license with you don't you?"

Wanderlust!

"I do, but it's Canadian."

"Oh, crap. I forgot about that. We need to stop first down at the license bureau and get you a new one. Make sure you have your new passport and paperwork. It'll be easy. Probably no driving test at all."

"Okay. But maybe we'd better take a different car just in case I have to do a drive test. I can't drive a manual shift car. I never learned."

Bill slapped his forehead in mock consternation. "Oh, no! What'll we do?!" He moaned. "We're doomed!"

"Molly stood with a hand on her hip. "Listen, wise guy, I just never learned, that's all. Is it easy?"

"Not too bad. I can teach you, but we should probably do that on the road. You're right. Maybe I can borrow my brother's car. He has an automatic shift." Bill left in search of Phillip.

Phillip wasn't going to use his car so Bill made plans to borrow it in the afternoon. Right now, he and Molly were ready for the great unveiling of their wedding gift. They put on overcoats and gloves then went out the back door to the driveway.

"Oh, Bill! It's beautiful!" Molly crowed when she saw the cream over light blue VW camper. She hopped up and down, clapping her hands like a little kid. "Open it! Open it!" She urged.

Bill clicked the lock on the sliding door and pushed it back. Molly jumped inside and looked around. "This is just great!" She was glowing with enthusiasm as she began popping little doors and shelves open. "All kinds of hidey-holes for stuff!" She gushed.

* * *

"This is going to be just great! Look at the size of the bed. I bet it folds out just like a couch. What's under here? Oh! A sink. This must be the icebox down here - yes. And all this glass around us. You can see out in every direction. But what about â ' oh, those little rolls on top are curtains that drop down. Oh, what a wonderful gift this is!"

* * *

Bill slid the door shut and went around to the driver's side. When he jumped into the seat and started the engine he did some looking around. The bus wasn't new, but had been very well taken care of. Bill looked at the registration over the sun visor and saw that it was only three years old. The odometer had only a little over nineteen-thousand miles on it. Very good mileage. He revved the engine a little and held it at about a third-throttle. The heater kicked in and began warming things up almost immediately. Nothing, he thought to himself, beats an air-cooled engine for producing heat fast.

"It's getting warm already? That's pretty fast." Molly echoed his very thought.

"It is air cooled, Molly. No water to have to warm first. The heat starts almost immediately when you pull the knobs."

"Oh, just like you, eh?" She deadpanned. She was getting Americanized pretty fast he thought.

"Yeah, I guess so," he shot back, smiling at her. She slipped between the seats and sat down in the passenger seat. "It's great to be able to go back and forth without stopping to get out. I can sleep or make a meal while

Wanderlust!

you drive."

"Um, not a good idea. You can't wear a seatbelt while you're sleeping unless you're doing it right there." He pointed to the seat she was in. "Now that I've found you I have no intention of losing you."

"Yes, I guess you're right." Molly said soberly.

Bill killed the engine and they got out. The sun had broken through the overcast and was now shining very brightly down on them. They were both squinting by the time they got back inside the house.

"So. Whatcha think about the camper?" Phillip asked through a mouthful of toast. "Pretty much all of us chipped in to help buy it."

"Well, my thanks to you all," said Molly, kissing him on the cheek. "We love it. Now, if I can only drive it." Phillip looked quizzically at Molly. "I don't know how to use a stick shift," she explained. "Bill's going to show me how."

"Well, he's a good teacher. I didn't either until he showed me what to do. I kept killing the engine until I got the hang of the clutch. After that, it was easy."

"We can go over to the Air Police driving range if they'll let us." Bill said. "That's where they teach troops how to do high-speed chases and vehicle handling. They have streets and stuff marked out all over. I can ask, I guess."

That being settled, Bill asked Phillip for the keys. Phillip reached into a pocket and handed them over. Bill and Molly dressed back up again and went out to his brother's car; a dark green Chevrolet two-door coupe. He fired it up, waited until the gauges started moving, and they drove off.

[January 8, 1964]

[Municipal Building, Great Falls, Montana - morning]

Downtown Great Falls was bustling with traffic and parking was hard to find, but the municipal lot hadn't filled up yet. Bill parked and they went inside. After waiting for people ahead of them, were finally called up to the desk. Molly launched into her speech, but the woman gently held up her hand to stop her. "That's okay, Honey. I can handle it just fine. Let me have your paperwork and I'll be right back. Welcome to the United States - and congrats on your marriage." She smiled, showing her even teeth. She looked down at the passport. "My goodness, JUST married at that. Congratulations again."

"Thank you," Molly said, they went to the back wall to have a seat.

In about ten minutes, Molly was called back up to the desk by an older guy. She looked apprehensive until he smiled and motioned her to the depth perception box. He manipulated a few things to test her eyesight, and then led her to the chair where pictures were taken. The light flashed and he pointed back to Bill. She came back and sat down. "Is that all?" She asked Bill. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. He tested your eyesight, depth perception, and took your picture. Your license is next."

Five minutes later, the guy motioned the two of them back up to the desk. "Here's your license Missus Stiles." He said with dimpled cheeks, which broadened into a huge grim when Molly smiled back. "Am I the first to call you that?"

Wanderlust!

"Officially, yes." She replied. "I'm still getting used to it. The first time, my sister called after me and I didn't even turn around."

"Well, that tickles me very much then, young lady. You take care out there now."

"Thank you very much, sir. I will." They both turned and left the bureau. Molly stared at her license. "I see my picture but the name is strange to me. 'Molly Renee Stiles'." She repeated it over and over and then nodded once decisively. "Got it!" She announced.

"We'll take the scenic route along the Missouri River." Bill asked.

"The Missouri River? I thought that was down south a ways."

"It is, also, but it starts west of us here. I'll drive slowly so you can look." He said thoughtfully.

They got in and he drove her along the high cliffs overlooking the famous falls the city was named after. Ice was encrusting whole parts of the falls and made them look like a layer cake. Molly was enthralled. Bill stopped at the Lewis and Clark Center and they went inside the museum. She hardly spoke as he showed her around and told her of the expedition they undertook a while back to explore this whole region for the US government. When they left, he drove onwards to Rainbow Dam.

[January 8, 1964]

[Missouri River, Great Falls, Montana - around noon]

They parked again, but found that the River Edge Trail was closed due to ice buildup. Bill figured that wouldn't have wanted to go just then anyway as they weren't properly dressed for hiking. He told Molly that they'd come back in the summer some time and walk its length. They now stood on the high bluff overlooking the dam. She took his arm and turned him towards her. They kissed. "Thank you. You have a beautiful city, Bill."

"But nowhere near as old as Montreal though. We were formally established here as a settlement in eighteen eighty-three. Montana became a state in eighteen eighty-nine. Hardly an 'old world' city. Heck, Indian attacks only stopped around eighteen fifty-five."

"How do you know all that?"

"I had to learn it when I went to the state university and pledged a fraternity. I'm full of stuff like that. Come on, I'm getting cold. Let's go warm up some."

He drove Molly over to a little coffee shop he knew of that was run by his friend Rose; the one who used to be his occasional date. He figured it was best to do this in public in case things went wrong.

But they didn't - go wrong, that is. Rose was apparently back in her office so after they got their tea and cookies Bill asked the waitress if she'd go back and tell Rose he was here. When the waitress was first called over, she looked a bit apprehensive that maybe Bill might complain about something, but relaxed when he told her he was an old friend of Rose. A few minutes later Rose appeared. "Bill! My goodness. It's so nice to see you again." She rushed up and kissed him when he stood up. "This must be your new wife. Wow, she's beautiful, Bill. Hi, I'm Rose." She stuck her hand out to Molly.

Wanderlust!

Molly took it, and they shook in the European style, a single, up and down, shake and then let go. Molly was smiling, but Bill had seen her smile like that before. It was friendly, but could escalate into unfriendly in a hurry. He took over.

"Rose, I hear you might get engaged also. Who's the lucky guy?"

"Norman Bridger. You remember him from high school? Tall guy with black hair?"

Bill thought a moment to call up an image of good old Norm. He remembered him. If he hadn't changed, he was likely to break Rose's heart. He played around - a lot. "Yeah, I remember him." Bill said with false conviction. "Nice guy. Getting serious then?"

"I hope so. We have a date in, mmmmmâ !" she glanced at her watch. "â about two hours. Going to see a movie. I gotta go back and do manager stuff. Let me have that." She picked up their bill and carried it off with a smile. She talked briefly with their server and went back down the hall to her office.

"Well, how about that." Bill said. Molly looked at him.

* * *

'She seems very nice, but I think there is an edge of something; I don't know what. She had hard lines around her eyes. Maybe that's it. Somehow, I just can't imagine my Bill hanging around her. I wonder if he's still attracted to her. If so, I'll scratch her eyes out.'

* * *

"I don't like her very much. I don't know why, but I think she still has designs on your body; and nobody but me better get it." Molly said as she cracked a smile, chuckled, and then broke into a laugh. Bill relaxed a little as he really thought Molly was about to attack Rose. "Come on. Drink your tea before it gets cold." Molly poured a little more hot water over Bill's teabag.

Chapter 24: Wanderlust - Chapter 24

[January 8, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls Montana - afternoon]

They finished up and Bill let Molly drive back home. She got a little flustered by the gate guard, who popped to attention and saluted her. She didn't know what to do so she smiled back and waved. This tickled the guard who wiggled the tips of his fingers. It was a very small, beside his leg wave, but nevertheless a wave. 'Damn,' Bill thought. *'I love the military'*.

Molly parked in front of the house so they wouldn't block the camper. Once inside, they were asked if they were hungry, but both declined - having just eaten cookies and drunken tea. "No thanks, Mom," Bill replied. "We just got back from Rose's place. I gave her the bad news. She seemed to take it in stride."

"I just bet she did. I hear she's getting engaged anyway. At least that's what Paula says. You're teaching Molly to drive a stick?"

"Yeah, after we warm up a bit. Do you think the APs will let us use their driving school lot?"

"Don't know why not. I think they're on vacation right now anyway - no classes until after the New Year. I can call if you want."

"No. Don't bother. We'll just drive over and ask. I think I know a few of them anyway."

Later, Bill cranked up the bus and the two of them drove over to the transportation squad's office building. It sat next to a huge, flat expanse of concrete that had orange cones scattered all over it marking narrow streets and parking areas. They parked and Bill walked Molly to the door and entered.

The first person he spotted was a Sergeant named Paul. Bill knew him well. "Paul! How goes it?" He called as they walked towards his desk.

"Bill! Great to see you. Been a while hasn't it. What? About a year or so?"

"About that long. Paul, I'd like to have you meet Molly, my wife. Molly, this is Paul Menard."

"How do you do, Paul. I'm happy to meet you." They shook hands.

"Do I detect a little French in there? *Juste un peu de Français?*"

"*Mais, bien sûr! Je suis de Montréal!*" Molly replied. And they were off; chattering in French. Bill had forgotten that Paul spoke French.

Bill caught most of their conversation. Apparently, she was telling him that we'd gotten this wonderful camper as a wedding gift but she didn't know how to drive it. Could they use the 'driving course' and let Bill teach her?

"Of course you can. Let me get my cold weather gear on and I'll go with you and we can catch up on everything. Dave! Watch the shop for a while; I'm going out to the lot."

Wanderlust!

"Okay," answered the Airman across the room. "I got it."

The three of them got into the bus, Bill driving, and pulled over to the lot. They stopped at the entrance. Paul explained that not all the stuff was out there, but enough to practice starting, stopping, turns and the like. He said that the skidpan was not operational though.

"Skidpan?" Queried Molly.

"Yeah. It's how we teach drivers what to do in skids. Maybe there is a slick patch we can use. Anyway, swap places with Bill and he can start teaching you. Gosh, Molly. I just have to say it. You are very pretty. Bill's a lucky guy." She shook his head. "I should be so lucky."

Molly dimpled as she smiled back at him. "Thank you, Paul"

Bill swapped places with Molly and she climbed into the driver's seat. She adjusted the bottom a bit closer as he was so tall, and then Bill started showing her the gear pattern. It was imprinted on the top of the gearshift knob also so she wouldn't forget. Since the area ahead of them was without any cones for at least three hundred feet, Bill decided to show her the gears.

The first ten minutes were the hardest. She crunched through a couple of gears, stalled the engine a few times, but finally mastered the gas-to-clutch pressures necessary to shift. After fifteen minutes, she was shifting through gears easily - albeit a bit slowly. They went to the cone-marked street grid. They went up one street; stopped at a stop sign, and then down another street to repeat the process. Molly was getting a real workout on the gears. Fortunately, a VW is very forgiving and didn't complain once.

* * *

'This is far more difficult than I thought. *Merde!* I just crunched another gear. Poor thing. I hope I don't hurt it. But I think I am getting better now.'

* * *

Paul told her to just drive wherever she wanted while he and Bill talked. Paul said he'd been seeing a fellow airman, female he hastened to add, and they were getting serious themselves. He hadn't bought the ring yet, but was coming close to doing so. "Oh, I hope you do, Paul." Molly said, downshifting into third with a slight grind. "I think everyone should be married!"

Paul laughed, then said thoughtfully "Well, maybe so. Look how happy you've made Bill. Whoops!"

The bus slipped sideways a little bit, but Molly instantly corrected using the wheel and straightened out. "You did that very well, Molly. Almost instinctively. Oh. Wait a minute." He slapped his forehead. "Ah, what a dope. You lived in Montreal. They have snow there too. What a stupid thing to say. I keep forgetting that you already know how to drive, just not a stick shift." They all broke up with laughter at that.

Finally, Bill judged Molly to be fit enough to drive them home. Paul got out back at his office and leaned in through the driver's window. He kissed Molly on the cheek. "Take good care of him, Molly. He's a really great guy."

"Thanks, Paul. I think so too. Goodbye and good luck to you, too."

Wanderlust!

He waved and went back into the building. Molly leaned over and kissed Bill then started for home. Bill told her where to turn, and she made it there without once killing the engine or grinding gears. Paul was right; she was a natural at it.

They arrived back home in the late afternoon. Bill's mother and Paula were out shopping and Phillip took off for his date as soon as Bill gave him his keys saying "Sorry. Gotta go. Janette just called and wants meâ" pause "âto pick up something she needs for our dinner." Molly chuckled at the strategically placed intake of breath.

"I'm sure she really does want youâ" pause "âto hurry, then." She said. They all had a laugh over that one. Smiling, he put his cold weather gear on and went out to his car.

"Janette's his sometimes girlfriend." Bill explained. "They've been dating now and then ever since they graduated from high school. You'd think they had had enough time to make up their minds by now wouldn't you?"

"Well, with some women - not me, as you know - it takes a while to gauge just what you feel about a guy. The instant I saw you, tall, self-assured, and looking eager to help, I knew, without a doubt, that I'd just met the right man."

* * *

'And did I ever! I could hardly catch my breath when you stepped out into that corridor. My heart was hammering away so hard I thought you might even hear it.'

* * *

"You know," Bill said as they settled down in the living room. "I've replayed that whole train scene in my head hundreds of times and I still got the distinct impression that I'd either seen you or talked to you before. I know that's nuts but still I got that impression. Maybe it was just wishful thinking on my part, or I was remembering lost dreams or something. I bet a shrink would have a ball analyzing me." Bill grinned.

"They - whoever 'they' are - say that there is really only one woman soul mate for every man's soul. I am absolutely sure I've met mine." She shifted the conversation. "How about I show Phillip a picture of Denise?"

"Ooooh. I don't know about that. He's dating Janette right now. I guess it couldn't hurt though. Denise and Phillip. What a pair that would make. That would really cement our two families together wouldn't it?"

"Sure would." She bent over and kissed him. He kissed back.

Paula and Beth returned home, calling for help with the bags in the back of the car. Bill went to help, freezing because he'd forgotten to put on a coat. Molly grabbed him as he passed the second time and handed it to him. Actually, she rammed it into his chest. "Here, take this before you become Babe the Blue Ox." He thanked her on the run and brought in the last load.

"Holy cow, Mom. Was there anything left on the shelves after you finished shopping?"

"I'm storing stuff for a big family dinner. We're going to have everything you like. We haveâ" She stopped, looking at her son. "You're not going to be there though, are you?" She said it as a statement.

Wanderlust!

"Mom. You know that Molly and I would love to be there, but the two of us are 'our family' now. We're planning on leaving tomorrow morning sometime for the rest of our honeymoon."

Tears welled up in her eyes, but she nodded just the same. "I understand. Your father and I did the same thing to my mom out in California when we left for Whitehorse." She wiped at her eyes and hugged both of them. "Just be happy and love each other at all times."

"We will, 'mom'" said Molly with emotion. "Thank you for understanding."

"What? What happened? Why's everyone crying?" Paula came up behind them and asked. "Something bad?"

"No, Paula. Something good. Molly and I are leaving in the morning for the rest of our honeymoon. I just told mom about it and that we wouldn't be here for the big family dinner."

"Oh, I'm going to miss you guys like crazy!" She wailed. "Can't we have the big dinner tonight? Pleeeeeze!"

Beth thought about it a few seconds and then said "that'll be all right with me if your father agrees. Wait until he gets home though. Don't bother him at work."

"Okay." Paula skipped off to grab a soda from the refrigerator.

Molly and Bill went upstairs and relaxed a bit in his room. She glanced around at the posters he had on the wall and the model planes he'd built. Gently, she lifted a model of a B-36. Its wingspan was almost eighteen inches and it weighed around a pound. "This is beautiful," she declared. "Did you do this?"

"Yup. When I was about fifteen or so I guess. Took me around a month if I remember right. I sweated a lot over getting the paint just right. My dad had pictures of the B-36's that used to fly in the wing up in Alaska so I duplicated their markings. It was kind of a naughty thing to do - take pictures - because they were a very hush-hush airplane back then."

"Well, it's just beautiful. When were you in Alaska?"

"From nineteen forty-seven to nineteen fifty. We lived in Fairbanks."

"You mom mentioned Whitehorse. Was that Canada's Whitehorse? Yukon Territory?"

"Sure was. I was real young up there. I was born in Washington State, but we moved to Whitehorse when I was less than a year old. I don't remember much about it but snow. Actually, I don't remember it in my mind, but I have seen lots of pictures my parents took."

"I've always wanted to go visit out west. I hear the mountains are really wonderful."

"We'll get plenty of mountains in the US west too. In fact, if we have a snowstorm we might end up having to go way down south on the east side to go around under them instead of through them."

"Goodness! Does it snow that much?"

"Certainly does. It can snow as much as a foot in an hour when you're up at ten or eleven thousand feet."

"Wow! Will we get that high?"

Wanderlust!

"Loveland Pass, west of Denver, is just less than twelve thousand feet - by only ten feet. Any snow up there closes the road immediately. We might have to put chains on the bus."

"What an adventure that will be for me, at least. You've been over it a lot haven't you?" She slid closer to him on the couch and put her chin on his shoulder. "Are you happy?"

"Happy? Where did that come from? Of course I'm happy, my love. I've got you!" He kissed her on the nose, which she wrinkled back at him. "Come on. Dinner's about ready and as soon as my dad gets here we can start." He pulled her to her feet, wrapped his arm around her waist, hugged her to him, and they went down the hall to help in the kitchen.

That evening, after dinner was eaten and the dishes cleared and washed, everyone gathered in the living room. It had been decided by Paula and Phillip that since they hadn't been at their wedding, that Christmas presents for the newlyweds were to be opened today - after the fact. Once seated, Phillip acted as the gift-passer. He rooted under the tree and came up with several packages which he handed out one by one to either Bill or Molly.

Amid laughter and merriment, enhanced by glasses of eggnog with a special kick to them, they opened their presents. Bill's brother, ever practical, gave him a set of tire chains for the bus. He gave Molly a fur cap with a distinct Russian look to it. Bill surprised his mother with a set of wine glasses. After he'd found out that three of her old set had been broken last year by the dishwasher, he decided to replace them with a new set. His mother promised to hand-wash them. Molly presented Bill's dad a nice bottle of cognac. It was one hundred percent French and had been aged twenty-five years.

Paula gave Molly a new travel kit that had all sorts of little sliding drawers and lined pockets for jewelry or anything else she wanted to carry. It had a hinged lid and should fit nicely in a spot behind the bus's refrigerator that could be closed up and hidden. It would make a perfect safe for them while they traveled. Bill's dad gave him a vehicle alarm. Not one that required wires run all over the place, but one that used infrared waves inside the car to detect someone entering it. Very nice addition in view of the trip they were about to take.

They all sang a few Christmas carols and then talked into the night. Bill began to yawn and then realized that it was after midnight. "Well, I hate to go right now, but Molly and I need our sleep if we're going to head out tomorrow." Everyone stood, kissed, or shook hands with everyone else and then Bill led Molly upstairs. It seemed like only seconds before they were asleep, curled in each other's arms. Warmth against warmth. "*Je t'aime.*" Bill murmured. "*Je t'aime.*" Molly responded.

Chapter 25: Wanderlust - Chapter 25

[January 9, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - Morning]

"Honey! Do you want your heavier coat in the duffel bag, or on the back seat?" Bill called quietly into the bathroom. Molly was still in there washing up.

"Just put it on the back seat. We may need to get out for some reason and I don't want to go digging for it."

"Okay." He set it aside.

They were packing for the next portion of their honeymoon. Whenever they got the camper bus packed they'd say their goodbyes and head down the road. The eventual destination was sunny California. They would be traveling through Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. Bill had been trundling bags and boxes of stuff down and fitting them into the various nooks and crannies of the bus for an hour. There were a lot of those spots too. Open a little inside door and you could stuff things way back along the skin of the camper. If you used clothing, it was just like insulation - and they'd need that while they were still in colder areas.

Finally, Molly came out and pulled on her blouse. "Are you all right?" Bill asked with concern. She looked a bit ashen and had a look of tiredness about her eyes. "Do you still want to go? We don't have to do this right now. It can wait."

"Sure I do, my love. I'm just a little tired I guess. I'll be fine." She tugged a light sweater over her blouse and picked up her string bag that Bill had given her last night.

"Well, okay. But you let me know if you're not up to it."

She gave him a wan smile and kissed him as she passed. "I'll be fine." She repeated.

* * *

'What in the world is *wrong* with me? I feel terrible. I hope I am not getting sick. That wouldn't be very good right now. I want us to have such a wonderful time on this trip. Except for those few days in Montreal, we've never really been alone. Now we have two weeks of solitude to look forward to. I will *not* be sick!'

* * *

When the last parcel was stowed, and familial chatter around the kitchen table slowed to an occasional sentence or two, Bill decided it was time to go. He stood and put his hands on Molly's shoulders as she sat in front of him. "Well, Honey. Are you ready to go?"

Paula took Molly's hands in hers. "Have a great trip, Molly. Have tons of fun and take lots of pictures."

"I will, Paula. Be good."

Bill's brother and father came over and they all shook hands. Bill hugged them both. "We'll be fine. Don't worry. Back before you know it."

Wanderlust!

Beth kissed Molly on the cheek and hugged her. She turned her head to her son. "Take care of her, Son. Drive carefully."

"We will. Goodbye all." Bill swept across them with a wave and put his hand in the small of Molly's back. She went through the door he held for her and together they walked out to the camper. Everyone else remained inside the house looking either through the kitchen window or the glass door. Bill and Molly waved, the family waved back. The travelers settled down in their seats for the trip. Bill was driving.

After waiting a moment, ostensibly for the bus to warm up, Bill surreptitiously dried his eyes a little. He put the bus in gear and backed down the driveway. They were off the base in two minutes. Molly was engaged in rearranging all the stuff Bill had put in the glove compartment and the small rack that was below it. It seemed like busy work to him, but he figured it kept her mind busy. She looked up at her husband and smiled. "Here we are again. On our own. Starting on another grand adventure."

"Yup. But this time we're doing it as a real couple, not faking it. I just wish you felt better."

"I am feeling better right now. I had a glass of milk and some toast for breakfast. It went down nicely."

"Is your throat sore or anything like that?" He had noticed that she didn't seem to have a cough.

"Nope. I've just got some sort of â€¦ something, I guess. I'll get over it."

"I hope so. I hate to see you this way." He said with concern.

She reached over and patted his arm. "I'll be just fine, my love."

[January 9, 1964]

[US 87, South of Great Falls, Montana]

Scenery passed. The day wore on. They were headed down U.S. Highway 87 towards Billings. Bill thought that they might get a bit further, but since this was winter, daylight failed early in the evening. He didn't particularly want to drive much at night since they would have to find a motel. There was no way they could sleep in the bus until the evenings got a bit warmer.

They stopped at a diner outside of Harlowton and ate a really awful sandwich. Molly didn't finish hers but Bill wrapped it up and took it with him when they left. Molly did have a malted milk that seemed to agree with her. She perked up a bit once the sun popped out from behind a cloud and lit up the Great Plains. There was virtually nothing as far as you could see except an occasional house or barn and the mountains to their right. She seemed fascinated at the sheer size of the outdoors.

"Are we still in Montana?" She asked.

"Sure. We might make it into Wyoming by tonight, but probably not. We have all the time we need for this trip, Lover. Nice and slow. That's the way to enjoy it." She smiled back at him and then looked down the road.

* * *

"This country is so large! We have been driving a good part of the day and we are still in Montana. Canada is very wide, for sure; but this country is wide in all directions!"

Wanderlust!

* * *

As the sun touched the mountains and shadows lengthened, they turned off at Levina onto a little shortcut to Billings. Bill pulled up to a gas station in Broadview to top off. In winter, he told Molly, it was always wise to keep your tank filled at night because water condensation could freeze in the tank and melt in the morning.

"You know all kinds of things like that, Bill. I would never have known that. Oh, look!" She pointed out the side window. "Tiny little cabins at that motel. Is it time to stop yet?"

He looked over to where she pointed and, sure enough, the motel across the street had little log cabins arranged in a circle around a central grassy spot. A perfect place for their first night. Bill paid the gas station clerk and then pulled across the street to the parking spot in front of the motel office. They had pretty much the pick of the cabins since it was a little early so he chose one back away from the street. After paying some pretty stiff prices in European hotels Bill didn't think that twenty nine dollars was outrageous at all. Molly was incredulous.

"Twenty nine dollars! Is that all? How can they make money?"

Motels are very inexpensive here in the States, Molly. They have a lot of turnover and room maintenance comes cheap. Mostly, they hire Indians to work as maids. I don't like the way some of them are treated, so I leave a good tip where they'll see it first, before the owner."

[January 9, 1964]

[Antler Motel, Broadview, Montana - late afternoon]

They carried in what they would need for the night and relaxed. The television only had three channels - all very snowy - so Bill turned it back off. Molly seemed her old self now. She was humming a tune as she moved about the cabin which, after a bit, Bill recognized as the tune she was singing in the tub way back when they were in Paris.

"Feeling better now, my love?" He asked, holding out his hand to her as he lay back on the bed.

"Much better." She took a knee next to him, making the bed sink deeply. "Move over a bit."

He shifted over and put his arms over his head, motioning Molly to put her cheek on his chest. She did. Then he wrapped his hand around her shoulder and hugged her tightly. "I'm happy."

* * *

I wonder if this is the time to tell him what I've suspected for three days now. It could hardly come as a shock, after all the lovemaking we've done. Still, maybe I should wait for a bit. No, maybe not. *Oh, putain! Je ne sais pas quoi faire!*

* * *

Decision finally made, Molly cleared her throat and put her lips on Bill's in a tender kiss. "I have a secret," she whispered.

"And what's that, Honey?"

Wanderlust!

"I think we're about to become a family."

Bill's heart seemed to stop; then it revved into double-time. "A f-family? Your morning sickness!" He finally got it! Molly was pregnant! Son of a bitch!

He hugged her tightly and began kissing everything within reach. Her nose, her eyelids, her cheeks, and finally her lips. She began giggling when she felt his fingers sliding down her waist to land on her tummy.

"No, silly. You can't feel anything right now, but I am sure I am pregnant. I will have maybe a week of morning sickness and then it should go away.

"Butâ but, shouldn't we go back now. Shouldn't you take things easy?"

"For a guy who knows lots of stuff, you have a lot to learn. I'll be fine. We can still make love any time we want. I can be just as active as I want to be until about the seventh month; then we will have to take it easy. Oh! I'm SO HAPPY!" She wrapped her arms around Bill's chest and hugged him tightly.

Bill was still stunned. He knew they were playing with fire every time they made love, and now all that had come to a head. His wife was pregnant! Yoweeee! He was going to be a dad!

"Does anyone else know?"

"I think your mom guessed but she wouldn't say anything, would she?"

"I don't think so. She would wait until you announced it. How about your folks?"

"Probably not. I wasn't doing this back then. I think the airplane ride triggered my queasy stomach."

"And, all this driving might keep it going. Maybe we should go back."

"No! I want a proper honeymoon. Just the two of us - and little, tiny, junior." She giggled. "I hope it's a boy. He'll grow to be straight and tall; just like his father."

"Wait. Wait. A 'he'? He's already grown up? Molly, let's slow down here a bit, okay?" Bill grinned at her. "What can we do to celebrate?"

"Go look in the icebox."

Bill put on his shoes and coat then went out to the camper. In the icebox was a small split of very good champagne. Aha! Bill thought. Molly had known she was pregnant a while ago because this wasn't sold in the States. She'd bought it in Montreal. God! He loved this woman - his woman - his wife.

Molly allowed herself only one small glass of champagne, telling Bill it was for the good of the baby that she had no more alcoholic drinks until after he was born. Bill agreed, and finished the quarter bottle.

They walked a short distance to a small diner and had a passable meal of grilled cheese and beef barley soup. Neither one of them was very hungry at the time. When dinner was over, they walked back and decided to just climb into bed and go to sleep for the night.

But they talked for a little while first. Still thrilled at the news, Bill jabbered about all the things he could do for their child. Eventually, he wound down and pulled the covers up to their neck. Amid visions of little pink

Wanderlust!

babies dancing around his head like cherubs, Bill fell asleep.

[January 9, 1964]

[Antler Motel, Broadview, Montana - morning]

Next morning, Bill woke with Molly plastered down his whole side. She had apparently gotten a bit chilly and moved in on him. Her head was resting on his chest, which explained why he was breathing hard. She had thrown a leg over his and her knee was resting across his thighs. He cracked an eye and found another eye staring back at him. Molly was watching closely for any sign of life. "Good morning, my love." She said. "I see your man handle has appeared." He snickered at the use of her pet name.

Molly giggled and tossed the covers away from them both, then rolled atop Bill. She reached back and dragged the covers up over her shoulders. "Brrrr. Cold outside." Her warm body pressed tightly against his chest and her arms locked behind his neck. "I love you so much." She whispered in his ear. "Can we just stay like this for a couple of hours while you warm me up?"

The thought of staying in bed with Molly for two hours sounded just fine to Bill, but they had to get out of the room by eleven in the morning and it was already nine. "Would another fifteen minutes of thisâ!" he wiggled his hips from side to side. "âand thisâ!" he raised his hips upwards, lifting her into the air. "Do?"

"Mmmm. Just fine." For the next fifteen minutes, they slowly made love until both were drowsy with exertion. "Ready for a new day now?" Molly asked in a soft voice.

"Absolutely!" Bill slipped out from under her and sidled towards the bathroom, hopping from one foot to the other. He'd found out that she was right! It was cold out there. Soon, he had the shower running full blast using nothing but hot water. The steam built up until it began wafting out the door. He heard her rising from the bed with a squeak, and then she appeared beside him. She did a little groping.

"Aw. Your man handle has gone soft." She giggled.

"Molly! If you don't stop that, we'll never get on the road today. And, since when did you get all raunchy on me, eh?"

"It has always been inside me, my love. Now that I'm married to you, I can let it all out. Oh, look. You're interested a little bit."

He was too; but just a little bit. After he washed up and brushed his teeth, and left the bathroom to get dressed. Molly lingered in the warmth, and then came out and dressed also. Breakfast was next on the agenda. The little town had two diners - neither one had much outside to recommend it, so they just mentally tossed a coin. They may even have gotten the better of the two. No prizes were issued for the meal however. The eggs were runny and the toast was cold with congealed butter grease on it. Bill didn't even want to think about the coffee, it was so bad. They paid and bugged out of there in record time.

When they returned to the motel cabin, they packed up the bus and drove it over to the office, leaving it at idle so it would heat up. Bill dropped the key off at the office, which had a different clerk there for the morning shift who wished them a good trip as Bill was on his way out.

[January 9, 1964]

[US 87, Southern Montana - morning]

Wanderlust!

Driving conditions were excellent and they made good time. At just under an hour, they rejoined highway eighty-seven at Billings and took it in an easterly direction until it curved south again. According to the map, Wyola, Montana was the last town of any size at all before they would reach Wyoming. They stopped at a diner crafted from a real train car there in the little hamlet and had what turned out to be an excellent lunch. Wonderful buffalo hamburgers and huge Texas French fries.

Back in the bus after lunch, they crossed the border fifteen minutes later. The time versus distance thing in Bill's head calculated they would reach Casper in about three hours. Outside of a stop for gas, which turned out to be a little on the expensive side at sixty cents a gallon, they entertained themselves by singing along with various country music stations they found on the radio. Neither one of them was much good at it but they belted them out anyway. Molly seemed to like singing full throttle.

At Casper, Molly and Bill changed around and she drove. She showed good instincts at when to downshift descending hills but tended to leave it in the higher gear a bit too long when climbing which made the engine lug. But, by the time they reached Cheyenne, Molly was an old hand at shifting. It had been a long day and with six in the evening approaching they decided to bed down for the night.

The only place they could find was a chain motel that put them up on the second floor of an old wooden frame building which creaked and groaned in the brisk wind off the prairie. They ended up having to stuff towels around the bottom of the door and windows to keep the draft from coming through. They slept fitfully under a pile of blankets; the two of them wrapped together other all night.

[January 10, 1964]

[Best Western Motel, Cheyenne, Wyoming - Morning]

They woke up in the morning anxious to get the hell out of the place. Bill was visibly stimulated, but as soon as he fluffed the covers, the cold seeped in and his ardor vanished. Molly never even rolled over from her position facing away from him when he got up. He brushed his teeth and used a washcloth under the tepid water to clean up somewhat. Molly sleepily did the same and then he patted her on the butt and told her to hurry up and get dressed so they could leave.

One the way down to the bus, Bill stopped by the desk and told the old guy sitting there that this was the worst place he'd ever stayed in his life - and that included most of Europe. It was drafty, filthy, drab, dull, and didn't even have hot water or towels that didn't stink of mold. The old guy just shrugged his shoulders. On the way out, Bill grabbed about six donuts out of a bowl sitting on a table near the coffee machine. The old man yelled at him that he had to pay, but Bill just kept walking. The old man didn't even bother to follow him to the door.

"What was he yelling at you?" Molly asked as Bill got into the driver's seat. He didn't answer, but instead handed her the bag with the donuts.

"I stole his donuts. They're about the only thing warm in there."

"I believe you are right."

There are four ways to leave Cheyenne - the four cardinal points of the compass. Since Bill knew he'd filled out a card when they arrived last night, but he hadn't added their bus registration; and, since they'd parked off to one side, when they left he simply used a side exit. This way, they never were in view of the front desk at any time. "Who cares?" Bill said caustically. "He hasn't got a clue which way we went. Don't worry about it. Hand me one of those things."

Wanderlust!

Molly passed Bill a donut and he munched on it as he drove. She busied herself with the pull-down mirror on the visor fixing her face. Bill thought it was beautiful as it was, but she liked to touch it up a bit. The rising sun came in through my side window and painted her hair even more golden than normal. "Gosh, you're beautiful in the morning, Molly."

"I turn into a demanding old biddy if I don't get coffee though. How about over there?" She pointed to yet another beanery on the side of the road.

They pulled in, shut down, and went in search of a hot breakfast.

Chapter 26: Wanderlust - Chapter 26

[January 10, 1964]

[Colorado Border]

After they left the diner, they entered Colorado within ten minutes. They were planning on getting to the Boulder area in about ninety minutes, but it started snowing a little and that hampered their speed. Cars were whipping by them at speed but they were in no hurry. One car shot past them and, when it started across a bridge, began sliding sideways. At the end of the bridge it was pointed back towards them. Bill could see the guy frantically whipping the wheel from side to side but the car wasn't behaving.

Black Ice! The word exploded into Bill's mind. He immediately lifted his foot off the gas pedal. Molly, who had been drowsing, opened her eyes and shot to attention. "What?" She looked forward. "Why is that car blocking the road?"

"He just spun out." Bill replied, doing an adroit double-clutch and carefully downshifting. "That bridge is covered with black ice. You can't see it, but it's there. I'm trying to get stopped without using my brakes." He was slowing enough so he double-clutched again and popped the gearshift into second. The engine whined loudly but they started to slow faster now. By the time he reached the threshold of the bridge they were barely moving in first gear.

Bill had yanked the knob for his four-way flashers the instant he'd identified the danger, but cars were still going by them at highway speeds. Bill wondered what the hell was wrong with them. Another car directly in front of them started fishtailing and impacted the bridge rail on the left, shedding chrome trim. It ricocheted off the concrete and back into the road. Bill figured he had to get the hell off this bridge.

He moved as far right as he could and managed to find a thin film of gravel that was left over from the last time it snowed. This gave him enough traction to move forward and quickly pull over at the end of the bridge and behind the barricade railing so they were protected. Bill left the engine running but jumped out and pulled a big flashlight that had a red flashing end to it from under the seat. He powered it up after pulling his heavy coat on. Molly asked him what he was doing. He told her he had to slow down those people until law enforcement came along or somebody would get killed.

"You be careful, Bill. Am I all right here?"

"You're fine. There is a guardrail between you and the road. I'm going back across the gully and see if I can stop traffic. Stay in the bus!"

He left and slipped down the bank into the empty gully. He had a hard time with big stones that had slippery ice on them, but he made it to the other side. It took him quite an effort to climb back out but finally reached the top. Staying outside the guardrail he walked about two hundred yards down the road swinging the flashlight in front of him.

Off in the distance Bill saw a large truck coming. It was moving at quite a clip so he reversed the flashlight and hit the vehicle with a bright beam of white light. The trucker began slowing; great gouts of black smoke pouring from his exhaust stacks as he downshifted. Bill thought at first that he might jackknife, but he got it under control and pulled to the side before the bridge, flashers running brightly.

"Have you got any flares?" Bill yelled up at him.

Wanderlust!

"Yeah," the trucker yelled back. "Let me clean the shit out of my pants and I'll get them. Black ice?"

"Yeah. The bridge is covered with it."

A car roared past them, hit the bridge, and slid sideways. It stayed that way until it got to the end of the bridge and then began to rise up on two wheels. Bill thought for sure it was going over; so did the trucker. "Gaw DAMN! What a knothead. We gotta slow them idiots down. Come on. Fire up a couple of those." He handed Bill four flares.

Bill popped the tops of the first one and struck the sparker. It sputtered and then settled down to a fiery red glow. He spiked it to the ground next to the road. The trucker sprinted a ways further and did the same. In three minutes, they had laid a trail of red flares running back nearly a quarter of a mile. Traffic was finally coming to a halt. As they did, the trucker yelled for someone to keep going further back and stop oncoming traffic. A burly guy in a pickup and a US Mail carrier went back along the road. The mail guy had several more flares. The dangerous bridge was covered now.

* * *

Molly craned her head around, watching through the rear window. She couldn't see much. Feeling guilty at her action, she unstrapped from the seat and stepped out of the bus.

'*Mon dieu*, that wind is very cold. I'd better get my coat on or I will freeze. Bill will never forgive me if I get sick now.'

She chuckled to herself at the thought of Bill hovering over her while she languished in a warm bed.

'I can see the cars are now stopping. Where is he? Oh, there he is, with that flare. Brrrr. Come back soon, my love. It is too cold to linger.' She climbed back into the warm bus.

* * *

Bill went back to Molly and told her everything they had done. As he was lifting a foot into the bus, a Highway patrol cruiser came down the opposite side of the road. "Hey! You folks all right?" He called. Bill waved and told him that he and the trucker parked there had dropped flares back about a half mile now. He yelled back that he'd do the same on his side. He popped on his light bar, and then made a U-turn to go back down the road. Occasionally he would stop and fire up a flare.

"You always know what to do, my love. Always." Molly leaned over and kissed her husband. Bill waved at the trooper as they passed. He waved back.

They drove south along the front range of the Rockies. Every hillside had a mantle of snow on it even though the flatlands below them had none. Farmlands were to either side of them, lying fallow for the winter. Artesian wells, capped against the cold, showed up as icy snow cones where water had leaked from piping. Molly asked about them and Bill told her that artesian wells didn't need to be pumped; that they got their water pressure from the hills above them. All you had to do was run a pipe down about fifty feet and water gushed forth. You had to put a valve in it to stop the flow.

At Fort Collins, they gassed up and took highway 287, which was closer yet to the foothills. They passed through Loveland and then Longmont - old stomping grounds for Bill back when he was a wild teenager. They stopped once, and he had tried to look up some old friends but was completely unsuccessful. Not even Boulder High had any addresses for his friends. A phone book had revealed little. Now, it was just another

Wanderlust!

town they had to pass through.

Bill knew of a shortcut that would take them west to highway 6 in Golden, which would bypass the city of Denver. From Golden, they would take highway 6 further west until it merged with highway 40 towards the Continental Divide at Loveland Pass. Highway 6 went over that pass and highway 40 diverted north over Berthoud Pass. Bill's goal for the day was somewhere between Dillon and Vail on highway 6. The climb to the pass was a long, grinding grade and they would only be making about fifteen miles per hour up the steep grade to the summit - stuck in second gear.

[January 10, 1964]

[Boulder, Colorado - afternoon]

In boulder they stopped for a late lunch. On the way out of town, they parked in the lot of a huge supermarket and the two of them bought enough groceries to hold them should they get caught in the snow traffic. At this time of year, however, there should be little danger of active snowstorms but they can pop up very fast and dump a lot of snow on the road in just a little time. It pays to be prepared. Bill also stopped at a Western Auto and bought a dozen flares; something he had neglected to buy before starting out on the trip. By the time they hit the road their goal was shortened to just the town of Dillon on the western slope.

They navigated through Clear Creek Canyon on its narrow, twisting, little road. Trucks would blow past them coming downhill and make the whole bus shake. Molly looked over at Bill with a little apprehension. "Are you sure this is safe right now?"

"Sure, Honey. I've driven this in full winter using chains many times. We'll be fine. This bus has its engine in the rear so all that weight is right where we need it - over the rear wheels. You and I are sitting right over the front wheels so we have that covered also. My dad put excellent winter tires on this thing too. Piece of cake. Trust me."

"Okay. If you say so."

"I say so. Just sightsee and enjoy the scenery." She smiled at me.

* * *

'I can't say why, but I *do* trust him. Every day I find yet another reason to love him all the more. I am glad he is driving though. I would not like to drive on this road at all.'

Molly had never been in real mountains. They had them, of course, in western Canada, but she had never visited them - up close. Now, she was climbing into them. She felt her ears popping every once in a while as they rose in altitude.

'I wonder how high we are nowâ ' '

* * *

They remained silent for a while until they came up on the junction with highway 40. It was a merge from the left, which wasn't normally a problem, but they were going uphill and very slowly at that. Bill flicked on his turn signal and dropped into third gear. The bus picked up speed and they joined with the traffic flow. Since this was the "fast" lane, he needed to get over to the right as soon as possible. He waited for a gap, and then moved over. They would be here in this lane for the rest of the climb - behind trucks, big busses, and cars with

Wanderlust!

trailers. They were in no hurry at all so Bill didn't strain the engine.

"Do you want something to drink? I'm thirsty." Molly asked Bill as they passed a waterfall. "I can get a bottle of water if you want."

He thought about it. "Sure. That would be great. Be careful getting up. I'll warn you of any turns."

She unbuckled her seat belt and passed between the seats to the little refrigerator. He heard it open, then close. She handed him a small bottle of juice instead. "The water froze when I picked up the bottle. Very strange."

"Water will do that if it's below freezing but not disturbed. When you touched the bottle, it moved the water and it froze instantly. Juice is fine." He popped the cap and took a slug of it and then grimaced because of the cold.

They passed Georgetown, and then Silver Plume with its big water wheel - frozen in place at this time of year. He was stuck following a tractor-trailer until they came to a passing lane. Slowly, very slowly, Bill passed the truck. This was a good thing because they hit a small patch of fog and the windshield began to get dirty. Luckily, the reservoir for the window washer was inside the bus on the front wall so it hadn't frozen. This allowed him to clear it.

Now they were hemmed in by vast forests of pine trees and tumbled rock falls. An occasional road dove off to the side, only to terminate at a lonely cabin on the creek they were following. "I'd like to live there," Molly said in passing. "It's so beautiful here."

"Well, in winter, most of these houses are vacant. At any given time there might be as much as three or four feet of snow to plow through to get to your front door. Summertime is much better."

She smiled ruefully, "Yeah, I guess so." She lapsed into silence once again.

Suddenly, she pointed ahead. "What are those long patches up there?"

"They are skiing runs. See the towers right up the middle? That for the chair lifts. This is a big skiing area for people from the entire Denver area. Hotels and motels are very expensive. That's why I want to get to at least Dillon. Not quite as expensive there."

"How much? Like in Paris?"

"Hmmm. Our hotel room in Paris was probably a little less expensive than a hotel here in this area. Dillon is most always cheaper than ski areas proper. Don't even think about a hotel in Vail. That's where all the Washington, DC politicians come."

"Oh. I've heard of Vail. I didn't know it was in Colorado though. I thought it was in California."

"A lot of people think that. We'll be passing though Vail tomorrow."

They stopped right at the top of Loveland Pass; all twelve thousand feet of it. Bill took Molly's picture standing in front of the Forest Service sign and then she took his. Bill prevailed on a couple to take a picture of the both of them. They returned the favor by taking one of the couple also. Bill made the rounds of their bus: making sure the lights were all working, checking the tires again, and cleaning off the windshield. Once they were moving he tapped the brakes and felt them nice and solid.

Wanderlust!

All the way down the grade he never left third gear. He was using the engine as a brake and not relying solely on the wheel brakes. Bill explained to Molly that they were now in what was called Middle Park. It was the area between Loveland Pass and Vail Pass. "We have to go over another pass?" She asked.

"Yup. This one isn't so bad though. It's only about ten and a half thousand."

"Oh, that's really comforting," She said, rolling her eyes but with a twinkle in them. "Tomorrow?"

"Yeah. We'll hit it tomorrow. We're on the outskirts of Dillon now. Look for a place that has a vacancy."

"Okay."

They passed motel after motel and not a one had a lit vacancy sign. It didn't look good for them. They might have to stay at a roadside stop and bundle up. They had a very thick, padded sleeping bag for each of them that had the added plus of being able to zip together to allow them to sleep together. If they had to, they would, but Bill would much prefer to find a motel.

The highway followed the northern shore of Dillon Lake and passed beneath the dam. They were rapidly running out of motel possibilities. The next town was Frisco.

Molly spotted the sign just as they swept around a curve and the headlights fell on it. "Look! A bed and breakfast. Go that way!"

Slowing rapidly, Bill turned and went up a side street. Two blocks later they stopped in front of a two story building build like an old time western hotel. It had a false front and appeared to be open. No sign was out, either for or against, space available. It didn't hurt to try.

Chapter 27: Wanderlust - Chapter 27

[January 10, 1964]

[Parker's B&B, Frisco, Colorado - evening]

Bill parked in a lot with about ten slots but none of them had a vehicle in them which did look promising. There was a small sign on the door frame that said to 'just walk on in', so they did. It was warm, almost stiflingly so, in the anteroom. A weathered woman came bustling up to them wreathed in smiles.

"Hi folks. Just get into town?"

"Sure did. Not a single place available anywhere in Dillon. I sure hope you have some room here."

"Oh, but we do! I have a choice of two rooms - one in front and another towards the back. The front room is a little more expensive though." She named prices. Neither one seemed that expensive to Bill. Certainly less than the hotel in Paris which would be their 'standard' from now on.

Bill turned to Molly. "Which do you want, Honey? Up to you. You get to make some decisions now too you know."

The woman peered at them through her half-glasses. "Are you young people on your honeymoon? I'll just bet you are."

Molly colored at her neck by way of an answer. "Well then." She said with a chuckle. "Don't you worry yourselves about prices. Take the front room at the back room price, please. How nice it is to have young people staying with us - and just married to boot. Go get your stuff out of that camper and I'll show you the room."

"You go up, Molly. I'll get our night bags and be right up."

She took Molly's hand and led her away to the stairs. Bill went back out and secured the bus for the night, taking their bags out and hauling them upstairs.

Once on the top floor, Bill steered towards the sound of Molly's voice and entered a very nicely appointed room. A huge four-poster bed dominated one side while an equally large armoire was on the other. A small picture window looked out over the hillside across the way; lit with the lights from doll-sized houses on the opposite slope. A door led to a bathroom, shower only the woman explained, as the bathtub had sprung a leak and was under repair. "No problem," Bill answered. "I'm kind of bushed after the long drive so a shower would be just fine."

"Well, good then. Dinner will be served at seven. There are four other couples joining you in the dining room. Dress is casual - western style, if you want. I'll be downstairs and have the book ready to sign for you. Go ahead and relax now. Where'd you come from today?"

"Just south of Cheyenne. A very long trip."

"Sure was. How'd that bus of yours do in the mountains?"

Wanderlust!

"Kinda slow, about fifteen miles per hour or so, but steady. We may not be very fast, but we do get around thirty seven miles per gallon with it."

"Is that a fact? Well, I'll be. That's pretty good. Well â later." She waved her hand and closed the door behind her.

Molly hopped over to Bill on one foot and pressed her body to his. She started nuzzling his ear. "Mmmmm. This is a really great place. I'm glad I saw that sign."

"So am I. I wasn't looking forward to sleeping in the bus overnight. It would have been fun, but we wouldn't have gotten much sleep I bet."

She nuzzled his ear again, nipping it with her lips. "Oh, I don't know. There are better things than sleep you know."

"Really? Name one," he said teasingly.

"How about â man handles," she said in a rush, groping him. "I would rather grab man handles than sleep sometimes."

"Man handles or man handle? Which is it?"

"Oh, singular, for sure. Just your man handle, my love. None other. And don't you forget that."

Bill moved backwards a step as his man handle was beginning to react and it was nearing time for supper. "You'd better get cleaned up for dinner. And save some hot water for me too."

"Oh, pooh. You're no fun. You just wait until tonight." She flipped her shoulder at him, but winked. "Byeeeeee."

She splashed around in the bathroom for a bit and then called him in. She was standing in front of the sink, completely nude, twisting and turning while trying to look at her hips. "Am I getting fat?" She asked.

This is an open minefield question for any man alive. Bill took a long moment to answer. "No â and, yes."

"What kind of answer is that?" She challenged.

"If you mean 'hippy' then no, but if you mean exceptionally pleasing to the eye, then yes. I have never liked emaciated girls. I like my girls with some semblance of roundness about them. You know as well as I do that as the baby grows you'll get larger. This is definitely not fat. It is pleasurable roundness. You could never be fat to me, Molly." He slipped his arms around her from behind and ran his fingers down her belly and cupped them under it. "Right here. This is what it's all about. This is what's important to me right now. I want you to be healthy and have a healthy baby." He put his lips lightly against the back of her neck and kissed her. She groaned and caught his wrists. She lifted his hands until they rested below her breasts.

"Just think. In a few more months I'll have another mouth, a tiny one, kissing and sucking there." She ran his fingers across her warm breasts. "I'm going to be very sensitive during that time. I hope you'll be patient with me."

"You can count on that, my love. Now," He patted her on the butt, "you'd better get dressed." She backed up a little and encountered his man handle.

Wanderlust!

"Or, you can get undressed." She teased. "We still have a half hour until dinner."

The idea of a quickie with his wife was appealing, but if they delayed up here for too long he doubted they would get to dinner on time. Reluctantly he bent and kissed her shoulder. "Keep it warm for tonight," he said as he went back to the bedroom.

"Hand me my bra and panties will you?" Molly called from the bathroom. Bill hunted around inside her bag until he found what she wanted; which he then handed to her. When she came out, she was wearing them both. She bent over the suitcase and the fabric of her panties stretched tightly across her butt. Bill was almost ready to give up on dinner and just hop into bed right now. But, he was a bit hungry.

Dinner was a casual affair. They met the other guests, who were all travelers of some sort. Strangely, none of them were skiers at all. One couple, up from Florida just today, having taken the bus up from Denver, seemed surprised that they had trouble breathing. When Bill told them the altitude they understood why. Frisco is just over nine thousand feet high; which was about nine thousand feet higher than they were used to.

After dinner, most of the guests went into the huge living room to sit by the fire. Molly and Bill talked a while and then began to get sleepy. Making their apologies they headed upstairs to their room. They barely got their clothes off before piling under the big feather comforter on the bed. Bill didn't know who slept first, him or Molly.

Chapter 28: Wanderlust - Chapter 28

[January 11, 1964]

[Parker's B&B, Frisco, Colorado - Early morning]

Snow had fallen overnight. Bill noticed this the second he looked out the window from the bed. The whole valley was coated with it. "Molly. Wake up, Honey." He called softly. "We've got to get moving pretty soon. It snowed last night."

"Huh? Wazzat? Snow?" She mumbled from deep with the coverlets and turning to face me. "How much did we get?"

"I don't know. I'll check." He hopped out of bed and tiptoed over to the window. Based on how much was now sitting on the roof of the bus he judged that about two inches had fallen. "Maybe two inches. Looks like something local though. At least I hope so. I want to get over the pass and into Grand Junction today. If we're lucky, it will take us about five hours. More snow makes us slower."

Bill took a quick shower and then shoed Molly in for hers. He thought it was his imagination after their little conversation last night, but now thought he saw a little more fullness to her stomach. 'Could she be starting to show already?' He wondered.

They newlyweds ate breakfast almost by themselves. Just one other couple joined them at the table when they were about halfway done. The couple was from Des Moines and was headed back that way now. Bill told them to take it easy over Loveland Pass and they said they would. In just over an hour Molly and Bill were backing out of their parking spot and moving down the road.

[January 11, 1964]

[US 6, west from Frisco, Colorado - morning]

They continued their trip west on highway 6. Slowly they climbed back up to Vail Pass which, surprisingly, had blown almost clean of snow. Using the brakes sparingly, Bill drifted down the other side in third gear. They made the mistake of stopping in Edwards to have a hot meal in a diner that had seen better days. Molly just picked at her hamburger and didn't touch her greasy fries. She took on a slightly glassy look which Bill noticed when he got into the bus again.

"You feeling badly, Honey?"

"Oh, not really. It was just that I looked at those fries with all that fat dripping from them and I felt a little ill. I'm okay now that I'm out in the fresh air. That place was horrible."

"Agreed. It's probably a long way from a health inspector."

She tittered and buckled up. Bill pulled out into traffic and continued down the road. Eagle came and went, along with Gypsum. They crossed the Colorado River at Dotsero. There they pulled into a tiny roadside stop and made coffee on their little stove. Bill explained the significance of the name 'Dotsero' to Molly as the starting point for mapping companies back when Colorado was still a territory. Mileage was measured from the river so that was the 'dot zero' point.

Wanderlust!

"How do you know all this stuff?" She asked with a perplexed look. "Do you just read it somewhere or what?"

"That particular one my dad told me when we crossed the river years ago on our trip down from Alaska."

"Now there's a place where you have to be extra hardy to survive. The thought of Alaska brings to mind wolves, bears, dogsleds and the like."

"Funny you should mention that. I know how to drive a dogsled. I was taught by the best driver in Fairbanks."

She leaned into him and kissed his cheek with grape jam stickiness on her lips. "Somehow I just knew that, my talented husband."

Refresh from their short break, they continued downhill towards Grand Junction. Glenwood Springs wrinkled Molly's nose. "What's that horrible smell?"

"That's the springs that the town is named for. It's supposed to have healing powers. They believed that years ago but now it's mostly just for the hot springs and not for anything else. There is one place here in town where you can go from almost cold water to steamy hot in a series of pools. It's a place where the sexes are separated by a translucent divider down the middle of the pools. You swim in the nude."

"Really! I've always thought that would be deliciously decadent to do sometime; swim in the nude. But, it's much more fun if everyone swims together."

"Mmmm," he acknowledged with a noncommittal grunt. "But think of all the man handles around you. Wouldn't that make you nervous?"

"Only if you weren't there, my love. Then it wouldn't matter to me one bit."

Thoughts of nude bathing accompanied Bill for the next ten miles. Going downhill was much faster than going uphill and they made good time. The drawback to this was that the engine wasn't working very hard and didn't produce much heat. It got a bit cold.

A final huge bend in the road revealed the town of Grand Junction out before them. "Goodness! Look how far you can see out there!" Molly exclaimed.

"That's where we're headed," said Bill. "Right out that direction." He pointed through the front window. "We should probably stop and fill up with gas before we leave Grand Junction. There isn't anything between here and Green River for over ninety miles."

Molly turned to look at him with eyes wide. "Nothing? As in empty?"

* * *

'Surely there must be *something*.' She thought.

* * *

"Yup. Totally nothing but sand, rocks and a few jackrabbits."

"Gosh. That sounds really scary. I'm so used to having towns - even small towns - nearby. What if something breaks down? Can you fix it?"

Wanderlust!

"Well, unless the engine drops to the ground I can. I've got a full toolbox back there and a couple spare parts if we need them. We have the camper itself if we need shelter. And, if the weather cooperates, we can stay at the campgrounds in Green River."

"Not a motel?"

"Nope. Tonight we can rough it."

Molly smiled at Bill uncertainly. He reached over and patted her on the knee. "We'll be fine."

They found a nice gas station on the western edge of town. Bill filled the tank and also a military-style jerrican he'd bought at a surplus store. It was never a mistake to have more gas than you needed. He lashed the can to the luggage rack on top.

While Bill was doing this, Molly took the opportunity to stretch her legs. She got into a conversation with a family of four who had just left Green River this morning. They told her that the road was clear of ice and snow and that the view was wonderful. The wife confirmed that there was nothing out there. "Not even a road leaving the main road except for small pull-outs where people have camped."

"Gosh! That's hard to believe."

"Believe it, Honey." The woman patted Molly's arm. "Say, what kind of camper is that you're driving? Looks kinda small."

"It's big enough for the two of us. It is a Volkswagen - from Germany."

"Looks strange. I can't put my finger on it butâ Ah! I got it. Where's the engine? The front seats are right over the wheels."

"Oh," Molly chuckled. "It's in back."

"In back? Well, I'll be danged. Pretty clever. Stick shift?"

"Yeah. I'm still getting used to it. My husband lets be drive for a while every day. I didn't want to in the mountains though. He drove all the way through them."

"Don't blame you. We're headed east right after lunch. You both take care now. We're ready to go, I guess."

Her husband and two kids were waving at her from their car. The woman left to join them. In the meantime, Bill arrived from paying the gas bill. "Who was that?" He asked.

"Just a woman. They're headed east. She said the road is clean and clear all the way to Green River."

"Thanks, Babe. Good intelligence is always nice to have." He kissed her cheek. "We'd better get going too. You want to drive?"

"Um â sure. I'll drive. But not for too long though."

"No problem. I'll fix sandwiches while you drive."

[January 11, 1964]

Wanderlust!

[US 6/50, west of Grand Junction, CO - afternoon]

Molly drove. When they got out on the road, Bill watched her handle the bus for a moment. She was doing well, but when the wind, which was steadily blowing from the northwest, got interrupted by a small hill, she tended to creep towards the side of the road. When the wind reappeared after the hill, she moved to the left.

"Honey. When you see we're coming up on the next hill, be prepared for the wind to stop. That way, when it does, you won't move to the right. Then, when it starts again, you can be ready for it and not drift to the left."

"Oh. I thought it was me that was doing it. I'll watch for that."

She did too. After several more little wind-blocking hills, she got the knack of compensating for it. Bill relaxed, unbuckled, and slipped back to make lunch.

He worked fast, not wanting to be unbuckled too long. In no time, he'd produced two lunchmeat sandwiches, a soda each, and a big bag of chips. He put the chips between the front seats and crawled back into his own. "I'll hold your sandwich while you drive. Munch now?"

Molly nodded and Bill handed her the sandwich. She took a big bite and handed it back to him. "Mmmm. Good. I like the deli mustard."

"So do I." He let her take another bite.

Feeding himself between occasional bites of her sandwich and sips of her soda for Molly, they finished their lunch. Molly was now anticipating the wind and kept the bus straight down the road. And it was straight too. Not a degree of variance was showing as they topped a small hill and looked out across the valley below them. The road ran straight across and climbed the far hill.

Bill began to drowse and soon was drifting off to sleep.

* * *

'Well, I guess Bill trusts me. He's asleep over there. I never realized just how far forward I'm sitting here. I can look right down at the road just in front of me. How strange.'

Molly chuckled to herself as she piloted the bus down the road. 'He could probably look at the mileage and tell me within five miles how close we are to Green River. I hope I never lose my fascination at just what he can do.'

* * *

The sun began to sink down into the far hills in front of Molly. She began to squint in the glare. Bill woke up and looked over at her.

"Ready for some relief? That sun has to be murder on your eyes."

"Yes. It does bother me a little. I am a bit tired also in my arms from the wind." She lifted her foot off the gas pedal and let the bus drift to a stop. There was no traffic in either direction so she felt no need to get off the road. Unbuckling, she dropped to the pavement and stretched to the sky. "Ooooh. That feels good."

Wanderlust!

Bill, on the opposite side, did the same and then came around to take over from Molly. When they settled down in their seats, Bill started off. He had his sunglasses on now and the sunshade pulled down low.

"How far do we have to go now?" Molly asked.

Bill looked at the odometer, did some calculations, and replied: "About fifteen miles now. Green River will pop out of the ground as we get near the valley. It sits kind of low."

"Oh. Okay. I'm closing my eyes now for a while. The sun is bright."

"Mm-mmm." Bill replied.

They drove onwards across the seemingly limitless plains now beginning to show deep shadows behind each clump of grass or hillock. It was getting late now. As he expected, Green River began showing as a smudge on the horizon. He glanced at Molly, but saw she was dozing and kept quiet.

When he turned off the highway to go into town, Molly woke. "We here already?"

"Already? You closed your eyes a half-hour ago, Sweetie." Bill chuckled.

"Oh." She rubbed her eyes. "My eyes burn."

"That's probably due to the humidity. It's very dry out here. We'll stop at a market and buy something to soothe them after we get to the campground."

He drove down near the river and pulled through an arch proclaiming the Green River Campground. A 'spaces available' sign hung on a nail on one side of the wooden arch. Bill pulled up to the office and got out. Still a bit sleepy, Molly didn't.

[January 11, 1964]

[Green River Campground, Green River, UT - evening]

Duly registered now, Bill drove to his assigned slot and parked. He'd opted for a powered spot so that he could run a plug from the bus to an outlet under a locked cover. He'd been given the key for it. Once power was applied, the larger lights would work and they could save the battery.

Bundled against the light breeze, which had tapered off when the sun set, Molly went around to each window and loosened the curtains to let them fall. Bill got out the curtain frame for the front window and fitted it. Soon, they had their own little space. To make sure, Molly got out and walked all around the bus to check.

Bill pulled out pots, pans, and a can opener to fix some supper. Neither one of them was very hungry, but he thought they should eat something. Molly stopped him.

"Maybe we could find a diner close-by. I'd like something really nice before we go to sleep."

"Sure, Baby. Put your coat back on and we'll see what there is to see."

They locked up the bus and went over to the office. The woman there told them there was a nice restaurant just up the road a block or so. Bill thanked her and they headed that way.

Wanderlust!

Molly didn't order much, and then only picked at what she did order. Clearly, she was off her feed. When he finished his meal, he asked the waitress if she would wrap up Molly's dinner. She said she would and came back from the kitchen with a paper bag.

"I added a carton of milk for you, wife."

Molly looked up at her gratefully. "Thank you very much. My stomach is a bit upset right now. The milk will help."

Bill put some cash on the table to cover the bill and added a tip. They got up and left the restaurant. When they got back to the bus, Bill ran the engine a little while to make some heat and then switched it off. They went around checking windows again to make sure the curtains were closed.

Cuddling together under a blanket, they sat on the convertible seat and read for a while. Bill eventually glanced at his watch and proclaimed that it was getting late. Molly agreed. They stood and pulled the seat out to make their bed. It was the first time Molly had seen it done.

"Pretty nice," she exclaimed. "Looks soft enough."

"The pad is under here," Bill said, reaching through the door under the bed and pulling it out. He spread it over the bed. Then he pulled out their sleeping bags and joined them together, catching Molly's smile as he did. Another cubbyhole produced two pillows. By the time the bed was made, Molly was ready for it. Bill held things steady as she crawled into the bag; then he joined her.

When Bill turned off the remaining light, the bus went dark. There was enough residual light to be able to see, but nothing bright enough to be bothersome. The campground was quiet now. He kissed Molly gently.

"Good night, *Mon Cher*. Sleep tight"

She kissed him back sleepily. "You too, my love. I hope I am feeling better in the morning."

"Me too, Honey. I worry about you. Maybe we should go back."

"Shush," she said, putting finger on his lips. "I'll be fine. Maybe tomorrow we can stop early and find a good motel or something. It would be nice to just rest for a while."

"*Oui. Je Suis d'accord*, my love." He kissed her again. She began kissing back. They didn't go too far however as Molly's eyelids began to droop. They spooned; Molly at Bill's back. Rapidly, they fell asleep.

Chapter 29: Wanderlust - Chapter 29

[January 12, 1964]

[Green River Campground, Green River, UT - morning]

Molly and Bill woke to the sounds of the campground coming to life. At around midnight, a large vehicle had pulled in to the site next to them. The people were polite, but still the opening and closing of doors woke them briefly. Now, they could hear the sounds of children running around next to them. When something bounced against the outside of the bus with a thump, Bill sat up and groaned.

"What the hell? It's way too early for this."

He eased out of the warm cocoon of their double sleeping bag, grimaced when his feet hit the cold floor, and pulled on his shoes. Wrapping himself up in his coat over pajamas, he hustled over to the communal bathroom. When he returned, Molly was stirring. She looked a bit better.

"Hi, Honey. How do you feel?" He asked quietly.

"Considering all the yelling and screaming going on next door, I'm fine. A couple of the kids had a fight and now they've all run off to eat breakfast. Let me get dressed and maybe we can do the same."

"Sounds good to me." Bill said, taking off his coat and running a little water into the sink. "I'm going to do a very short wash-up. You might want to take a hot shower. The women's washroom is just over that way."

"Oooh. I can use a hot shower." She said, smiling at him.

Molly gathered up her toilet stuff and hustled over to the wash room in the chilly air. Bill continued to dress and then broke down the bedding, folded the blankets, and collapsed the bed back into a seat. When Molly pulled the door open, he had a hot cup of coffee ready for her.

"One milk, two sugars; right?"

"Oh, thank you. I need this. Someone was sick in one of the stalls and it smelled terrible in there. I took a fast shower." She sipped the hot brew. "Mmmmm. Good."

"Do you want to try and eat here, or pick up some doughnuts or something as we go out of town. The next stretch is just over a hundred miles with nothing in between."

"Really? Another long run with nothing but desert?"

Bill nodded. "Yup."

"Yes. Then let's stop on the way out and see what we can find to eat. Please." This was punctuated by a growl from Molly's stomach. She chuckled. "See, even this agrees."

"Right! Let's get this boat ready to sail then."

They busily cleaned up things, washing the coffee pot and stowing it. Molly gathered up her cast-off clothing and stuffed it into a bag. "We're going to need to wash things out soon, Bill."

Wanderlust!

"We can probably do that in Salina - or in Delta if we stop there."

"Sounds good to me."

"You want to drive?"

Molly shuddered. "No. You go ahead. I'll try and wake up some more."

They unhooked the cable from the power box and stowed it and then fired up the engine to let it begin to warm things up. When ready, he drove over to the office, got out and went in to return the key to the power box.

When he came back, he had good news. "The guy in there said there was a Safeway on the west side of town. We can buy some goodies there." He glanced at the gas gauge. "We might also top off again."

Molly belted herself into the seat and sipped the remainder of her coffee in silence while Bill navigated down the main street of town. They located the grocery store easily and found a gas station right next to it. Prices at both places were a bit high.

[January 12, 1964]

[US 6/50, west of Green River, UT - morning]

Once on the road again, fortified by two sticky buns each and a big container of hot chocolate, they began to feel human again. Bill turned on the radio but got nothing but a couple of stations giving stock reports. Pretty boring stuff. When that ended, the nasal twang of country music began. He turned it back off again. "Can't stand that stuff," he remarked to himself.

The highway stretched out in front of them, narrowing to a dot at the horizon. They drove along in silence. Molly was reading her book, but found that the road was too bumpy to concentrate and gave up. She lay her head back on the headrest and closed her eyes.

* * *

'This is truly a great country,' she thought. 'We've been driving for three days now and have just been in two states besides this one. I don't know where we will eventually settle down, but living here would certainly be an experience. Everyone is so friendly.' She paused to belch softly. 'Ooh, too many sweet things. My stomach is upset.' She smiled at herself.

* * *

Bill noticed the smile out of the corner of his eye and wondered if she was indeed feeling better. He voiced the question.

"Yes. Actually, I do feel better this morning. I have to confess that it was I who was sick in the bathroom. I tried to clean it up as best as I could. I don't think anyone saw me. I feel bad about it though."

"Don't worry. It'll air out soon enough. The men's side had an exhaust fan so yours probably did also. No problem." He turned to smile at her.

She smiled back and pushed her empty coffee cup into the trash bag.

Wanderlust!

They drove on silently. Molly drowsed in her seat while Bill thought about many things. First and foremost he wondered if they should turn back. Molly seemed confident that the sickness would pass, but he wasn't so sure. Running around the countryside in a bouncy bus was probably not the best thing to do when you were pregnant. He would ask Molly if she wanted to go back to Great Falls by way of Salt Lake City. He drove on.

[January 12, 1964]

[Salina, Utah - noon]

They reached Salina, Utah shortly after noon. Bill parked the bus in a slot beside the municipal park and they got out to stretch. He put his arm around Molly's waist and guided her to a picnic table. They sat down.

"Molly, I think it would be a good idea to cut this trip shortâ!" He paused when her face clouded up. "Wait. Hear me out. We can still have a great trip, but instead of California we just go north through Salt Lake City and back up to Great Falls through Idaho. On the way, we can go through my stomping grounds of Missoula. How about that?"

"Oh, Bill. You wanted to go visit friends in California. I don't want to hold you back. We can go on."

"No. I really think you need to get back home where we can take better care of you â and little junior too." He chuckled and patted her tummy. "Now, put on a happy smile and we'll go get some food."

* * *

'I feel so bad that I'm causing him to miss out on his friends. Even as sick as I am, I'm having fun just being alone with him. *Mon dieu*, I love him so.'

* * *

Molly put her arms around Bill's neck and drew him close. "Okay. We can go back, but I would like to sometime visit your friends in California. *Promets-tu?*"

"*Je vous promets.*" He said solemnly. "I love you so much, Molly, that it hurts deep inside to see you feeling badly."

They walked around the square and found a nice little place to get a hot meal. They were surprised to find French onion soup on the menu. They both ordered it - along with two grilled ham and cheese sandwiches. It was delicious. When they left, the both felt much better; Bill because he thought he'd done right, and Molly because her stomach was quiet for a change.

Bill did the math and figured it would take them a little over three hours to get to Ogden. He didn't want to stop in Salt Lake City because he knew the prices would be higher. So, after walking another fifteen minutes, they got back into the bus and started out. With a stop on the outskirts of Salina for gas, they were on their way north, leaving highway 50 behind.

[January 12, 1964]

[North of Salina, Utah - afternoon]

Their new direction took them upwards through towns such as Gunnison, Nephi, and Santaquin until they stopped yet again in Provo to stretch. They'd passed a sign pointing to Utah Lake State Park and decided to eat

Wanderlust!

a little bit of food. The gate was open, but the little guard shack was locked up. They found a nice picnic table near the shore of the lake and spread out their food.

"I thought we were near Salt Lake. Is that up ahead of us?" Molly asked.

"Yes. Provo is a few miles south of the big city. This lake is just a smaller one around the big lake. You'll know it when we get there. Flocks and flocks of seagulls hang around it all the time."

"Seagulls? Here? In the middle of the country?"

"Yup. They migrate over the Sierras from the west coast and settle down here. Strange, eh?"

"Sure is. I've never seen a seagull. Are they big?"

"Pretty big." He indicated a bird the size of a small chicken with his hands. "They make a lot of noise too." He chuckled.

They cleaned up their trash, tossed it into the nearest trash can, and left the park. As they were heading northwards, Bill filled Molly in on the extent of the salt flats. She was very impressed, but he seemed to think he might be exaggerating a bit. It wasn't until they passed over the main portion of Salt Lake City on an overhead causeway that she saw the endless stretches of blindingly white salt flats to the west.

"My goodness! Is all that salt?"

"Sure is. Extends west for around a hundred twenty miles. All the way to Wendover - on the Nevada border."

* * *

'That is almost too much to comprehend. All that salt! Bill told me that it is so flat that they race cars on it and that some of those cars get up to two hundred miles an hour. This country - my new country - never stops amazing me.'

* * *

Eventually Bill saw another sign. He'd known the base was here, but hadn't thought of it until now. "Say, Honey. How about a good meal in the Officer's Club here at Hill?"

"Hill? Is that another base like Malmstrom?"

"Sure is. We can have a good meal and then be ready to stop when we get to Ogden. No plastic food in a diner tonight."

Molly reached over and touched his arm. "Oh, that sounds so good. Do we have good enough clothes?"

"I think so. We can park near the back of the lot and pull down shades if we want while we freshen up. It'll be fun!"

"Okay. A tasty meal would go nicely right now. Let's do it."

He drove on until he reached the entrance to the base. He drove up, prepared to show his ID card, but the guard simply saluted and waved him through. Up ahead, he saw a large sign with various destinations listed.

Wanderlust!

He drove slowly enough to spot the arrow pointing to the O-Club and turned that way. Presently, they pulled into the lot.

Today being a Sunday, Bill figured there would be some sort of buffet. They changed into cleaner clothes, washed up a little, and Bill brushed Molly's hair. In ten minutes, they stepped out of the bus and headed for the main entrance.

They went directly to the front desk and talked to the person seated there. She asked them for a club card, but Bill didn't have one. He did tell her that his dad was stationed at Malmstrom and that he was a member in good standing of that one. She smiled up at him as she passed over a clipboard.

"Just sign here as a guest. Are you here for the buffet?"

"Definitely," Bill replied. We've been on the road all day and are very hungry."

"Really? Where did you come from?" She asked.

"Salina. We're on our honeymoon." He added, perhaps unnecessarily, as he put his arm around Molly's waist.

"Oh. Congratulations. I hope you enjoy our club."

Bill handed her back the clipboard and she made a notation on it as to the time they arrived. Bill thanked her and he and Molly entered the club proper. Everyone seemed to be dressed as casually as they were so Molly didn't feel too uncomfortable. Some women had dressed up more elegantly, but Bill told her that they probably had just left evening church services.

They found their way to the dining room and the greeter found them a table. "If another couple comes in and doesn't mind sharing, you can put them here with us. We don't mind. We've been cooped up in a car all day and some talk would be nice.

"Thank you, Sir. I'll keep that in mind. Wait for your server and then just go up to the steam tables. *Bon appÃ©tit!*"

"*Merci,*" said Molly in reflex.

Their server arrived and set them up with plates, utensils, and water. He indicated where the steam tables were and told them to just go ahead and get whatever they wanted. When he left, they did just that.

* * *

'Just look at all this food! I don't know where to begin. Bread, I suppose. Oh, wait - those hard rolls look delicious. I'll get one of those. This is roast beef and that is ham. Maybe the beef. Oh! A sweet potato! I love sweet potatoes; I have to have one. Now a spoon of green beans. And one of corn. I hope I can eat all of this!'

* * *

Bill watched Molly with relief. It seemed as if she had regained some of her appetite. He had been beginning to worry about her. If she ate everything on her plate, she would certainly be full. 'Good for her,' he thought.

Molly did indeed eat everything on her plate and polished it off with a small wedge of cherry pie. Bill had chocolate cake with a spoon of ice cream on it. When they were finished, they paused over a second cup of

Wanderlust!

coffee.

"You must be feeling better now, my love. You ate quite a bit."

"Oh, I am - feeling better, that is. Such good food. Do they always serve this much at these clubs?"

"I don't know about this one, but the one back home is great. Those pilots demand a great deal from their club and they get it. The club is a membership club. They each pay an amount into the club depending on their rank."

She nodded to herself. "That seems fair. How much will this meal cost us?"

"I haven't a clue, but I bet it won't be much. Drink up. We'd better get on the road. It's past four now."

"I kind of hate to leave. It's so nice in here."

"Sure is, but we should try to get a motel in Ogden before too late."

They finished their coffee and Bill left a tip for the server. It wasn't required, but he did anyway. He took Molly's hand and led her back to the front door. On the way past the desk he complimented the woman on the club; telling her it was every bit as good as the one at Malmstrom - maybe better. She smiled and thanked him. "Come back soon," she said. Bill waved on the way out.

Bill didn't realize it, but Hill AFB was immediately south of Ogden anyway. They had barely left the front gate when they saw the city limits sign. He chuckled.

"What?" Molly asked.

"I guess we could have lingered for a while longer. We're already in Ogden now."

"Good. Do we want a motel or a hotel? I would kind of like a hotel if we can find a good one."

"Hotel it is, then." Bill announced, turning down a street that would take them towards the center of town. They didn't find anything that appealed to them and were about resigned to going back to the Best Western they spotted earlier when Bill saw the marquee for the Marion Hotel. They drove past.

"It's perfect!" Cried Molly. "It looks just fine to me."

Bill parked and walked back to the hotel. He came back to the bus ten minutes later and announced they had a room. Molly clapped her hand like a kid. "Wonderful! I hope they have hot water. I need a bath desperately. No showers for me tonight."

"I didn't ask, but they probably do have bathtubs seeing as they're pretty old. We'll muddle through. Let me park in the hotel parking garage and get off the street. They gave me a punched plastic card to raise the gate." He held it up.

"Ooh. Drive! Drive!"

He did just that. When the bar rose, he drove upwards to find a spot and then parked. They each grabbed a small bag and went into the hotel. The clerk had told Bill that the card was also the key for opening the door. He'd never seen anything like that before and wondered just how it worked. They found their room and settled

Wanderlust!

down.

[January 12, 1964]

[Marion Hotel, Ogden, Utah - evening]

Molly collapsed on the bed and sighed. "Long day!"

"Definitely! I don't know if I could have driven further than this. That meal made me very sleepy. How about you?"

"Me also, but first - a bath. I hope." She rose and went into the bathroom. She poked her head back around the doorjamb and announced that there was indeed a tub - a big one. "Big enough for two - if you're so inclined."

"I'm not inclined at the moment, but that can be remedied in no time at all." He snickered.

"You're terrible." She responded, but with a wrinkled nose.

"You get started and I'll join you later. Bubbles?"

"Oh, yes! Ummmm, none in here so bring mine, please. They're in my brand new makeup kit, bottom drawer."

Bill located the small tin and brought it to her. She was already running hot water and partially undressed. He nuzzled her ear and patted her on the butt. "Oh! Go away until I'm washed up a little. I want to be nice for you."

"You're always 'nice for me', but I'll wait." He left.

* * *

'Right now I feel very undesirable. I smell from all that sitting in the bus. I suppose that doesn't bother him at all, but it does bother me. I think I'll add a little more salts than usual. They don't seem to be foaming up as much as before. Maybe it's the water. I'll ask Bill. I bet he knows. What a wonderful meal we had. I can't believe I ate that much! And the pie! So sweet but tasty. I guess I have to watch my weight now with this child growing in me. I can't feel anything, but I know he's there. He? Oh, I hope it is a boy! So many things are going to happen to me - to us - while he grows. I hope with all my heart I won't look ugly to Bill.'

* * *

Following a leisurely, and hot, bubble bath, the two of them, their ardor suitably sated, piled into bed even though it was relatively early - only nine-thirty. It was a race to see who went to sleep first.

Chapter 30: Wanderlust - Chapter 30

[January 13, 1964]

[Marion Hotel, Ogden, Utah - morning]

* * *

Molly woke slowly under the warm covers. She pushed her hand out to the side where Bill should be but encountered nothing. She rolled over onto her back and sat up quickly.

'Gone? Where has he gone? I can see that the bathroom light is off so he is not in there.'

She swung her legs out and sat on the edge of the bed.

* * *

At that moment, Bill was downstairs in the coffee shop buying them their breakfast. He'd hit paydirt! They had croissants! He bought four of them and a large container of coffee. On the way out, he grabbed several tubs of butter and two paper cups as well as cream and sugar packets. He hustled back upstairs to their room hoping to find Molly still asleep.

The lock clicked open and he pushed through the door to catch Molly pulling on her robe. "*Bonjour, mon amour. Il est beau l'extÃ©rieur mais trÃ©s froid.*"

"*Comment le froid?*" She responded, tying her sash and brushing her hair back from her eyes.

"*Je ne Sais pas, mais le vent souffle.*" He said slowly. "Perhaps around forty degrees or so. I didn't ask at the desk."

"Brrrr. I want another hot bath. This morning, *Monsieur*, you will not join me so I can fix up my face for you." She said archly.

"*Oh, je Suis Ã©crasÃ©. Pour Ã©tre rejetÃ©e si tÃ¢t.*" He stepped closer and tried to kiss her but ended up at her forehead when he'd aimed at her lips. "Molly?" He said with his forehead creased. "What's up?"

"No big thing, but I am feeling a bit sick to my stomach again and it bothers me for you to see me this way."

He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tightly. "I promised through bad and good, Molly my love. If you feel bad, I feel bad. Can I help?"

"No, not really," she murmured into his shoulder. I am just having second thoughts about making you go home so soon."

He leaned back and looked at her in the eyes. "Hey! We both made that decision. I haven't regretted it so don't feel bad about it. We'll still have some time before we get back. If we get moving in an hour or so we can probably make it back into Montana by nightfall. We have just a small piece of Idaho to go through first. More mountains to see. Heck, we'll be back for your birthday even!"

Wanderlust!

She brightened up a little. "I thought you might have forgotten that. I feel good now and I'll be even better after a hot bath. But first â are those croissants I smell?"

"They are indeed. Come over here to the desk and we'll have breakfast while it's still hot. I have coffeeâ!"

They went to the table and Bill laid out all the hot things he'd brought up. Molly started slowly, but built up speed as her appetite returned. Licking her fingers guiltily, she then pronounced it time for her bath and retired to the tub. For once, this morning Bill heard her humming and felt much better.

She stepped out, wrapped in a huge fluffy towel, and proceeded to slip into her underthings. Bill watched surreptitiously as she was sometimes self-conscious about such things even now after all their time being married. Once again, he thanked whoever was responsible for bringing this wonderful woman to him. She went back to do her hair.

"I figure we can make Dillon before nightfall. It's over three hundred miles, but the road isn't all that steep. Maybe six hours, maybe less." He called to her in the bathroom.

"Okay. But we might have to stop a couple times so I can walk around. I get cramped up sitting all the time."

"You want to drive some of the way?"

"I might, if it isn't snowing."

Bill looked out the window. The sun was shining wanly and a cloud bank seemed to be building up a little. He thought it might snow later. "You can drive this morning and then I'll take over. How's that?"

"Sounds good to me. I'll be out pretty soon. You can start taking the stuff out to the bus if you want."

"Okay. Will do. I'll leave your bag here for you."

"Mmmm hummm." Molly responded.

* * *

'Actually, I like to drive *le bus*. Once I got used to using the clutch that is. Having the steering wheel almost flat makes it easy for me. I bet I have trouble once I start getting big though.'

Molly smiled at the thought of trying to drive with a big belly bumping the wheel.

'Maybe I'll just let Bill drive me wherever we're going.'

* * *

They were ready to go in fifteen minutes. All bags were stowed and the ice box filled with a little ice from the machine. When Molly tried the water pump, she found it made a funny noise.

"Bill? Something is wrong with the water pump. Take a look. It's making a whoosh sound."

He stepped through the seats and pumped the lever a couple of times. It made the same sound for him.

Wanderlust!

"I bet the diaphragm is leaking. If any water was in it, and froze, it might have goofed up the pump. I'll take a look at it tonight. We don't want any water in the tank anyway because it will freeze."

Molly agreed with him; happy knowing she'd noticed the problem by herself.

They arranged themselves for the trip. Molly adjusted the mirrors and the seat back to fit her smaller frame and fired up the engine. Looking around carefully, she backed out of the slot and started down the road.

The first bit of their journey today was fairly easy. The clouds were present, but not showing any further snowy developments. The wind picked up a little, making Molly pay attention to their whimsical nudges. Being essentially a box, the bus was subject to winds that wouldn't have bothered an automobile so one had to take care not to wander in the traffic lane.

Molly looked down at the gas gauge. "Should we stop soon and get more gas? We're under a quarter tank."

Bill glanced over and verified. "Yup. We should. According to the map, Malad City is just up ahead. We can gas up there."

The bus whined down the road until it curved around a small hill. Malad City appeared. Finding a gas station was no problem because there appeared to be several of them all in one spot. The price was the same so it didn't make any difference which one they chose. Molly turned in to the first one they came to and killed the engine.

Bill hopped out and began filling the tank. While it was filling, he checked the oil. "About a half a quart low. I'm going to get another quart and add it tonight. Help remind me, Molly."

'Okay. You drive now?' She asked.

"Sure. No problem."

Bill went in and paid for the gas, adding a quart of oil to the tab. The guy at the counter asked him what his mileage was and whistled when Bill told me it was around thirty five or so.

"Jiminy, that's pretty good. My old pickup only gets about twelve."

"You probably have a lot more horses than I do though. Mine's only forty horsepower."

"Forty!" The guy said, raising his eyebrows. "How does it do on hills?"

"Kinda pokey," Bill admitted with a smile. "But we do make it up." He scooped up this change. "Take care."

"You too. Looks like snow is on the way."

"Might be. We'll be careful."

They continued up the road. This time it was Bill driving.

"Oh, by the way. Welcome to Idaho, Honey."

"When did we do that?"

Wanderlust!

"Didn't you see the sign? You were driving."

"Must have missed it. The wind was pushing me all over."

* * *

'I sure am glad he's driving now. My arms are tired! He told me this bus didn't have power steering and I believe it! Oh, shoot. I have to pee! That's happening more often now too. Maybe we can stop near a tree or something.'

* * *

"Honey? I'm going to need a rest room kinda soon. I went back at the gas station, but now I have to go again."

"No problem. Keep your eyes peeled."

They had just passed a small town and were approaching another. Bill spotted a small town park and then saw the outbuildings. It would probably be cold, but serviceable. He pointed.

"There you go. Be sure to put your coat on. It'll be cold in there."

She nodded and dragged her coat off the back seat as she left the bus. Bill let it idle instead of turning it off so that the heat would stay on. Molly came back a few minutes later looking much more comfortable. She got back into the bus and they drove off.

They went through Pocatello and then stopped in Idaho Falls for a late lunch. It wasn't all that good, but it did beat cold sandwiches and juice. Bill bought a thermos of hot chocolate to help keep them warm on the road.

Presently, they passed through a small notch between two mountains and entered a long, straight valley between them. They drove on in silence. Molly dozed but seemed to come awake at every bump in the road. Bill reflected that being on the road, in her condition, was probably not the best thing they'd done. He would be glad to get back home and allow her to get some well-deserved rest.

Bill spotted a windsock on the left side of the road. Not only did it indicate the wind was blowing directly into the nose of the bus, but it also told him there was an airfield nearby. He spotted the small tower and pulled into a parking spot. Molly looked at him with wrinkled brow.

[January 13, 1964]

[Dell Flight Strip, Dell, Montana]

"I'm going to check the weather. They'll have the latest forecast here for sure. Be right back." He leaned over and kissed her; then got our and hustled into the building.

* * *

'There he goes again. Is there anything to be seen that he misses? I wouldn't have thought of checking at an airport - especially one this small - for weather. Well, maybe they do depend on weather a lot. But, to think of it so fast when he first saw the flag thingy is really surprising.'

* * *

Wanderlust!

"Help ya?" A guy at a desk asked.

"You have the latest met report?"

"Sure do. Came off the wire just a half hour ago. You a pilot?"

"Not at the moment. Just driving. Eventually heading for Great Falls. Planning on stopping in Missoula, my old college area, and then heading east. Any bad weather on the way?"

"Says here to expect flurries. Westerly winds gusting to thirty-five. Accumulation to two inches. But, that means here in the lower elevations. Could be worse up higher. I'd take it easy."

"We plan to, my friend. My bus can make it and I've got chains if I need them. We're going to stay in Dillon overnight anyway. Thanks for the report."

The guy nodded. "If I was flyin' I'd take off now and be down before dusk."

"Just the same as me, I guess," Bill chuckled. "Thanks again."

The guy waved a hand and Bill pulled the door closed behind him. He explained the weather forecast to Molly, underplaying the ferocity of the wind somewhat so as to not alarm her.

"We'll be in Dillon soon. Nice and warm in a motel."

Forty miles up the road they entered Dillon. Their first order of business was to find a snug motel. They passed up a couple because they had quite a few cars in front of them. Being this close to a branch of the University, that could mean a noisy night. They pushed on through the town. Once they crossed the river, they found a nice Best Western and got a room on the second floor that looked out over the valley.

[January 13, 1964]

[Best Western Motel, Dillon, Montana - evening]

Not wanting to drive anywhere else for dinner, they opted for a meal in the small café attached to the motel. It was generally good food, but simple and mostly tasteless; corporate stuff, as Bill thought of it. Molly wrapped her roll and a pat of butter with a napkin and put it in her purse for later. Having brought their thermos, Bill asked if they would refill it. For what they charged, it should have been expensive French Roast, but it was probably thin Maxwell House. Smelled good to him though.

Back in their room, Molly wanted a nice soak in a tub of hot water but found, to her dismay, they only had a shower. Undaunted, she pulled off her clothes and turned the hot water on full blast. Soon, steam was billowing out of the slightly opened door. Bill was happy to hear her humming a little as she washed the road grime off.

The Television was on cable so they had a choice of channels. One of them was a weather channel and it depicted the cloud cover the meteorology report had mentioned. It was extensive, but even their forecast didn't sound all that bad. When it came time for Bill to shower, he had changed the channel to an old western movie. On his way to the shower, Molly patted him on the butt and whistled.

"Nice buns," she commented.

Wanderlust!

Bill snickered, wondering where she'd ever heard that phrase, and closed the door. His toilet took only fifteen minutes but when he came out of the bathroom Molly had burrowed deeply under the covers with just her nose showing. Bill rapidly donned his sleeping clothes and slid in next to her. They cuddled, nose to nose for a bit and then faded into sleep.

Chapter 31: Wanderlust - Chapter 31

[January 14, 1964]

[Best Western Motel, Dillon, Montana - morning]

Bill lay flat on his back and woke slowly as Molly toyed with his beard. She seemed to him to be in a very good mood so he made the proper advances and was rewarded with a gentle lovemaking session under warm covers. After glancing at the clock and making a mental note to snooze for another half hour, they fell asleep again.

Bill woke first, happy to see it had truly been only a half-hour. He slipped out of bed and did his morning washing up, and then kissed Molly on the top of her head. When she pulled the covers down, he did a much more thorough job of it, making her smile and giggle. She rose also, brushed her teeth, combed her hair, and dressed rapidly in the chilly room.

"Well, today we can go one of two ways. We can head straight over to Great Falls through Helena or we can go up and head west over to Missoula and visit the university I went to. Up to you, Honey."

"Oh, I'd love to see the university! I've heard you talk about it and since we're this close we just have to stop by. Is it too far out of our way?"

"Nope. We can get to Great Falls another way from there. I used to hitchhike back and forth when I was attending classes. I know that road like the back of my hand. So - we go!"

* * *

'He is *so* decisive! It would have taken my parents ten minutes to make up their minds. Maybe less for Denise. For him, it was immediate; no hesitation.'

* * *

They gathered up their belongings and packed them. Molly made the rounds of the room and bathroom to make sure they hadn't forgotten anything and pronounced them ready. Bill carried their bags down and stowed them in the bus. As he did, he looked around the sky and noticed the cloud cover was moving in on them.

"Might snow a little, Molly." He remarked.

"Will that bother us?"

"Nah. Not at all. Hop in and we'll go look for something to eat."

Bill fired up the bus while Molly buckled herself into the seat. When the heater began blowing warm air, he started off. They found a nice diner right at the northern fringe of town and had their breakfast. It was tasty as well as hot.

As they motored up the wide valley, Molly would crane her head from time to time. "What's up, my dear?"

"Are those fields round?"

Wanderlust!

Bill looked in the direction she was pointing. "Yes. That's how they water their fields sometimes. They have a big long water line with huge wheels that runs around a central point. The water is fed up into the watering machine and as it turns, it waters. Pretty cool, eh?"

"It sounds kind of strange to me."

They traveled about five miles or so until Bill pointed out the window on Molly's side. "There! See that long thing with the wheels on it?"

"Yeah. Is that the water thing?"

"Sure is."

"I didn't know it was that big. How fast does it go?"

"Not fast. It might take all day just to make one complete circle."

"Pretty efficient, I'd say."

They arrived at the road that went east to Butte around eleven. Bill told Molly that if they went right, they'd go directly to Great Falls. Left took them towards Missoula. "Last chance, Honey. You sure you feel like going this way?"

"Now stop. We decided before. I want to see your college. It'll be fun!"

"Okay. Here we go. He swung left and accelerated up the gently grade towards Missoula."

Privately, he was pleased she wanted to go this way. He'd been wondering of late just how much, if any, the town had changed. He hadn't been gone that long, but in a college town anything can change in a very short amount of time. Besides, he wanted to look up some old friends at the smokejumper's school.

They ate a small lunch in Deer Lodge, filled up with gas, and continued up the wide valley. Around two, they entered the narrow slot that signaled the town of Missoula. Once in the city proper, Bill turned west and headed for the campus. They parked in front of the administration building and got out. It was blowing a little, but so far no more snow had fallen.

"This is really impressive, Bill. No wonder you liked it so much. The universities in Montreal tend to be rather cramped and stodgy. This looks wide open."

"It is, actually. I spent a lot of time over in that building; the library."

Hand in hand, they walked around the campus. Bill pointed out the buildings he was familiar with and even showed her the big "M" laid in rocks on the hillside. He explained that every year, the freshmen would be rounded up and given buckets of whitewash and brushes. They had to re-paint the rocks for the coming year.

"That looks like a really hard climb to me."

"It is. I made the trip three times. Once as a freshman and twice more as an overseer. That bunch of rocks is about eight or nine hundred feet higher than we are here. Quite a climb."

"I bet it is," she shivered at the thought.

Wanderlust!

"Let's go over to the Student Union snack bar and find some hot chocolate. Does that sound good?"

"*Cela semble merveilleux pour moi*," Molly said, tucking her hand under his elbow. "*Allons-y!*"

"*En avant!*" They strode down the pathway marked with an arrow to their destination.

After a cup of hot chocolate apiece, they left the student union and wandered about a bit more. Bill would have liked to show Molly everything, but the wind was taking its toll. Even he was becoming chilly. The decided to make for the bus and warmth again.

"Want to see the smokejumper's school?" Bill asked as they drove away from the campus.

"Sure! Is that where you learned how to do it?"

"Yup. Two seasons. It's hard work too."

"Dangerous also." She said it as a statement, not a question.

"That too. But, remember, I promised not to do it again. I mean it too. I've a lot more responsibility now haven't I? To all three of us."

Molly smiled back at him and nodded. She unconsciously rubbed her tummy as she did.

They headed slightly north of town and entered the grounds of the airport. It was a much larger place than the small airfield Bill had stopped at before. When he pulled up in front of the school building, he was a bit puzzled that there were no cars in front of it. When he got out and read the sign on the front door he understood. They'd closed the school for the holidays and wouldn't re-open it for another week.

"Sorry, Honey. The school's closed for another week. Damn, I wanted to see some of my friends."

"They don't live nearby?"

"Some probably do, but most are from out of town."

"I'm sorry."

"No need to be. Now we can head out for Lincoln. That's a place about halfway between here and Great Falls. We can't go all the way there today so we'll just stop there if we want; or we can go a bit further to Simms."

"Whatever you wish, my love."

They left the airport grounds and headed back down the highway. The wind was picking up and Bill noticed it was snowing a bit more. Snow behind him didn't really matter unless it was moving faster than they were.

"Lincoln is only about eighty miles from here. Shouldn't take us very long at all."

They weren't too far along the road before they came to the cutoff that ran nearly east to Great Falls. It kept them from having to go back down to Butte and then up north again. Bill knew the route well as he had hitchhiked back and forth back home on school holidays. He swung left onto a smaller highway. It was not a good decision but he didn't know it yet.

Wanderlust!

* * *

'It is a shame he didn't get to see his friends. I want so much to be a part of his life. Besides, I think he wants to show me off. I don't know why he finds me so special, but he does. And I love him all the more for it. I wonder if the snow will get worse before we stop.'

* * *

As they drove around a curve, Molly suddenly pointed to a small sign. "Look! It wants me to go that way!"

Bill quickly glanced at the sign. Sure enough; it pointed the way to a town called Garnet. "Wanna go see it?" He asked.

"No. We'd better keep going. I'm worried about the snow."

"No sweat, Honey. I'll get us through. Once we get into deeper canyons, the wind will die down somewhat and the snow shouldn't bother us." He drove onwards.

[January 14, 1964]

[Lincoln, Montana]

An hour later, they approached Lincoln. It was still light out - being late afternoon - so they just stopped for a snack and to fill up with gas. They passed a large RV store with pumps so Bill slowed and turned around to go back.

"I want to see if they have a pump for our water tank. I don't know if I'll buy it, I just want to see how much they are."

"I'll wait in the bus if that's okay."

"Sure. I won't be long."

He filled the bus and then went inside to pay and browsed. He did find a pump, but figured the top was too big for the size of the washbasin they had. A salesperson came over to him.

"You in that little bus out there?"

Bill bridled at the diminutive terminology, but nodded.

"I've always wanted one of those. My RV is way too big now that there is just the two of us. You need a pump?"

"Yeah, but this one's too big for my sink. Mine is a little hand pumped one with a lever off to the side. You have any of those?"

"Nope. Sorry. Ours are for bigger sinks I'm afraid. Which way you heading?"

"Towards Great Falls. We may decide to just stay here for the night or push on to Simms."

"Snow's picking up a little. You shouldn't have any problem though."

Wanderlust!

Bill turned to the large front window and looked out. The snow was coming down slightly thicker, but it still should be easy to travel in. He also saw Molly talking to a woman standing next to the bus. As he watched, Molly get out, don a coat, and follow the woman over to a large RV parked a little ways away from the bus.

"Looks like my wife found a friend. Guess I'd better head on out."

"Take care," the guy said and wandered back up the aisle.

Bill left the store and went to the RV and tapped on the door. It opened to frame a large guy in a Stetson who boomed his welcome and pulled him into the vehicle.

"Welcome, son. I guess we've already got your wife. Newlyweds, eh?"

Bill smiled self-consciously. "Yeah."

"Well that's just great. I'm Dennis and over there is Gert. We started out in a tiny little thing even smaller than yours. Teardrop trailer it was. Way back in the late forties." He laughed. "Now, we got this big thing. It's our only home now. We just travel all around."

Bill looked around. It certainly was a nice sized thing to be traveling in. He noted that both sides of the living room appeared to be able to swing out and there was a bed loft right over the front seats. Very snug indeed. They spent another ten minutes chatting and then they took their leave.

When the cold wind hit Molly outside, she suddenly had to use the bathroom again. "Honey, I'm going to run into the gas station for a minute. Would you go warm up the bus and met me?"

"Sure I will. Take care across the lot. The pavements slippery in spots."

She looked at him, then rose on tiptoes and kissed his cheek. "Stop worrying. I'll be fine."

While he waited for Molly, Bill saw that the Texan's RV was pulling out onto the road. They headed east. Bill pulled over to the door about the time Molly left the building. She hopped into the seat and buckled up.

"Brrr. It's really chilly out there. How far is our next stop?"

"About seventy miles. We'll get there right after nightfall if the weather holds."

"Will it?"

"I think so." He reached over and patted her hand. "Stop worrying. We'll be fine."

They left the parking lot and pulled onto the highway once again. As they did, Bill noted that the snow was coming down much heavier than before. But it was still behind them. If he made good time, they'd stay ahead of it.

The road was becoming snow-packed and they could see the tracks of the dual tires the RV ahead of them was making now. Bill slowed down somewhat; mostly so that he had better control. Gusts of winds were now pushing him at times. It had picked up.

Up ahead, they spotted the taillights of something big. When they edged closer they saw it was the Texas RV. It was moving fairly slow now, but much slower than it really should have been. Suddenly, there was a sound

Wanderlust!

like a gunshot and a big cloud of smoke came out of the tailpipe. This was followed by yet another. Clearly, they were having difficulties.

Not wanting to pass them in case their RV broke down completely, Bill slowed even more. Snow began to build up on the windshield and the wipers were now having quite a time clearing it off completely.

"Bill. Is this safe?"

"Very safe, Honey. If we have to we can pull off and weather out the storm. We have sleeping bags and all. Plus we have food. Might be cold, but we'll be safe. Look! They're pulling off into that pullout."

The RV drifted to the side, lurching and belching smoke. Bill followed it, but not close enough to be involved in whatever they may do. Finally, the engine fired one more cannon shot and then it died. Bill stopped also and turned on his four-way blinkers.

Grabbing his heavy coat, he admonished Molly to stay where she was and got out to see if he could help. Crunching through the newly fallen snow he approached the RV and tapped on the door. It was opened by Gert. In the background he could hear Dennis swearing strongly from under the dash.

"The whole gol-danged harness is melted. Dammit. It just had that checked the other day when they installed this damn radio. I'll bet that dumb bunny did something wrong."

"Now, dear. We have company. That nice couple in the bus are here."

Dennis rose, banging his head on the dash, which didn't help his disposition. "Wal, I managed to stop it from smokin' but them wires is really cooked. Everything all right back here. See anything burning?"

Both Gert and Bill looked around. "Nope," I said.

Gert spoke. "Look. Its plain we aren't going anywhere now, Dennis. How about we just bed down here until it gets light?" She turned to Bill. "You folks going any further?"

Now it was time for Bill to make a decision. He looked out the window and was rewarded with nothing but snow. He couldn't see the other side of the small canyon at all. The storm had caught up with them. Looks like he was stuck also.

"Nope. We'll plunk down here also."

"Well you bring that purty gal up here and we'll feed y'all something. Heck, you can even sleep here if you want. We have a generator. That is, if the knothed hasn't burned up the wiring back there too." Grumbled Dennis.

[January 14, 1964]

[Turnout, Little Wolf Creek Road, Montana highway 200 - past dusk]

Bill left the RV and walked back to his bus. Molly looked at him expectantly when he got in and shut the door. "They want us to have dinner with them. His vehicle has crapped out - burnt wiring under the dash. He says his generator works, so they have light and heat. It would be much better than staying here."

"Can't we go back to Lincoln?"

Wanderlust!

"Not now, Honey. We'd be driving right into the snow and it's getting deep now. I made a bad decision. We should have stayed put."

"Well, okay. I'll bring up some of our food too; bread maybe?"

"That would be nice. Bring some of that wonderful cheese also."

Molly unstrapped and went to their larder and gathered up things for dinner, filling a plastic sack. Then, after donning her heavy coat, she slogged the twenty yards up to the RV. Even now, it was hard to distinguish without the running lights being lit.

Bill considered shutting off his flashers, but thought better of it. Until later tonight, when the chance of passing traffic was over, he'd best leave them on. He reached into a storage place in back and hauled out his tool kit. Perhaps he had something here that could help Dennis repair his RV.

Molly gratefully entered the warm vehicle and shed her coat. She passed her sack of goodies to Gert who set them on the tiny kitchen counter.

"Come on, Hon. You sit right over here near the heater. You look froze to death. You can leave that coat on for a spell until you warm up some."

Molly looked at her gratefully. "Thank you very much. I, um, sorry; I don't remember your name."

"Gert. And the one under the dash is Dennis." She raised her voice. "Dennis! You mind your manners - hear?"

"I hear ya. I hear ya."

* * *

'This is a really nice camper.' Molly thought. 'Loads of room. I wonder how much something like this would cost. A lot more than I'm thinking I bet. With something like this, we could travel all the time. But we couldn't do that; not without a job.'

She made to stand up but never made it.

* * *

Back in the bus, Bill was just locking the door when he heard a sort of sliding growl coming from across the road. No, not quite there. It was coming from up above the road. A small rock the size of a baseball hit the road between the two vehicles and bounced over the side of the hill.

Landslide! He thought. And, it wasn't over as even more small rocks pattered to the road and skittered across it. Then, out of the gloom a much larger rock - boulder size - smashed into the road but didn't bounce. It broke into two parts and each part slammed into the side of the RV, one behind the driver and the other right in the middle, canting it up on the right-side wheels briefly.

Bill heard Molly scream. He knew instantly it was her. "Oh my God!" He breathed. "Oh no! Oh no! MOLLY!" He began to run, not even thinking that there may be more rocks falling. He heard another scream - this time not Molly.

Chapter 32: Wanderlust - Chapter 32

[January 14, 1964]

[Turnout, Little Wolf Creek Road, Montana highway 200 - past dusk]

"Dennis! Are you okay? Dennis!"

The RV had been pushed sideways about six inches as evidenced by the position of the tires as he passed the big duals. Bill slammed up against the door and wrenched it open, not knowing what he would find.

Gert was holding Molly's head in her lap. There was a lot of blood, but Bill could see it was coming from a cut on Gert's hand. He started towards her but Gert held up a hand.

"She's fine, Son. See what you can do for Dennis. He's caught by that rock."

Books, clothing, kitchen utensils, cups, and dishes were strewn all over the floor. The window directly across from the door had been severely starred by the blow, but not broken. There was a big bulge to the left of the window where one of the pieces of rock had struck. Fortunately that rock had not penetrated. Then he saw the damage that the other rock had caused.

It had hit right behind the driver's seat and was now resting in the aisle on top of Dennis's leg. He was groaning in pain and trying to pull his leg out but not having much success. Bill jumped over to him and tried to move the rock. No dice. He'd need something heavy to budge it. Dennis looked up at him.

He grimaced in pain. "I have a long pry bar in the aft tool bin. Go get it and lift this damn rock off'n me." He craned his head out the window. "Any more comin' down?"

"Not that I can see," said Bill, rushing out the door to get the bar.

He found it easily and raced back inside. He tried to be careful where he put the bar, but Dennis told him to "jest jam the thing in and pry". Bill found a spot in the floor that seemed to be sturdy and pushed the bar under the rock.

"Gert! When I lift this, you be ready to pull him out." He said loudly.

He sensed she was now standing behind him. Prying hard, the rock moved a little but then the bar slipped. Dennis groaned. "Sorry. Let me try again."

Bill jammed the bar in tighter and applied pressure. This time, the rock lifted about three inches. Gert was ready and lifted Dennis's shoulders and fell backwards. His foot slipped from under the rock.

"Gaw dam! That feels a lot better now. Oops, sorry, young 'un." He said, looking at Molly.

Bill turned to tend to Molly now. She was trying to sit up but not having much success. She looked very groggy. Then she broke into tears, almost hysterics.

He rushed to her side and held her tightly; smoothing her hair down and speaking in a soothing voice.

"Whâ ı what happened?" She asked into Bill's shoulder. "What happened?"

Wanderlust!

"A big rock came down the hillside and hit the RV. Actually, two of them. I saw it happen. Are you all right?"

"I think so. My arm hurts something awful. Something hit it."

Bill looked around, but nothing lying near her was obvious. Possibly that skillet. "I don't know, Honey. You hurt anywhere else?"

"My leg hurts some, but not like my arm."

He ran his fingers down her leg and stopped when she hissed. When he pulled the pant leg up he could see a huge bruise beginning to form. Something had hit her there also.

* * *

'OW! I hurt all over. Look at my hands. There's BLOOD on them. Oh no! Bill is here now. When did he get here? Did I pass out? OW! That really hurts down there.'

* * *

By now, Gert had Dennis sitting on the settee. He was grimacing in pain, but seemed to be feeling better now that the rock was off his leg. The main cabin was a little dimmer now that the lights over the driver's side were out. Things began to get as normal as they could be under the circumstances. Gert directed Bill back aft and into their storage area to get some blankets and quilts to stuff into the hole the rock had made. The sound of the wind went way down when he'd finished.

Bill stood. "We need to get some help here. Dennis, do you have a radio?"

"Yeah. I do, but it probably won't work. I think the idiot that installed it messed up my wiring and caused it to all short out. It's up there on top of the dash."

"All you need is power for it?"

"I think so. Ahhh! Damn. This leg is really hurtin'"

Bill went to the demolished front end and looked the radio over. It didn't look as if it was damaged, but the only way to tell was to try it. "Dennis, do you mind if I try to jury rig it? It won't be pretty, but it might work."

"Whang away, Bill. Do whatever you need."

"I'm going to go back to the bus and grab some wire and a few other things. I could use some of this," he pointed under the dash, "but I don't trust wire that's been shorted out and melted. Gert? Do you have things under control in here?"

"Shore do. You go. I'll take good care of Molly and Dennis."

Bill closed the door behind him and headed for the bus. When he got there, he noted that no more rocks had fallen. The snow had abated somewhat, but the wind was still picking it up and scattering it so it was difficult to tell. He grabbed a spool of wire and went back to the big camper.

Once there, he located a power wire from the bundle running to the working lights in the splintered area behind the driver. Knowing it still had juice he spliced some wire from his spool and ran it over to the dash.

Wanderlust!

Pulling the radio wiring harness up from the dash he tugged until it wouldn't come further. He cut the power line and stripped the end so he could splice to the line he'd just strung.

There was a brief spark and then the dial of the radio glowed. Muted hissing came from the speaker dangling from the ceiling. "It works!" He said unnecessarily.

Ensuring it was set to Channel 9, he started calling for help.

Five minutes later he was still calling. Then, very faintly down in the hiss, came a voice. It faded, grew stronger, and then faded again. Bill tried once more not stopping until he had passed all the information someone would need to locate them. A pause, and then the voice came back, stronger now, stating that help was on its way and to monitor this channel. Bill acknowledged and turned the volume up a little so he could move around and check on Molly again.

Dennis was sitting with his leg elevated on the back of a very bent-up couch. Gert had wrapped him with a blanket and then sat down with Molly across her lap doing her best to comfort her. Molly was sobbing gently and when Bill came close she threw her arms around him.

"Oh, I hurt so bad, Honey. I really hurt." Her eyes opened wide and her face drained of color. "What about the baby?" She gasped.

"Honey! You'll be fine," said Bill, not even sure of that. "Your leg is banged up as well as your arm, but you should be fine."

"I didn't know, Bill," said Gert. "Come over here, Baby and let me keep you nice and warm. Bill, you go to the back and keep an eye peeled for them that's coming to help us."

He kissed Molly gently, patted Gert on the shoulder, and went down the aisle to the rear window. There was some sort of flap over it, so he couldn't see outside. When he passed Gert he explained. "I'm going to go back and start the bus and turn it around to show headlights. You yell if you need anything, I'll be outside. He made sure that Gert heard him and then left.

The cloud cover seemed to be lifting. To the west he could see faint stars through the blowing snow. This he was happy to see because it let him look down the valley. He wasn't sure where the help was coming from, but it was a good bet that it was coming from the west - probably Lincoln.

He started the bus and turned it around so that the headlights were pointing back down the valley. If anyone was coming up, that is the first thing they'd see. Setting the handbrake, he went back to the RV and went inside.

Molly was apparently sleeping now; her arm wrapped in a large towel. She had some sort of quilt over her legs. She looked comfortable. Dennis, on the other hand, was still in a great deal of pain. Gert had slit his pants down the seam and was in the process of probing, gently, what looked like a very bad break. He was grimacing, but not making any noise.

"Oooh, damn, Gert! That surely hurts. You think it's broke?"

"Yup, I do. Nothing through the skin though. Kinda tore up, but that's it. I can try and clean it, but mebbe those rescue guys might do better. You think?"

Wanderlust!

"Yeah, probly." He looked over at me. "You gal is resting now. Gert gave her some aspirin and wrapped her up. She's kinda banged up."

Bill nodded, his eyes wet with tears as he looked down at her small frame resting in the torn seat covers of what used to be a nice couch. Dennis's RV had really taken a beating. It had grown colder now, but the generator still hummed. Wondering why the cold, Bill went to the control panel and saw a yellow light. He asked Dennis what it meant.

"The breaker to the heater is blown. You need to go out into the generator box and push the red button. If it pops back out, don't try it again because it means something's shorted somewhere. Okay?"

"Okay. I'll check."

Bill left the vehicle and pushed the button. It remained pushed down. While he was out there, he checked on the bus and found it running just fine. He also checked the road and found no more stones on it, just the residue of the first fall. He wondered if he should try and kick some of the big ones off the road, but when he started towards it, he sensed a flashing light coming around a distant corner. Help had arrived.

A large fire truck and a smaller, boxy, rescue unit pulled to a stop between the bus and the RV. A uniformed guy got out of the fire unit, followed by another carrying a trauma case from the rescue.

"You the fella that called for help?"

"Yes. There are two people in the RV that got banged around pretty good. One, the man, has a severely broken leg and the other, my wife, got shook around badly. She had a bruised arm and another bruise on her leg. And, Doc, she's pregnant if that's a factor. Not too far along - maybe six weeks or so."

"Okay. We'll take it from here. That your camper?" He said, pointing at Bill's bus.

"Yeah. I'm going to kill the lights and motor now that you're here."

"Good idea." The man turned and spoke to the other one. "Go on in and get started while I get some details."

"Yessir!"

The uniformed man identified himself and then suggested they go into the RV also. They stepped into it and he looked around. "Wow. That rock really messed things up a bit."

"I'll say," remarked Dennis, wincing as the medic poked his leg with a syringe. I wouldn't even have been here if that dang fool installer hadn't messed up my wiring putting in that radio."

"Works now though."

"I know. Bill there rigged it for me. Handy guy to have around. That's his wife over there on the couch. She got banged up some when the cabinet opened up and clobbered her with a frying pan; or so says Gert here. I was just coming out from under the dash when I got pinned by that damn rock."

The uniform swung around and whistled. "That's a really big one. Came in right through the window."

"Yup. If I'd been sittin' there I'd be history. It would have taken my head off."

Wanderlust!

"Well, we'll get everyone fixed up as best as we can and transport you all back to Lincoln. We can do the paperwork down there under better conditions." He turned to Bill. "You want to follow us down in your bus?"

"Sure will. I want to stay as close as I can to Molly. I don't want anything to happen to her," he said, his voice breaking. The recent events were beginning to catch up with him now and the adrenaline was fading. He was near collapse. He looked at his watch and saw that it was past midnight now. He sat quickly as his legs gave away.

"Here! You'd better let me check you out," the technician said.

Bill waved him off. "Just the adrenaline wearing off. I used to be a smokejumper so I know what it is. I'll take it easy, I promise." He grinned to make his point.

An hour later, Molly and Dennis were tucked into the rescue unit and it started back down the road to Lincoln. Bill and the uniform made sure the RV was as secure as it could be, left a note on the windshield for any trooper that may pass by, and walked to their vehicles.

The driver of the fire unit said "I'll follow you down just in case. You feel like stopping, tap your brakes a few times, and then stop."

"Gotcha." Bill said.

Forty-five minutes later, the three vehicles pulled up in front of a one-story building with a sign that said "Mercy Clinic". The rescue unit parked under the portico, engine running. Bill parked and shut down the bus. The fire unit went on past, presumably back to the station. Taking a deep breath, Bill went into the building.

Chapter 33: Wanderlust - Chapter 33

[January 15, 1964]

[Mercy Clinic, Lincoln, Montana - past midnight]

* * *

Pain! 'Why is my arm so painful? Ow! And my LEG! Oh, Mama. It's hurting me so bad. Where AM I? I don't remember driving anywhere. Where is Bill! I want my HUSBAND!'

Everything came back to her in a rush: the rock hitting the side of the RV and crashing through; pots and pans flying through the air - hitting her on the arm; her screaming and then the blow to her leg by something really hard and long. She had no idea what it was, only that it had hurt her.

* * *

Molly moaned. This caught the attention of an older woman who was annotating records at a desk. She looked up as Molly moaned again. She rose from the desk and came over to Molly's side. "You're in Mercy Clinic, Honey. You got banged up and the tech gave you a mild sedative. You've been asleep for a while. You feeling any better now?"

Molly shook her head. "No. Where is he? Where is my husband?"

"The tall, good-looking guy?" She smiled at Molly's response. "He's out in the waiting room where he could try and sleep a little. It's three in the morning now. He was by your side the minute you came in here. The Doc told him to leave and get some shuteye. He didn't want to."

Molly began to tear up again. "Am I going to be all right? My arm hurts something awful and my leg is asleep."

"The doctor numbed it up some so he could check for splinters. He figures you got hit by some kind of timber coming across the RV at you. That was on your leg. You have a blue mark across your upper arm where something that looks like a skillet hit you too. Three inches higher and it would have hit in that beautiful face of yours." She ran her fingers down Molly's chin.

Molly cried in earnest now. "My baby? Is it okay? Please tell me its okay."

The nurse patted her cheek. "It's just fine, Honey. There was no damage to you anywhere near it."

Molly collapsed back into the bed. "*Oh. Merci Dieu pour cela. Merci. Merci.* I could not live with myself if anything had happened."

"You'll be fine, Honey. Just try to rest. I'll let your husband know you're awake."

* * *

'Oh, thank you, God for that. The other man, Dennis; I wonder how he is. I thought I saw a big thing come through the window and hit him. Where is the nurse? Oh, she's gone now. Who's coming now? It's Bill! Oh I am so happy to see him now.'

Wanderlust!

* * *

Bill bent over her in the bed, took her good hand, and began kissing the fingertips. "Hi, Honey. You're doing fine. The Doctor told me the baby's fine also. I was so worried about you."

Molly snuffled and Bill handed her a tissue. She blew her nose and then spoke. "When I woke up, I didn't know where I was or what had happened to you. I thought I was all alone. I know it didn't make any sense, but that's what I thought. Please kiss me. I need to touch you."

Bill bent forward again and gently kissed her lips. They held it for a long time. Molly's eyelids began fluttering as the sedative pulled her back into sleep. "So tired. You'll stay here beside me."

"I'll never leave your side, Molly. I'll be here when you wake. Now, you rest."

"G'Nite." She closed her eyes and her features softened as she slept.

Bill laid his head on the side of her bed and closed his eyes also. Eventually he drifted off.

[January 15, 1964]

[Mercy Clinic, Lincoln, Montana - daybreak]

The night nurse passing by woke Bill. "Mister Stiles? You can get a small breakfast down in the cafeteria, such as it is, if you want."

"Will she be okay while I'm gone? I told her I'd be here when she woke up."

"I'll tell her where you are."

"Which way?"

"Down the hall and go right. Down the stairs to the basement and then left. This time of the morning you can smell the coffee."

"Thanks, Ma'am. I appreciate it."

"No problem."

Bill spent most of the morning sitting in a chair by Molly's side holding her hand as she slept. Every so often he would move a lock of her hair, or touch her cheek, or lift her hand and kiss her palm. She would stir, but not come awake as she was still under the influence of the medication she'd been given early in the morning. He dozed.

Coming awake around noon, Bill decided to see how Dennis was doing. He'd hardly given a thought to the Texan all morning. Asking for his room number, he was directed down the hall only four doors. The door was open, but he tapped on the frame. Gert looked up with red-rimmed eyes, but smiled a little.

"Come on in, Bill. How's Molly? Is she better?"

"I don't know about better, but she's sleeping now. Probably best for her. How is Dennis?"

Wanderlust!

"I agree. They ran a bunch of X-rays and told me there were three breaks. All of them were fairly small, but close together. This makes it very hard to treat. They will have to do a little surgery and replace some bone with plastic and a couple of screws. The Doc told me that he could have done some real damage if he'd tried to pull his leg out by himself. I'm so glad you were there to help."

"Happy to do anything I can. Is he sedated also?"

"Yup. Been out all morning."

"How about your RV? You going to have it towed here for repair?"

"Hope so. I was about to call a tow truck when you got here."

"Can I help? I'll go nuts if I just sit in that room watching Molly sleep. I know it sounds strange, but I gives me more pain to see her like that than just doing anything else."

"I can see that." She pulled a piece of paper out of a pocket. "The cop that interviewed me this morning gave me this number to call. They have a big wrecker than can haul the RV. Let's go call."

Gert rose and kissed Dennis on the cheek. Then they both left to find a telephone. Gert called the number and talked for a while; eventually agreeing several times and hanging up.

"He says he can do it in about a half hour. Going to come by the clinic here and pick me up. Want to come?"

"Sure. Let me tell the nurse where I'll be." He rushed off to do just that.

When he pushed the front door open, Gert was talking to the guy leaning out of the driver's window of a big tow truck. They spotted Bill and waved him over.

"This here's Bert." Introduced Gert. "Climb in here and we'll head on out."

[January 15, 1964]

[Little Wolf Creek, Montana - noon]

"Whooo-eeee! She really got stove in didn't she?" Said Bert with a long whistle.

Bill had to agree. In the light of day, seeing the huge hole up front and the deeply dented side further back, made him slightly ill. He couldn't imagine what it had been like inside when the rocks hit. This thought made him glance sharply up the hillside and scan for more. He could see a ragged scar where the rocks had come from, but there didn't seem to be any more in that general vicinity. Still, it made him nervous to be down below.

He and Gert watched as Bert skillfully attached the cradle to the underside of the RV and actuate the hydraulic lift. He stopped when the front wheels began to rise. "Havta check to see the handbrake is off. Is this an automatic shift?"

"Nope. Stick," answered Gert. "Last I remember, it was in first gear as we stopped."

Gert unlocked the door and Bert check things out. He noticed the wire Bill had strung for the radio and asked about it.

Wanderlust!

"I did that to run power to it right after the rocks hit. You can just pull it free from that fitting on the wall. The wiring under the dash is all melted and burnt also. The harness is going to have to be replaced."

Bert ducked his head under the dash. "Oh, yeah. That's a real mess. Well, you can see what the big RV store can do for ya."

"Yup." Said Gert. "Only choice we got isn't it?"

Securing a few loose items on the floor, they left the RV and stood outside as Bert lifted it completely. They all got back into the wrecker and Bert expertly turned around and they started back down towards Lincoln.

Burt pulled to a stop in front of the RV store. Gert told him to wait a sec and she'd find out where she could park it. When she came back, she had Bert drive around back and put the RV under a shelter.

Bill told Gert he'd check with her again but he wanted to get back to the clinic. Bert offered to drop him by as he had to pass it anyway on his way to the shop.

[January 15, 1964]

[Mercy Clinic, Lincoln, Montana - afternoon]

* * *

Molly was awake, but not really comprehending just where she was. 'They told me a hospital, but I don't remember where. Where's Bill? *Merde*, my arm hurts!'

She began pressing the call button.

* * *

"Hi, Honey. What can I do for you?" The nurse said as she slipped into the room.

"I know I've asked this before, but where am I?"

"Mercy Clinic. In Lincoln. You remember coming here last night?"

"I â I think so. Something hit me while I was sitting in the RV. I don't remember much else. Where is Bill! My Husband! Is he all right!" She sat up in alarm and grimaced at the pain.

"He's just fine, Honey. You lie down and let me get the Doctor now that you're awake again. Rest easy." She pushed Molly back down onto the pillow.

When she left, Molly began to cry softly. She didn't do that long however because Bill came through the door and rushed to her side.

"Molly! You're awake! Oh, Honey, I was so worried about you. Are you feeling better? The Doctor told me you have two really bad bruises but nothing got broken. I â Iâ!" He began to weep on her shoulder.

"I'm fine now that you're here, my love. Stop. Don't cry. I'm just fine - and the baby is fine also."

Wanderlust!

Involuntarily, Bill's hand slid to her abdomen and rested lightly. "If anything had happened to you or the baby I don't know what I would have done. I love you *so* much!"

They remained silent for a long time. The Doctor cleared his throat and entered the room. "Well, now. How are you feeling, Missus Stiles? Any discomfort in your arm?"

Molly looked up. "A little. It feels 'tight', like someone was holding it in their fist."

"You sustained a little trauma there and it's a bit swollen. An ice pack on it, or just the cold weather outside will help. Your leg is simply bruised. Time will heal that also. Don't wrap it though; let it heal normally. I'm going to prescribe some painkillers for you. I'll have the nurse bring you some now and you can get the rest filled at the pharmacy. You were a very lucky lady, Missus Stiles. If whatever hit you was a bit higher, you would have taken it right in the face."

"Skillet. It was a skillet that hit me, according to my husband."

"I think what hit her on the leg was a long strip of wood from the countertop. I found both it and the skillet on the floor right afterwards." Said Bill.

"Yup. One lucky little lady." Confirmed the Doctor. "You rest now and maybe we can release you tonight."

"Do you think so, Doctor? I feel much better now."

"Don't want to rush it. Just take your time. I'll check back around five or so." He winked and left the room.

Molly turned to Bill. "Have you called anyone?"

"No. I didn't think we needed to. We'll be home soon and then we can tell everyone about being in a rock slide."

"Oh, don't kid about that, Honey. It was very real for me."

Bill looked contrite. "Sorry, Babe. Just trying to lighten the mood. Are you hungry? I could probably sneak in a burger or something."

"My mouth is watering already. With onion rings?"

"I'll see." Said Bill with a smile. He gathered up his coat and left.

* * *

'Oh, I *love* onion rings. I can taste them already. Wait! Won't the nurse smell them? Could we get into trouble? But, he'll get them anyway because he likes adventures. I can just see him sneaking them in under his coat and passing them to me like a spy passing microfilm in a bad movie.'

Molly smiled for the first time in what felt like days.

* * *

Bill came back an hour later. He did, in fact, have the onion rings under his coat - a fact that made Molly laugh with pleasure.

Wanderlust!

"What's so funny?" Bill asked innocently as he slipped her the rings.

"We look like spies exchanging plans for a secret new airplane." She said with a giggle.

"And, I haff ze Mikروفilm also!" Bill said in a phony German accent.

Now, both of them broke up. They were still laughing when the Doctor re-appeared. "Nice to see you in better humor Iâ" He stopped and looked at the partially hidden bag that used to contain Molly's burger. "âI guess you've been fed, then." He finished. "I was going to suggest you feed her something better than hospital food. You've anticipated me." He laughed.

"She tempted me." Said Bill, pointing at Molly who looked guilty.

"No matter. Here is your prescription." He turned to Bill. "Now, you leave so I can examine you wife. I'm thinking we can let her go earlier than I thought. I'll be done in about ten minutes."

Bill gathered up the food wrappers and left the room. He headed for the waiting room and then stuffed the junk into a waste bin. He could still smell onion rings in the air. 'Well,' he thought, 'I warned her.'

The Doctor joined him in the waiting room and sat. "You wife is still in a bit of pain, but it is under control. I see no reason to keep her here tonight. She told me you were headed to Great Falls. Is that right?"

"Yes. It's only a half-day away so we can make it first thing in the morning if we leave early. As soon as we get there I'll have the doctors at Malmstrom check her out. But, I don't want to leave today - too late already."

"I agree. Let her rest some more. I'd advise having her sit in a sleeping bag while she's riding. Keeping that leg warm will help a lot." He stood.

Bill got up also and they shook hands. "You've got a very nice clinic here, Doctor. I've passed through here lots of times, but never stopped. Now, if I do pass by again, I'll be sure to stop."

"Thanks, Mister Stiles. We try our best here. You can get that prescription filled here or at any drug store. It will make her a bit sleepy, but sleep is the best therapy for her right now. Take care."

"Bye, and thanks."

They parted. Bill went to get the prescription filled. Once that was done, he headed back to Molly's room. She was dressed and sitting in the chair beside her bed. She looked up.

"The Doctor ways I can go now. Are we staying here tonight?"

"I think we should. The weather is kicking up a little - not as bad as last night - but we would be better waiting until morning. Let's head for that motel down the road." He lifted her coat and held it out for her.

* * *

'Of course he would hold my coat for me. Oh no! My new coat is torn! Right down the sleeve. He just bought it for me not long ago.'

Molly began to cry as she fingered the tear.

Wanderlust!

* * *

"Oh, Baby. Don't cry. It can be fixed. And if not, I'll buy you a new one." He put his arms around her and hugged; smoothing the back of her head with his hand.

They headed for the bus. Molly had a pronounced limp so they walked very slowly with Bill supporting her. She grunted softly with each step and gratefully sank into the passenger seat. Bill rummaged in the back and pulled her sleeping bag out. Following the Doctor's advice, he tucked it all around her and then fastened the belt over it.

"I feel like a sausage all trussed up like this," she said with a smile.

"I love you, my little French sausage."

"And I love you my big American sausage," she said with a mischievous grin. Maybe not tonight, but later I will really love it."

They laughed. Bill felt grateful she had gotten her sense of humor back. "Now, how about that motel?"

"Sounds delightful to me. I need a very hot bath."

"I will make sure they have baths and not showers then, my love."

"Mmm - mmm. *Merci*."

[January 15, 1964]

[Wheel Inn Motel, Lincoln, Montana - evening]

Having found exactly what Molly desired, they took a room in the motel. Once in the room, they stowed their belongings and rested a moment. Molly rose and began taking her clothing off. She was having difficulty so Bill helped her. He was astounded at the side of the bruise on her arm, but was completely unprepared for the one on her thigh.

It was the side of a dinner plate and full of all the dark hues of the rainbow. The Doctor had told him it was superficial, but it still looked ghastly. He gently ran his palm over it and then bent to kiss it.

"That makes it feel all better, my love. I didn't know you had healing kisses."

"Oh, but I do! Let me help you into the tub and we canât!"

"No! I am not sure I can contain myself if you were in the tub with me. I want a good soak in hot water."

"Ah, but I have a surprise for you also." He reached into a paper sack and pulled out a box. "Taaa dahhh!"

"What is that?"

"Epsom salts. It helps ease aching muscles. You add it to a hot bath. Now let me carry you to the bathroom."

Molly giggled. "I am perfectly capable of walking over there myself."

Wanderlust!

"I know, but let me indulge in my fantasy."

"What fantasy?"

"This!" Bill plunged his head down and buzzed Molly on her tummy with his lips. She shrieked, and then covered her mouth with her hand.

"The neighbors! What will they think?"

"I dunno. Want to ask them?"

"Oh, you're horrible!" Molly said, but with a smile. She got up and hobbled over to the bathroom and turned on the taps for the tub. While it was filling, she fended off Bill's playful advances.

* * *

I can tell he isn't serious, but it is nice to feel desirable even when I look like this. I must look a mess; all purple and blue. But this will fade with time. Our love will not. I won't allow it. The water is ready and he has put those salts in it too. Ahhhhh. That feels heavenly.

* * *

Bill watched Molly's face as she gave in to the siren song of a hot bath. He wondered, perhaps for the thousandth time, just what it was with women and hot baths. Being in one just seemed to make them more serene. He longed to climb in with her, but knew that wouldn't be welcome at the moment. He kissed the top of her head and withdrew to the other room and turned on the television.

They ate an early dinner from a Chinese carry-out and watched a movie on the cable. Then, after brushing their teeth they retired. It had been a horribly long day for both of them, even if Molly had been asleep for a lot of it. They drifted off to sleep listening to the wind as it sighed around the window sill.

"Just like Paris," said Molly.

"What?"

"The wind. Hear it?"

"Yes. Now that you mention it, I do. It does too - sound like Paris."

"Je t'aime."

"Je t'aime."

Chapter 34: Wanderlust - Chapter 34

[January 16, 1964]

[Wheel Inn Motel, Lincoln, Montana - morning]

Molly had awakened once during the night moaning. Bill gave her one of the pills prescribed and she swallowed it. He held her gently in his arms until she dropped back off to sleep.

Now, it was morning. Bill woke first and quickly washed up. Molly was still sleeping so he elected to not wake her just yet and went down to the office and asked about coffee and something to eat. The day clerk mentioned a small diner three doors down that opened early. Bill thanked him and went back to their room.

When he kissed her on the cheek, Molly woke and attempted to stretch. She grimaced in pain at how sore her arm was. Bill looked at it, did some massaging and shortly it was easier to move. He kissed her, and then helped her out of bed and into the bathroom.

* * *

'Oh. My arm and leg are in much pain I can not make up my mind which hurts worse. Shall I take a hot bath, or am I too hungry right now to wait? Let me wash up a little and then we can go have something to eat. After that, we shall see.'

Molly put a wan smile on her face and went back to Bill.

* * *

"I decided I am too hungry now to take a bath. Feed me, please!"

"With pleasure, my love. Put on your warm clothes also because it is very cold outside. The sun is shining, but the temperature is nearing ten degrees with wind. Wind chill makes it close to zero."

"Wind chill?"

"When the wind is blowing, it alters how cold a given temperature feels to you. Ten degrees with a fifteen mile-per-hour wind makes it feel like zero. And that is cold."

"Brrrr. I agree!" Shuddered Molly as she put her arms through her warm coat that Bill had fixed with a few strips of silver tape and zipped it up. "Ready."

They left, had a nice light breakfast, and returned within forty-five minutes. While he was outside, Bill used Molly's bus keys to start the engine to let it warm up. This allowed him to lock all the doors for safety. When they had gathered up their belongings, paid the bill, and arrived at the bus, it was nice and warm inside.

"How far away from home are we?" Molly asked once they left the motel.

"Less than a hundred miles, Honey. We should be there before noon. Once we get there, I'm going to have you checked by the base hospital just to make sure you are all right."

"Oh, Bill! Is that necessary? The doctor here seemed quite sure I was fine."

Wanderlust!

"It is necessary - for me. One person you are going to see is a Gynecologist. I meant it, Molly. The baby you're carrying represents a great deal to us and I will not be sure it's fine unless a baby doctor says so. No argument."

"Yes, my love." She said contritely.

Twenty miles later, Bill slowed a little as they passed a road crew cleaning up the rockfall from the little pullout area where Molly had been injured. It made him wonder what would eventually happen to the RV and both Gert and Dennis. He hoped they would be able to repair their vehicle and get it back on the road.

They left the mountains and descended into a gently sloping flatlands filled with fields lying fallow for winter. Occasional roads crossed the highway only to fade away into the distance. Most of them had not been plowed either. There were very few dwellings to be seen in the bright sunshine.

Other traffic passed them headed west into the mountains but they were only passed occasionally by faster cars. The road was deceptive in that there were small depressions that could hide several cars. You had to pay attention to the lane striping to see if it was safe to pass. Bill didn't worry because they were not going that fast and probably wouldn't pass anyone.

He was wrong. An old farmer pulled out into the highway about a half-mile ahead and dawdled along, moving slightly from side to side. He was moving along quite a ways below the speed limit so Bill readied himself to pass. At the first sign of the dotted line he swung out and accelerated past the old guy in his truck. Dropping back into fourth gear, Bill sighed.

"What?"

"Did you notice that he didn't even slow down when he got to the highway? He just blew through the stop sign and turned in front of us. If we'd have been closer, we would have had to stop in a hurry. Idiot!"

[January 16, 1964]

[Simms, Montana - forenoon]

They drove on in silence until Simms came into view. Bill filled the bus, probably for the last time, in Simms. Molly took the opportunity to browse through a western-style store and told bill to meet her there. When he paid the tab for the gas, he pulled the bus over to the store and went inside.

Nothing smells quite like a western wear shop. Especially if it carries any quantity of leather goods. Bill inhaled deeply while scanning the store for Molly. He found her in the clothing department looking at buckskin dresses. She held a fringed leather skirt in front of her and admired how well it hit her ankles. She already had a small female version of a cowboy hat on her head. She looked cute as hell.

"You like this?" Bill asked.

"Oh, yes. I do! Feel how light this skirt is." She handed it to him.

It was light. Too light to be real leather. He looked at the label and found it to be laminated cloth instead of leather. Browsing around, he pulled another skirt out and handed it to her.

"This is much heavier!"

Wanderlust!

"But it is real leather. If you want a good skirt that will last a long time, buy real leather. I think the hat is very cute too, Honey. Go ahead and buy them if you want. Make sure you get a western shirt also. No buttons though; just snaps."

"Snaps?"

"Yup. They have snaps on them instead of buttons. Makes it easier to get in or out of that way." He wiggled his eyebrows up and down. Molly cracked up.

"Oh. You." She looked at the price tags. "These are kind of expensive. Can we afford it?"

"Sure we can. We have lots left over since we didn't go all the way to California. No problem."

Now Molly looked a little guilty and moved next to Bill who put his arm around her shoulder. She snuffled into it and he patted her back.

* * *

'Now I feel bad. I know he didn't mean that in a mean way, but I do feel bad we cut our honeymoon short. If we hadn't I wouldn't have even been banged up in that RV. *Merde*. Now I am going to cry.'

* * *

"Hey, Honey. Don't worry. We'll be home for your birthday this way. I wouldn't have it any other way. I have to take care of you now. And, I will." He kissed her on the forehead. "Come on. Let's go pay for these."

Molly brightened up and looked at him with eyes shining. "Can I wear these now?"

"I don't see why not." He looked around and caught the eye of a salesperson that came over to them.

"Yessir. Can I help you?"

"My wife would like to just wear these out of the store. Can we just pull the labels off and let her take them into the changing room. The skirt, shirt, and hat."

"Certainly. I have my scissors right here." She expertly snipped the tags and labels off and handed the clothing to Molly who headed for the changing room. "That's a nasty bruise she has there on her arm."

"She had a matching one on her leg too. Got tangled up in a rockslide the other day over by Lincoln."

"Oh! I heard about that. She's pretty lucky not to have gotten really hurt."

"You said it. The RV didn't get knocked over though and that helped. The big rock hit right where the pull-out dining room wall was. I think the double wall held it back. The driver, Dennis, got a broken leg out of it."

"Terrible business. That's the third rock fall they've had at that pullout in two years. They've dynamited some of the big rocks, but the small ones keep loosening up in the frost."

"Yeah, just unlucky I guess. Hey! Here comes Molly!"

Molly returned and spun in a circle, wincing on her bad leg. "Howdy!" She called.

Wanderlust!

"My, don't you look cute in that getup, Honey." The salesperson remarked.

"I can only echo that. You look really fine. Now, my love, we'd better be moseying along."

Molly looked puzzled. "What is this 'moseying'?"

Bill laughed. "It's a cattle term meaning to get them moving for the day. They just sort of meander from one place to another. That's called 'moseying'."

"Oh. Got it."

"Where you from, Honey?" The salesclerk asked. "Back East? Don't mean anything by it at all. Just curious."

"I'm from Montreal, Canada. My husband and I are on our honeymoon." She blushed a little.

"Are you now?! That's just grand." She took Molly by the hand. "Come on over here with me and let's see if we can find a nice neckerchief for you. My treat."

They headed towards the front of the store and Bill followed carrying Molly's old clothing. By the time he got there with them, Molly was tying a light yellow scarf around her neck. It highlighted her yellow hair and light skin perfectly. She spun in a circle. "Like it?" She asked Bill.

"Sure do. I like it very much. We'd better get going if we want to make Great Falls by lunchtime." He watched as Molly skipped away to the door. He turned to the salesperson. "Thank you very much for your help. I - we - certainly appreciate it."

"She's a delightful girl. I take it all this is new to her?"

"Very much so. She grew up in Montreal itself and was on her first trip alone when I met her. We only met just two months ago."

"Really? My goodness. Well, I hope ya'll have a great life. Do come back!"

"We'll certainly try." Bill said, heading for the door also.

He trailed Molly out to the bus. She was kicking her leg out so that her new skirt would flap about. Bill had not seen her this happy in quite some time. 'The perfect medicine,' he said to himself.

* * *

'I *love* this skirt! The fringe tickles my calves and it is so heavy! Even the wind cannot get through it. It took some getting used to the snaps though. I didn't know about the snaps on the sleeves. I thought I had the wrong size at first until that one popped open.'

Molly reached up and made sure her new hat was snugly on her head.

'I love the hat too.'

* * *

Wanderlust!

They got back into the bus after stowing her old clothes in a paper sack. Bill started the bus and they pulled back onto the road. Molly reached over and put her hand on Bill's arm. "Thank you, my love. I love the new clothes. Now I am a cowgirl, yes?"

"Yes, now you are a cowgirl." He laughed and patted her hand.

Bill knew they were nearing home when they crossed the Sun River at the appropriately named Sun River township. Shortly thereafter, they picked up highway 89 which came down from Glacier Park. Bill made a mental note that he'd have to take Molly up there also; probably in the summer. But, he reflected, that would depend on what he decided: either employment or college.

When they got to Great Falls proper, they stayed on the north bank of the Missouri River until they reached Black Eagle. There, they crossed south into Great Falls proper. In what seemed like just a few minutes, they rolled up to the gate of Malmstrom and were passed onto the base.

Molly sighed. "Back home, my love. Are you sad?"

"Sad? Why would I be sad? I'm with the two I love most in the whole world. I am definitely not sad!"

She looked puzzled for a second. "Two? Oh â the baby." She snickered. "Yes, I now have two to love also."

"Well, I'm bigger so it evens out," Bill smiled at her. "Do we want to mention the baby yet? Nobody but us knows about it."

"Can it wait until my bruising fades a little? I don't want anyone to be concerned. Especially if I'm to see another doctor."

He patted her hand. "Sure, Honey. No problem at all. You just let me know when and we'll both do it. It should be when the whole family is there though. No leaks that way."

"I agree." She looked down and then patted her midriff. "This skirt hides me a little too."

[January 16, 1964]

[Quarters, Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - noon(ish)]

They pulled to a stop in the sideyard at the quarters. None of the cars were around so they apparently had the house to themselves. Molly let Bill unlock the door and then she made a beeline for the upstairs bathroom where she knew a huge tub waited. Bill chuckled to himself and brought in their baggage. He left the food and everything else out in the bus. He'd get it later.

He heard the tub running upstairs so he stopped in the kitchen to fix a pot of tea. He wasn't partial to chamomile tea, but knew Molly was so he put in two bags and let them steep while he wound down from the trip. Once the pot was done, he carried it and two mugs upstairs to await Molly's return to the bedroom.

Twenty minutes later, Molly opened the door to the bathroom and went down to hall to their bedroom. She found Bill asleep, fully clothed, on the bed.

* * *

Wanderlust!

'Look at him. I've hardly driven at all on this trip. He must be exhausted. Oh, look at this! He's made me some tea. Smells like chamomile. How wonderful of him. He is so thoughtful. I am so very happy he now belongs to me and me to him. And this little one belongs to both of us. Boy? Girl? Who knows? I do know it will be loved so very much.'

* * *

Molly lay down beside her husband and idly rubbed her stomach under the light covers. She fell asleep also.

That night, after dinner, Molly and Bill dropped the bomb. They'd been telling everyone of their trip and everything they'd seen and done when Bill nodded slightly. Molly included the phrase 'morning sickness' in a long description of their stay in a motel. She was into her next sentence when, of all people, Bill's brother Phillip butted in.

"Wait!" He held up his hand. "Will it be a niece or nephew?" He asked quietly.

Beth and Paula jumped to their feet at the same time. Beth found her voice first. "What! Back up there a minute, Molly. I distinctly heard you say 'morning sickness'. Is this in connection to being a parent in any way?" She asked, narrowing her eyes somewhat.

"Well," gulped Molly. "Yes. Actually. It is. I'm going to have a baby."

There. It was out. Now the family really went nuts. Their first concern, as Molly predicted, was how badly the bruising on her leg might have compromised the baby. Molly assured them that the doctor that attended her after the accident told her that everything was fine.

Beth shook her head. "No matter. I'm calling for an appointment tomorrow at OB/GYN. We'll just make sure of that." She sat back in the couch. "I'll be damned. I'm going to be a grandmother!" She shouted.

That night, as Bill and Molly lay in bed, they talked a little about things to come. Bill started to tell Molly that he'd almost decided to go up to Montreal and take her father's job, but chickened out at the last moment; telling himself that it was too much information at once right after the excitement of telling everyone about the baby.

He left it that way, fading into sleep listening to Molly's soft buzz.

Chapter 35: Wanderlust - Chapter 35

[January 17, 1964]

[Quarters, Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - mid-morning]

After breakfast, Bill's mother phoned the hospital and found out that she could get a walk-in appointment for Molly. Luckily, it had been determined earlier that Molly was eligible for dependent's benefits until Bill lost his eligibility by officially leaving college. Since he wouldn't be returning this semester, he would lose those benefits in May. That meant that by August, he would have to have another plan in effect to cover her for the baby's birth.

But, for now, she was still covered and Beth took Molly over to the hospital. Bill was at loose ends and wandered about the house in thought. He knew Molly's birthday was coming up and didn't really have anything for her. He wanted something really spectacular for her. Something she wasn't likely to forget.

He checked his wallet for the amount of cash he had and happened to pull the whole plastic insert out. His eye fell on the perfect gift - his pilot's license. Two years ago, while he was working in Missoula, he'd badgered the pilot who flew their jump plane, a flight instructor, into giving him formal lessons. He found he was good at it and, in only forty-five hours he did his first solo in a little Cessna 175. More lessons and a check ride with an FAA examiner made him a pilot. He'd been so busy with the wedding, honeymoon and, especially, the coming baby event that he'd completely forgotten about it. 'Of course!' He thought to himself. 'I'll set up a flight for her'.

Bill went over to the flying club office on base and talked to several guys about how to best go about it. He knew if he just told her he was a pilot she might, or might not, believe him. One of the guys behind the desk, Stan, began to relate a tale about how he introduced his mother to flying. The more he talked, the better it sounded. Bill made similar plans.

Now that he'd made the decision of what to do, he still had to undergo a refresher course and check ride in one of the club's Cessnas. It was decided that he would do this over the next two days. He paid for the refresher course manuals and bought an up-to-date chart of the local area. If you didn't have the latest charts, you simply did not get into the cockpit.

He attended a morning-long ground school which mostly covered the rules and regulations governing flight to and from a military base. Malmstrom was a SAC, Strategic Air Command, base, and as such one just didn't go flying whenever one wanted. It had to be coordinated with the tower to make sure that your small plane didn't keep the huge jets waiting. The rules were complex and very unforgiving.

He went home for a brief lunch and found Molly waiting for him.

"Hi, Honey," she said, pulling him in for a kiss. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, downtown. I took the bus for an oil change. After all the driving we've done it was time for one."

"Oh. Well, now I need it for a while too. Can I use it?"

"Sure." He tossed her the keys. "Drive carefully."

"I will. It won't take me long."

Wanderlust!

* * *

Molly chuckled to herself. 'Now, if I can remember where the, um, what did she call it? Oh â€” the 'BX', that's it! I can do some shopping for maternity clothing. Beth said she'd meet me by the Officer's Club front entrance. Whoops! Almost missed the sign. Drat! Ground the gears too. There she is!'

* * *

"Hello, Molly," said Beth, tapping at the window. "Park the bus and come on inside and we'll have something to eat first."

Molly shut down the bus and got out. They walked to the front door and went in. After they'd taken their coats off and left them in the cloakroom, Beth led Molly into a side room off the main dining area. It held about thirty smiling women of all ages.

Beth put her hand in the small of Molly's back and introduced her. "This is my daughter-in-law, Molly. She and my son just got back from their honeymoon and I wanted you all to meet her." She turned to Molly. "I don't expect you to remember everyone's names so we'll just do it as we go along. Sit here with me and we'll get started."

* * *

'Get started? Get started with what? *Mon dieu*, there is something I do not know going on here. Wait; is this one of those coffees Beth told me about? Yes, I bet that's what it is. I wish I had worn something nicer than this; and my arm! It is wrapped a little under the sleeve of my blouse. I hope no one notices it.'

* * *

It was indeed the monthly meeting of the Officer's Wives Club. Although technically not an Officer's wife, Beth thought that Molly should still qualify. Besides, she was proud of her new daughter and wanted to show her off.

The women, both individually or in small groups, came over to Molly's table and introduced themselves. Some already knew about the accident and inquired as to her health. All of them were kind to her. One of them, who made jewelry as a hobby, gave Molly a very nice necklace made from baked clay and silver wire.

"Oh, this is wonderful!" Molly cried when the woman gave it to her.

"Beth told me you had such beautiful blonde hair that I thought the blue and silver would go well. It does, too. Wear it in good health."

"Thank you. Thank you so much." Molly said, lifting the chain over her head and settling it around her neck.

The woman backed off a little and cocked her head. "Yup. It does look good on you. A little late perhaps, but congratulations on your marriage."

"Thank you again. I love it!"

Introductions tapered off and the rest of the meeting went very well. After a half-hour or so, a group of servers came in and set plates of coffee cake in the middle of each table. Carafes of coffee were added and the rest of the meeting evolved into a nice group chat. Eventually, the group began to break up and leave. Beth and

Wanderlust!

Molly were the last to go.

"Now we'll go over to the BX and see about some maternity clothes for you young lady." Said Beth, donning her coat. "You can just follow me over."

"Okay. Thank you for inviting me today. I really enjoyed it very much. This whole base is like one big family isn't it?"

"Sometimes it seems that way. We all rally around when anything bad happens to any of us. In that way, I guess we are a big family. See you at the BX."

They shopped that afternoon and came home with several boxes and bags of items they found. Molly stashed them in their bedroom, waiting for the right time to show Bill. She did wonder where he was though. He'd not been back since she left before noon and it was now almost four.

[January 17, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB Flying Club, Great Falls, Montana - mid-afternoon]

Bill would rather have been anywhere else other than where he was now. He'd been sitting at this desk for over an hour now sweating out the hardest examination he'd ever encountered. He was about finished now and looked over his answers one more time. He remember an admonishment from one of his college professors that one should never change an answer because your first impression was more likely to be the right answer.

So, with a sigh, he got to his feet and handed his results to the FAA monitor with a wan smile. "Hope this is right. Will it take long to grade?"

"Not long. Go have a cup of coffee or a soda and be back in a half hour or so." She smiled. "Don't worry. I'm told you worked hard at it. This refresher should be easy for you."

"Well, basically, it is, but the added regulations about flying to and from federal properly is complicated."

"That it is. Don't worry." She repeated.

Bill left and wandered over to the coffee machine. When he had gotten his cup, he sat down at a table and was joined by another guy who said his name was Steven.

"Hi, Steven. You here for an exam also?"

"Already had mine. It was a brass-bound bitch. I'm going for my instrument rating, multi-engine."

"Oof! That's too heavy for me right now. I don't have enough hours for something like that. I just want to get current so I can fly my wife over to her birthday party at Benchmark."

"Shouldn't be a problem then. The regs here are tough, but make sense so they are easy to remember. I think of them this way: the big silver things with eight engines that carry big bombs always have the right-of-way. Little birds like ours are breakfast for them." He chuckled.

Bill returned the laugh. "Yeah. I guess you're right about that. If I pass this test, I still have a check ride waiting for me tomorrow. I'll be gone all day and I haven't a clue what to tell my wife."

Wanderlust!

"Tell her you're going ice fishing."

"Ice fishing?"

"Yeah. Unless she's into fishing, she won't want to go at all."

"Well, she was in a little accident the other day and got banged up in a rock slide. She's going to take it easy for a few days."

"Really!? She get banged up badly?"

"Only smacked on her arm and upper leg. She got hit with a frying pan when the rock hit the cabinet across the RV from her."

"Yow! I bet that smarted."

"Certainly did. A couple of inches higher and it would have hit her full in the face. I couldn't have taken that."

"I hear you." He looked at his watch. "I gotta go now. You take care, Bill. Tell your wife to get better."

"I will. Thanks for the chat."

Steven waved over his shoulder on the way out as Bill hear the door open to the examination room. He turned to find the examiner smiling at him. He jumped up and went over to her.

"How did I do?" He asked eagerly.

"Missed only three out of the lot. That gives you a raving good score Mister Stiles. Congratulations." She shook his hand. "Read up a little more on approach plates for this base. You had the distances right, but the missed approach hold points weren't correct. Minor, but important if you miss an approach." She grinned.

Bill grinned back. "Yeah, I guess they would be. So I can do my cross-country tomorrow?"

"Absolutely. After this, I'd make sure I stayed current so you won't have to go through this again. Oh. Your physical is fine also. Here's your ticket and log."

She handed him his pilot license back with the currency endorsement on the back. He turned to the last page of his log and found the full statement of qualification. He was current again!

"Great! I appreciate it. Thank you."

"My pleasure. Fly carefully."

They parted after shaking hands again. Bill went out into the general ready room and looked around. He didn't see anyone he knew so he grunted and left again. Time to head home for the day. He was wrung out.

[January 17, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - evening]

Wanderlust!

Bill very much wanted to tell someone of his decision to fly Molly to her birthday party. He finally settled on his brother. After swearing him to secrecy, he told him of his plans.

"Great! She'll love it. Have you told her you were a pilot?"

"Nope. I thought I might surprise her. I ran into a friend who told me how he snookered his mother into her first light plane ride. He set it up like thisâ"

Bill went on to describe the subterfuge his friend had used. Phillip interrupted a couple of times with a snort of mirth. When he finished, Bill sat back.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I think you're going to spook that poor girl pretty badly."

"You think so? She's a level-headed girl, Phil. I don't think she'll panic. She might get worried, but I think I can calm her. Once I get moving, she'll probably have a good idea I know what I'm doing. Don't you think?"

He thought that one over. "Yeah. Probably. But, if she gets really scared you stop. You hear me? Stop! Or you'll answer to me."

"I will. I guarantee I will."

"Then go for it. She'll love it once she gets used to how goofy you are. She probably thinks you're already nuts for wanting to jump *out* of a plane so when she sees you flying one, she'll take it in stride."

"I hope so. Hey? Is that dinner I smell?"

Phillip sniffed the air. "Oh, yeah! We're having pot roast tonight with loads of carrots."

"Well, let's go then!"

They left Bill's bedroom and headed downstairs for dinner.

Later that night, Bill and Molly lay side-by-side in bed and told each other of their adventures during the day. Bill fabricated a bland but believable day with some of his friends as they watched a hockey game on TV. Molly seemed to accept it.

"By the way," Bill added. "They want me to go ice fishing with them tomorrow. Do you mind me going?"

"Ice fishing? Do you like to ice fish?"

"Sure I do. It's pretty cold work, but sometimes you can catch some pretty big fish. I promise to dress warmly. Can I go?"

"Sure you can. You don't have to ask me."

"Of course I do. You're my wife. I can't just go charging off all day without letting you know where I am." He hated to lie, but he tempered that thought with the joy and happiness she would experience in the air.

He rolled over and kissed her soundly â several times â and in the most interesting places.

Chapter 36: Wanderlust - Chapter 36

[January 18, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB Flying Club, Great Falls, Montana - morning]

Since she was feeling a little sore and cramped, Bill decided to let Molly spend most of the day either in bed or down in the living room wrapped up in a blanket on the couch. When he'd fixed her some tea, he headed out on his 'fishing' trip. Beth came in and spent some time with her before leaving to go downtown. Paul came home from the office and grabbed a light lunch then went back for the afternoon.

* * *

'I wonder how Bill is faring with his ice fishing. He left so early this morning I hardly had a chance to say anything. No matter. Maybe he will catch a big fish and we can have it for dinner. I know how to cook up a fish that will melt in his mouth.'

Molly sipped her tea and read her book; occasionally falling into a light sleep. The medications that were prescribed by the doctor in Lincoln were making her sleepy.

'No matter,' she thought. 'Sleep is the best thing for me or so says the OB doctor. He was a gentle man. I feel so much better now that he confirms that my baby is fine. He did warn me of too much activity though in the coming months. I also cannot have any alcohol to drink at all. That I will miss, but it is for a good thing.'

She smiled and rubbed her stomach as she turned back to her book.

* * *

[January 18, 1964]

[Cessna November Kilo Seven Six Two over Great Falls, Montana]

Bill was now twenty miles out on the last leg of his cross-country check ride. Sitting in the right seat was a member of the base flying club and also an instructor pilot. He hadn't said much at all on the flight which, Bill thought, could be either good or bad. It was time to set up the approach to Malmstrom.

"Malmstrom Approach, this is Cessna November Kilo Seven Six Two. Approach and full-stop landing on runway three. I have Information Kilo."

"Cessna seven six two, you are number two following the C-130 on final now. Do you have it in sight?"

Bill had been watching the navigation lights of a large plane for the last five minutes. He saw now that it was indeed a C-130. "Roger, I have it."

"Malmstrom clears Cessna seven six two into the pattern at seventeen ten. Winds are from zero four seven at twelve. Be aware of vortice effect following the C-130. At pilot discretion make short final at three miles."

Bill read it all back to the controller, hoping he hadn't made any mistakes, but received a simple 'roger'. He was now in the pattern. When he reached the point three miles from the centerline of the runway, he rolled left and lined up. He asked the examiner to read his landing checklist. They went through it while he continued his

Wanderlust!

approach.

Once he centered the landing system needles he maintained them carefully.

"*Seven six two - cleared to land.*" Announced the controller.

"Seven six two," Bill acknowledged.

He made what he considered a flawless landing, barely hearing the wheels kiss the pavement. When directed, he cleared the runway and taxied to the ramp in front of the flying club and shut down.

The two of them remained in the plane for a moment.

"You did well, Bill. No procedural errors at all. The landing at Augusta was a little long, but you compensated well for the crosswind. I'm grading you very good. Congratulations. You're now qualified for Malmstrom." They shook hands.

Bill handed him his log and the endorsement was added. Grinning like a schoolchild on a snow day, Bill left the plane and went into the clubhouse. He wanted to click his heels in the air, but didn't.

He had hidden his elation well by the time he arrived back at their quarters. On the way home he'd stopped by the commissary and bought three really nice trout for dinner. He spent a little time marking them up slightly so they looked like they were field dressed and then wrapped them up in a big square of wax paper.

Walking through the door, he announced he was home.

Molly came in from the living room and gave him a big hug. It was terminated when she sniffed. "Ooh, you smell like fish. Go shower - now!"

"Yes, Ma'am. I have three nice trout for dinner. You want to take a look at them?"

"You go and I'll look."

Bill hustled upstairs and took his shower as ordered. By the time he came back down, Molly had already filleted the trout and was rolling them in corn meal. "I think you are going to like the way I fix these."

"Just rolling them in corn meal?"

"Yes, but then I will make a nice butter sauce with lemon. They are not fried either. Instead, they are baked in a pan. You will see."

He left the kitchen and headed to the dining room to sit with his brother and sister. When the kitchen door swung shut, he bent forward and let them both know he'd passed his qualifications and the plane ride was on.

"You both know what to do then?"

"Yes," Phillip said. "I take half the guests with me in your bus and she takes the other half in the wagon. Right?"

"Right. Molly can't see any preparation for this. None at all. She's already suspicious. I think she knows something is going on. She's no dummy."

Wanderlust!

"We already know that." Said Paula. "We'll get it done. You handle your part."

Dinner was as advertised. The fish were golden brown and the lemon butter sauce was very tasty. They, along with vegetables and rolls made from scratch, made the whole meal. A store-bought cherry pie was served with coffee for dessert. Afterwards, when the dishes were washed and put away, Molly and Bill retired to the living room.

The family gathered around and they played a few hands of cards until it came time for their television show. When that was over, the two of them headed upstairs for bed.

"I hope you put those smelly clothes down in the basement to be washed." Said Molly. "And didn't leave them up here."

"I did. Take them downstairs, that is. I rinsed them out and left them to be thrown into the laundry tomorrow. Will that do?"

"Yes, my love. That will do nicely." She kissed Bill warmly and they snuggled for a moment. "I may read for a little while. Do you have a book, or are you just going to go to sleep?"

"Sleep, probably. Unless we can find something else to do."

They did.

[January 20, 1964]

[Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - morning]

Molly's birthday, January 20, dawned bright and sunny. The entire day before, Bill had been scanning the weather reports for anything that could spoil his gift. The temperature was supposed to stay around forty degrees and winds were light and variable. Perfect flying weather. While Molly was eating breakfast he slipped out of the house and drove down to the club apron and preflighted a Cessna 180. This plane was almost identical to the one he'd learned in and it flew almost hands-off. Leaving the plane in the care of Vern, another hangar flyer, Bill went back home.

Bill found out shortly after meeting Molly that she shared his interest in planes of all types. She especially liked watching the huge B-52's as they arrived and departed the base. This being so, it was no chore to get her into the bus to go down to the flight line to supposedly watch a wing exercise. Lots of people did it. They parked near the gate to the flying club.

"This is great, Bill. How many planes will be leaving today?"

"Not sure, but I bet it will be at least ten or so. Let's go over that way. We can go and watch from the flying club."

"Will they let us through? There's a guard at the gate."

"Sure. I just have to show them my ID." And, along with that but out of Molly's sight, his pilot's license. "Hop back in the car and we'll go on over." He pointed to the low building.

They drove through the gate and parked outside the club office. Bill helped Molly out of the car and they went inside. Vern came over and before he could say anything Bill winked and introduced Molly. Vern recovered

Wanderlust!

nicely and waved them over to the big picture window. Bill pointed out several of the club planes parked on the ramp outside: A Mooney, a Bonanza, and three various Cessnas. The one he'd preflighted, N351MD, was sitting on the ramp in front of the doors.

Vern came over and asked Molly if she'd like to go out and take a closer view. She nodded, bright-eyed, and he opened the door for her. Vern went back to the desk to listen for the telephone as he had the duty and Bill walked Molly out to the little plane. He gave her a short tour around the craft, making another brief preflight, but under the guise of giving her information. When they got to the door he tugged on the handle and it popped open.

"Hey, look! This one's open." He turned to her. "Want to sit in it?" She shook her head.

"Come on. It will get us out of the wind." He urged. She reluctantly put her foot up on the step and Bill lifted her into the seat. 'Yes!' He thought.

He carefully closed the door on her and went around to the pilot's door and climbed in. He could also tell that Molly was a bit nervous so he made a big show of just sitting there and looking about. She relaxed a bit more until he asked her to put on her seat belt.

"Why?" She said, giving him a squinty look.

"Oh, no reason. I just thought you'd like to see what it was like. I'll put mine on also if you do. It's just like an airline belt." He said, smiling at her. She lifted the belt and he watched her click the lap belt closed. Then he put his on.

Bill grabbed the control yoke and made silly buzzing sounds with his lips while checking full movement. This began to loosen her up and she giggled at his antics. He stopped burbling and looked down at the dash.

"Hey! They left the keys in." With no hesitation, he pulled the throttle out a crack and then set the mixture. He felt the handle of the hand brake to make sure it was engaged and then twisted the key.

* * *

'*Mon dieu!* No! What is this he is doing? This is an airplane, not a car!'

* * *

Molly jumped as the prop began to rotate and shouted at Bill when the engine caught. "What are you doing?!"

He mimed that he couldn't hear her because of the earphones he'd already slipped over his head. He pointed to hers hanging on the door hook and indicated she put them on. Carefully, and tentatively, she did. He pushed the intercom button and asked if she could hear him. She nodded and looked at him with her eyes wide open. She repeated her question and he heard it in his ear.

"Let's see if I can make this thing move!" He told her.

Molly grabbed his arm with a surprisingly strong grip and shouted "No!" Bill held up a finger and made a show of changing the microphone channel to the radio instead of intercom. She could hear him, but her microphone had gone dead. Bill set the transponder to VFR (Visual Flight Rules) flight, punched the Ident button, and then spoke into his headset.

Wanderlust!

"Malmstrom. Cessna November Three Five One Mike Delta requesting taxi instructions to the active from the flying club. VFR. Departure to the west." He intoned.

"November Three Five One Delta cleared to taxi using taxiway Alpha-Bravo. Winds from two two three at five. Barometer two niner niner five. Hold short of runway two one. Advise when rolling. Please expedite due to upcoming flight operations."

"Will do, thank you. One Mike Delta rolling."

"One Mike Delta."

He reached down and unlocked the emergency brake and advanced the throttle. Molly turned to face him and squealed in his ear. He could hear her even through the phones. "Bill! What are you DOING? You aren't supposed to be doing this are you?"

Bill spoke into the intercom channel. "Come on, Molly. Let's have an adventure! It's your birthday!"

* * *

'Oh, no! We will be arrested for sure. What is he doing? We will be in so much trouble.'

Molly yelped again as the plane lurched into motion.

* * *

They started moving and Bill steered them past a row of planes and out onto the taxiway. While they rolled down the taxiway, he watched the instruments to make sure they were still in the green - which they were. Molly was watching him very closely; not with fear, but with a look he'd never seen before: total puzzlement. Bill looked back and made a slight correction in their travel down the taxiway. Whenever they hit a bump, Molly jumped in her seat.

He made a turn onto the next taxiway and started down it towards the two mile long runway he was assigned. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Molly with her hands over her mouth trying her best not to hyperventilate. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all he thought and decided to fess up. He punched the intercom button.

"Molly, I'm sorry I scared you but I'm a licensed pilot. I've been one for two years now. I have around a hundred and fifty hours now in planes just like this one."

The radio interrupted. *"One Mike Delta - hold in place for emergency vehicle passing in front of you."*

"One Mike Delta." He acknowledged and pressed the brakes. Then, back to Molly: "I'm sorry if I scared you. I never meant to do that - especially right now. But it's your birthday and I couldn't think of a single thing better than a flight over town for you. We have enough gas to fly all the way to the mountains and back if you want. Press that little button on the microphone cord to talk to me. It won't go out over the radio."

A truck with a flashing yellow light whizzed past them at a cross intersection. *"One Mike Delta continue taxi."*

"One Mike Delta." Bill released the brakes and continued.

"Bill?" Molly pushed the button and released it. "Can you hear me?"

Wanderlust!

"Sure, Honey. Go ahead. Stop if I hold up my finger so I can answer the radio. Okay?"

It took her two tries to push the button again. "Okay. I'm all right now. I was just scared you were going to get into trouble. This is a military base."

"No problem. I've flown out of here a couple of times in the last few days just to get a check ride. That means an instructor flies with me to make sure I know what I'm doing. And, I do. Wait a sec." He braked on the markings for the runway threshold on the taxiway.

"Tower. N351MD holding at threshold; ready for takeoff." He took a second to add just a little flap.

There was a pause and then the tower spoke back to him. "*N351MD cleared for takeoff. Departure to the west.*"

"One Mike Delta - rolling." Carefully he edged onto the runway and stopped facing down it. He firewalled the throttle and they began moving. Molly closed her eyes but when they began to bump faster and faster she cracked them open slightly. By the time they were almost up to flying speed she had them open all the way. She also had a huge smile on her face and, when he popped them off the concrete, she shouted out loud.

"WHEEEEE!" She shouted again and again. Bill adjusted rate of climb, retracted the flaps, and set climb mixture. This little plane didn't climb very fast, but this was a good thing for novice light plane passengers like Molly. It gave them a chance to enjoy it. She certainly did.

Chapter 37: Wanderlust - Chapter 37

[January 20, 1964]

[Airborne, heading 210 degrees magnetic, 800 feet AGL]

By the time the plane was around seven or eight hundred feet up, Molly was craning her neck trying to look all around. Since they were still on the runway heading - 210 - Bill banked to the right and held it until they were steady on 270; due West. Still climbing, their path led them directly over town. Bill stopped his climb at two thousand and leveled off briefly. Not wanting to get tangled up in traffic patterns at Great Falls International he angled further to the north and aimed for the river and the Fifteenth Street Bridge.

"There's the bridge we went over right after you got here, Molly. And to the left is the mountains." The snow-capped peaks were magnificent in the bright sunlight. Almost enough to hurt their eyes. They hit a pocket of air and bounced a little. Molly yipped but then looked over at Bill and grinned. She was really enjoying this. 'Damn,' he thought. 'I really do love this woman'.

* * *

Entranced by both the view, which was spectacular, and the uniqueness of her situation, Molly did her best to see everything at once.

'He is right! Those mountains look so close, but he told me they were almost a hundred miles away. And there is the river and bridge! We're flying right over it. Whoops! Heh. We bounced a little. This is so much different that being in a huge airliner. I can see why Bill likes to fly, now. I wonder how hard it really is. He makes it look so easy.'

* * *

"November Three Five One Mike Delta, Malmstrom Tower. You are leaving my area. Frequency change approved."

"Thank you Malmstrom; good day. One Mike Delta."

Molly pressed her button. "What did that mean?"

He held up a finger and bent to the radio to transfer to the common frequency for VFR flights in this area. "It meant that I was leaving the radar coverage of the base and that I could now change to a frequency that everyone up here monitors. It's so we can hear where other planes are and what they are doing."

"Sort of like a party line?" She asked. A very quick student.

"Exactly like it. Listen." He punched the mic switch and announced: "Cessna November Three Five One Mike Delta on UNICOM heading two seven zero at two thousand five hundred." He said in measured tones, and then added: "With my new wife on her first flight."

He took a quick look at Molly, who had colored nicely. She looked back a little startled when a voice replied. "Congratulations One Mike Delta. Beech Two Seven Bravo." This was followed by two more of the same.

Wanderlust!

"It's just like a bunch of friends up here, Molly. This particular channel is in use all the time, but chatter is kept to a minimum." He pulled a sectional chart out of the pocket next to him in the door and passed it to her. He pointed to where they were right now with a finger. "We're headed this way," he said, sliding the finger west towards the mountains. "When we get about hereâ€¦" he indicated the foothills "â€¦ then I'll turn south and we'll fly down them for a while."

"How long will we be out here? Won't anyone be worried we don't come back?"

"Nope. Everyone but you were in on it. Phillip and Paula paid for the gas and my mom and dad paid for the rental of the plane. Happy birthday, Honey!"

She reached for his hand and kissed the back of it since she couldn't lean over with the seat belt tight around her waist. "Thank you, my love. It's the best one I've ever had. It's just wonderful to be up here." She looked out the window and scanned the ground they were now over.

"I am so happy you're pleased. We have to go up a bit more now." He pointed to the altimeter. "We're going to go up until we get to about nine thousand feet. To do this, I'll circle once and you can look right out the door and down. If it frightens you let me know and I'll stop." She nodded once, decisively.

Bill picked out Willow Creek Reservoir and started a climbing right turn. This let Molly look down off the right wing. She never flinched, as one of his passengers had done once before, but, instead, stared directly down and around. "All that grass. It seems to go on forever from up here. How high are we now?"

He pointed to the altimeter again. "We are at seven thousand four hundred and climbing at a rate of two hundred feet a minute. To reach nine thousand, we need to circle for another five or six minutes. Simple math."

"So if you went up faster, you'd get to nine thousand faster?"

"Right. I bet you would make a natural pilot. Want to try?"

* * *

'ME!?' Mon dieu! I cannot fly this airplace! Why would he ever suggest this?'

* * *

She stared at him. "ME! I wouldn't know what to do. No."

"Just put your feet lightly on the pedals down there and feel them move when I move them. They help control my turn. To go right, press the right one; to go left, press the left one. To go either direction, turn the wheel that way at the same time you press the pedals. See how I have the yoke, or wheel, now to the right? Feel the right pedal is down just a little. That's what is making us go in a circle. On that instrument," he pointed to the turn coordinator, "you can see the little white wing is tilted to the right and resting on the little white line. Then look at the little black ball in it at the bottom. When that's centered, we're turning properly."

She nodded. "And, what's making us go up is me pulling back on the wheel." He demonstrated by pulling and pushing it a little. The plane jumped up and down - as did Molly. Her eyes got wide and then she giggled.

At that moment Bill knew he'd have to see if she wanted to start with flying lessons. She was hooked that same way he was the first time he went up.

Wanderlust!

"Hey! Want me to show you the area where we go camping? There's a little airfield right by the campground. It's called Benchmark and its riiiiight here." He scanned the chart and then tapped the spot in the mountains. "About fifteen minutes away."

"Will they expect us?"

"I don't know. But I can check and see if anyone is there. Wait a second." He pulled the Airport/Facility Directory and checked on the field frequency for Benchmark. It was the normal UNICOM frequency. He told Molly to listen in."

"Traffic - Three Uniform Seven. This is Cessna One Mike Delta approaching from the east at eight thousand. Is the field open today?"

A pause, then a click. *"One Mike Delta - Benchmark. The field is open. Winds from the northwest at fifteen. Altimeter two niner seven three. No other traffic at this time."*

"Thank you. One Mike Delta."

Bill turned to Molly and she nodded; a huge grin on her face. "Great! Let's go!" He pushed the control column in a bit, backed off the throttle and added carburetor heat; all in rapid succession.

"What did you just do?" She asked.

"Well, first we needed to go down, so I pushed the yoke in. Then, to keep the engine from going too fast and to actually let us descend, I slowed us down a little - like letting up on the gas in a car. The last thing I did was let some of the exhaust pass over and around the engine and carburetor so that ice wouldn't form and stop the engine. Not a good thing. The field elevation is five four three four feet so we have to circle it once at twelve hundred AGL. That means Above Ground Level; which means we stop descending and circle the field atâ!" He looked at her with his eyebrows lifted.

She did the math and came up with sixty-six hundred and thirty-four. He told her that pilot's always rounded up to the nearest hundred so their pattern altitude, their circling, would be at sixty-seven hundred.

Down they went. When they entered a narrow valley they could see a broad face of white rocks to the right and tree-laden slopes to the left. They had sunk below the tops of the surrounding hills. Bill could see Molly was getting a little nervous with all the bouncing around they were doing in the gusts created by the hills.

"No problem, Honey. Wind gusts are always present in the mountains. When we come around a big curve to the right we'll be able to see the runway. You can help me look for it."

* * *

'He doesn't know where this place is? How will he ever find it? Oh, wait a minute. He showed me on this map he keeps looking at. I wonder if this brown bump here is the curve he's talking about. It must be. If that is right, then when we turn here, we should see something at least. I don't like all the bouncing we are doing though. The wings are bending! Can't he see them?"

* * *

Bill slowed to just below a hundred knots and grabbed the mic again. "Traffic. Three Uniform Seven. Cessna One Mike Delta is now at seven thousand at seven miles for approach and landing runway three zero - left

Wanderlust!

pattern."

"Cessna One Mike Delta - Benchmark. At pilot's discretion you are cleared for straight-in approach and landing, runway three zero."

"Thank you Benchmark. We will approach on long final. Passing three miles now."

"Benchmark."

Bill told Molly what he was doing as he did it. Reaching the panel, he popped on the landing lights, set ten degrees of flaps, adjusted rate of descent a little, and then added a little more throttle.

"Why more gas?" She asked. Bill looked at her slightly started that she knew what the control was.

"It's because when I added flaps - see those things hanging down off the back of the wing?" She craned around and nodded. "Well, those slow us down even more, but they also add lift - what holds us up here. So, I have to 'step on the gas' to compensate and keep the same speed. See this dial?" He pointed to the airspeed gauge. "I am keeping it right at ninety; which is in knots, by the way. I'll explain those later. Now, look over to the right. Can you see the runway?"

She scanned in the direction indicated and, after a moment, pointed excitedly, bouncing in her seat, "Yes! I think I can see it. That long finger of brown?"

"Yup. Just when it's in line with us, I'll turn a little bit more and we'll head right for it. Hang on!"

Bill waited a moment and then made a crisp turn towards the runway. He slid from side to side a bit, settling into the right path, and adjusted their rate of descent a little more. A light headwind coming down the canyon was making them float somewhat. "Now, all we do is wait for the ground to come up to meet us."

At about a mile or a little less, Bill increased flaps and slowed down to just over seventy knots. They drifted right a little so he compensated for that. Down they went. Bill thought to himself that this was as smooth an approach he'd ever made. He picked up the mic again.

"Benchmark - One Mike Delta. On final for runway three zero."

"One Mike Delta - Benchmark. Cleared to land."

They flashed over the threshold and touched down just past the numbers. Steady light pressure on the brakes and a slowing prop let them turn safely at the first taxiway. Bill raised the flaps and flipped toggle switches to kill the landing lights and turned on the taxi lights. "Benchmark - One Mike Delta - clear of the runway." He announced.

"Benchmark. Roger. You may taxi up to the tower building and shut down, Sir. They are waiting for you."

Molly twisted to look at Bill; a slow smile crossing her lips and crinkles appearing at the edges of her eyes. "Waiting for us? Who's waiting for us?"

He tried a lame explanation. "Not sure, Molly. Maybe they're just friendly." But it fell on deaf ears. The cat was out of the bag now. The best he could do now was to get her unstrapped and inside. "Let me shut everything down and get inside to see what's up."

Wanderlust!

Bill flipped switches, and then killed the engine. Once all was secured he took a moment to fill out his rough log and then got out. Molly was struggling with her belt clasp - no easy feat for someone who hasn't seen this type of buckle before - so he reached in and lifted the central release lever. It fell open. She turned to him and let her legs fall to the step on the wing strut. He put his arms around her and lifted her to the ground. On the way down, they kissed a couple of times.

"That was SO exciting!" She gushed. "Can we get something to eat here? Do they have a restaurant or something?"

"We might be able to scare up something at the lodge across the way through the trees. Wait a second while I go in and sign paperwork for the landing. Be right back."

"No. We go together. I want to say hello to 'Benchmark'." She giggled again. "He sounded really cute."

"He's probably married with five kids." Bill smiled at her. "But come on."

Inside, he found the usual stuff for a Fixed Base Operation (FBO). There was a long counter with clipboards on it, a woman sitting behind it in a chair at a desk, and a small table against the back wall with communications equipment on it. It was manned by a youngish guy of about twenty-five. When they entered, he turned and waved. "There you go, Molly," said Bill. "Mister Benchmark. Go say hello while I do the paperwork."

"Okay." She released Bill's hand and went over to the guy. Bill filled out their paperwork, declined to have the plane gassed up, but asked if they would check tire pressure for him. When he landed it felt like the left tire was a bit spongy. The woman said she'd get the line boy on it right away. She wiggled her fingers at him and he bent forward to her.

The woman leaned over the counter and whispered. "Everyone is over at the lodge, Mister Stiles. They've been partying for an hour. Too bad you can't join them." She smiled at him. No booze at all for a pilot before, or during, flight was a hard and fast rule.

"Thanks." He said. "Molly!" He called. "Ready to go?"

She turned back to him, waved over her shoulder at the radio guy, and walked over. She punched his arm playfully. "His name is Ken and he doesn't either have five kids. He's not even married. So there!"

"I heard that!" Said Ken. "Have a great day."

They left the FBO office and walked to the edge of the runway. There were two dotted white lines running across it, a small post with red and green lights, and a pushbutton. Bill pushed the button. The green light came on and they walked across the runway.

"Like a traffic light telling us it was okay to cross the street?"

"Exactly. If a plane was landing they would have given us a red light. Not everyone here is a pilot and even with landing lights a plane in the sky can be missed."

"You are so full of information, aren't you?" He just grinned back at her enigmatically. She wrinkled her nose - a sign of endearment he loved in her.

Chapter 38: Wanderlust - Chapter 38

[January 20, 1964]

[Benchmark Lodge - Benchmark, Montana]

They reached the front door of the lodge and went inside. It was done tastefully in, of course, knotty pine. There was a high-ceilinged great room with a long chest-high desk along the far end. Huge picture windows covered one wall and afforded a breathtaking view down the valley. Various groupings of couches and easy chairs sat around a very large central fire pit. The fire was roaring and gave off the tang of burning pine. Bill looked around and saw the sign for private dining rooms - his destination.

Without seeming to, he guided Molly towards that door. They went through and were greeted by an older woman. "Hello. Welcome to Benchmark Lodge. Table for two?"

Bill paused a moment and then answered. "Hello. Just the two of us, Bill and Molly."

"Ah." She said. "Follow me please."

She turned and walked towards an open alcove and then stood aside as the two of them entered.

Around fifteen people jumped up and shouted "Surprise!"

* * *

'Oh. This man! He is forever surprising me. And, I hope he never stops. My life will never be dull with him around.'

* * *

Molly's mouth opened in surprise and then she began to redden about the ears. Bill thought that she was at her most beautiful when she blushed. He hugged her to his side. "Happy birthday, Honey. Again. Welcome to your party."

Phillip and Paula came up and escorted her to her chair at the head of the table. They each kissed her cheek as she sat. "Happy birthday, Sis." Pronounced Phillip.

"Tell us about the plane ride, Molly," said Jennifer, a girl about Molly's age who lived next door to the Stiles. "I've always wanted to do that."

"Later, later," Bill's dad said from down the table. Right now we need to have a toast. Does everyone have their glass - except you, Bill? Hand him his apple juice someone."

Bill was handed his glass of juice while his dad cleared his throat and began. "Molly. You came into our lives just a short time ago. During that time you've enriched our family with your presence. I, and the rest of us, couldn't be happier with the choice our son made when he married you. Now, in just a few short months, you'll give us yet another member of our family." There was a collective gasp from a few people that hadn't heard Molly was pregnant.

"But this moment, however, is just for you. We all wish you happy birthday. Cheers!"

Wanderlust!

"Cheers!" They all echoed him. They drank. Bill leaned over and kissed her. It lasted until someone said "Wow! Give her air, Bill!"

The servers came in from the kitchen and began dealing out platters of food. The cuisine was pure Montana woods. They had venison, elk, greens, potatoes, game gravy, and all that went with it. Everyone dug in. Bill didn't have to explain elk to Molly as she was familiar with what they looked like. She took a bite of elk roast, chewed, swallowed, and pronounced it "delicious".

Conversation flowed around the table as they ate. Glasses were refilled from time to time (except for Molly, who stopped at her first one). In ninety minutes or so, everyone began to slow down. A huge flat cake appeared at the kitchen door with twenty-one candles alight on it. Everyone sang Happy Birthday to Molly, who got teary-eyed. With sniffles, she thanked everyone for the wonderful party and cut the cake to their cheers.

Bill thanked everyone for coming because he knew it was a long trip - several hours - over from Great Falls. The general consensus was that it was 'no big deal'. Bill asked Molly if she would like to walk around a bit. She said she would so they excused themselves and donned their coats in the hall. She took his arm and, as they passed the desk, the clerk wished her a happy birthday also. "Thank you," she said. "It was all so wonderful."

"You be sure to get your husband to fly you back sometime. This is a great vacation place."

"I will. Maybe we could come back this summer if we get free; before I get too big, that is." She giggled.

The clerk looked thoughtful. "Ah. I see." She broke into a huge smile. "And congratulations for that also."

Molly dimpled and gave her thanks again. They left and went down the front steps towards a walkway that wound through the pines and past the vacation cabins. "Want to see the cabins?" Bill asked.

"Sure. I have to do something to walk off that meal. What a huge lunch!"

"Yeah. I'm stuffed also." They walked slowly down the path. "Is it okay if I ask Jennifer to fly back with us?" Bill asked. "She's been dying to have me take her up. I won't if you don't want me to."

"Sure, Bill. I don't have a problem with that. I've had my surprise - surprises - today. I'd like to have her come. It'll give me someone to talk to while you fly. Darn. That sounds so silly for me to say that: 'while you fly'. You always astonish me with the things you know and the things you do. I had no idea you were a pilot."

"Like I said before, I've been one now for almost two years. I don't get a lot of flying in; just enough to keep my ticket current. I had my flight physical just last week so I could do this flight. It was fun getting all this together without you finding out. Usually I have no secrets from you. It was tough. Phillip almost gave it away a couple of days ago when he asked me if I had an up-to-date chart. I guess you didn't hear that."

"I did, but I didn't know what that meant. I knew you call weather maps 'charts' so I guess it didn't register as anything else. I'm glad you surprised me. It's the best birthday I've ever had. And now I'm twenty-one also. I can have a glass of wine with my dinner if I want. I really missed not being able to do that except at home. Now I can go out and do it."

"Yup. Just as soon as we get back to Great Falls, I'll take you out to a really nice, light, dinner at the Officer's Club. How about that?"

Wanderlust!

"Wonderful. Just the two of us?"

"Just the two of us, Honey. You and I. Gazing into each other's eyes and sighing. I love you, my wife."

"And I you," she said, completing their little ritual. They kissed right there in the middle of the path under a bright sunny sky that only the Big Sky country could provide.

They got back to the lodge in about an hour and sat with the rest of the gang in the great room with their feet up towards the fire. Loud, boisterous, laughter and talk permeated the room. Their party was joined by several other couples. One couple, who sat right next to them, appeared to be having fun, but didn't take part in much conversation. When the woman leaned over to her husband and spoke in German, Bill understood why.

He leaned towards her and asked, in German, if they were talking too fast for them. She turned rapidly towards Bill and looked up in astonishment. She replied that they were having such fun just listening to us have a good time. He asked their names and where they were from. She told him that they were traveling across the States and a friend in Billings had told them of this lodge. They called for a booking and here they were. She tapped her husband on the shoulder and he joined the conversation, happy to be able to communicate as he knew very little English. His wife was the translator for them both. Bill got their names: Heinz and Frieda Gruber.

When there was a lull in the general hubbub, Bill jumped in and introduced the two of them to his clan and their friends. His mom and dad spoke to them in German as well as another couple. From then on, they rapidly changed between the two languages at will to suit whomever they were talking to at the time.

Bill patted Molly's knee and walked over to where Jennifer was sitting. He knelt at her side and asked if she would like to fly back with the two of them. Her face lit up brightly. "Oh! Can I? Wonderful! Just let me know when you're ready to go."

"About a half hour. If we leave later than that it will be pitch dark by the time we get back to the base. That's not a problem at all," Bill hastened to add. "But it's just that night flying is trickier than daytime because of the reduced visibility."

"No problem, Bill. Just let me know and I'll be ready."

He looked at his watch and shrugged a little. "Maybe we'd better start saying goodbye then."

Bill went around the circle, thanking everyone for coming and reached his mom who waved Molly over. They hugged and his mother wished her a special birthday greeting just from her. Molly kissed his dad's cheek and shook hands with everyone else. Bill's brother and sister hugged her as well. Out by the coat rack, the three of them donned their coats and gloves.

Their walk to the FBO was halted by a red light on the post this time. Way off down the valley two beams of light appeared. Another light plane was on approach. Bill pointed it out and the three of them watched it land. In a burst of wind it swept past them and down the runway, slowing, until it turned off towards the ramp.

The light turned green again and they crossed to take the walk up to the FBO building. Bill filed a return flight plan and told the girls to wait here if they wanted to stay warm. Neither one did so they followed him out. He walked around the plane, pushing and pulling controls and then took out his fuel sampler and drained a little from each tank. "To make sure there isn't any water in it." He answered in response to Molly's question. Then he lifted the engine cowling to check the oil level, found nothing amiss, and closed it back up. The desk had told him the tire he'd asked about was two pounds low so they had added some air.

Wanderlust!

"Well, girls. No time like the present I guess. Jennifer, do you and Molly want to sit in the back seats, or one of you in front?"

Molly hesitated, and then told Jennifer to sit up front because the view would be awesome for Jennifer's first time. Molly would sit in the back so she got in first and settled down. Bill handed her a small blanket which she tucked over her legs. He also noticed that she fastened the seat belt expertly this time. He knew that he was definitely going to have to get her some lessons.

Jennifer was next. Bill assisted her into the seat, tucked her legs into the well, and told her not to stick them out too far or they would hit the controls. She nodded, looking slightly apprehensive. Bill reached into the bag on the back of the seat and pulled out two pairs of earphones. This particular plane had the ability to put everyone on intercom and leave one ear open for the pilot to hear the radio. He explained how everything worked and then closed the door.

After Bill ran around and hopped into the pilot's seat he made sure the door was secure. Then he primed the engine and hit the starter. The engine coughed once and then began running smoothly. The propeller spun in a blurry arc. In rapid succession, Bill set the controls up, adjusted the radio panel, and set the autopilot for the altitude he wanted. They were just over two thousand feet higher here than Great Falls so he would be going downhill all the way.

After checking the intercom out with the two girls, Bill toggled up the mic and announced his intentions. The FBO operator came back and cleared him to the runway threshold and they began moving slowly towards it. On the way, he added a notch of flaps and set the heading bug for the autopilot. Since Great Falls International was directly in their path, he'd have to jog north around it again in order to land at Malmstrom. This wasn't a problem at all with a heading hold autopilot.

The engine sounded good to Bill so he announced he was pulling onto the runway for takeoff. Once there, he settled on the center line, ran the engine up, checked the magnetos, and then released the brakes. They rolled down the runway and lifted off at about the three-quarters mark. Once they were steadily climbing, Bill eased the flaps off and flew the plane manually down the valley.

Jennifer was practically drooling on the window. Her hands were fluttering all around as she pointed out stuff to Molly. Molly, on the other hand, tried her best to look almost bored - bless her. Bill could see her eyes looking everywhere also. Soon, both girls were talking up a storm on the intercom. Bill broke in and told them he would be off the channel for a bit. Jennifer okayed and Molly gave him a crisp 'roger'. Bill spent some time with Great Falls Approach informing them of his intention to fly north of them at five miles and three thousand AGL. It was approved and he was given a transponder code which he dialed in and pushed the ident button. They came back with radar confirmation and wished him a nice trip.

Almost an hour later, nightfall was closing down on them. The sun was disappearing behind the mountains and throwing long shadows across the plains below them. Over the engine noise Bill could hear Molly and Jennifer talking but not specific words. He clicked his right ear to intercom.

"â land that's why I don't go out with him any more." Jennifer was saying.

"Excuse me ladies, but I thought you might like to watch the city go by. We're approaching it now. Over to the right is the airport - that flashing green and white light and those sequential runway flashers are the active runway. That means the one planes are landing and taking off from."

"So that's what those flashing light are. I've seen them from the ground on foggy days. It's sort of like a big signpost saying 'land here' isn't it?"

Wanderlust!

"Just that, Jennifer. Wait a second; I have to call Malmstrom again."

Bill checked back with Malmstrom tower and received permission to enter their pattern so he terminated with Great Falls Approach and reset his transponder code. The wind had shifted enough so Malmstrom reversed the runway direction from the one they had taken off. Now they were assigned runway twelve. He circled around at five miles until he was aligned and called back that he was on final. With permission now to land, he set up his approach and started down.

The landing was uneventful, except for a double chirp - the wheels and Jennifer's yip. She didn't expect such a loud noise. Bill told her that she was only about four feet, if that, from the wheels so it sounded much louder. She laughed with relief. He taxied over to the flying club's apron and shut things down. Another guy came out of the office and took down the particulars of the engine usage and the like. Bill told him he had about a third of a tank in each wing. He nodded and made a note of that. Stiffly, Jennifer and Molly got out of the plane and followed Bill into the warmth of the office. They stood, flapping their hands and arms in front of the space heater until he had signed all the paperwork.

Bill's folks wouldn't be back from the hills with their bus for another hour so they just took a base taxi back home. Jennifer thanked him with a peck on the cheek, for which she'd received permission from Molly. "Thanks very much, Bill. It was wonderful. I loved it. Molly, you're one very lucky girl, that's all I have to say. To be able to just fly off when you want to is great. I gotta go now. Bye."

She hugged Molly and wished her another happy birthday then lit off for her house in the dark. Bill turned and put his arm around Molly and ushered her into the house. "Now, I believe I'll have that drink." He announced. "I deserve it."

* * *

'You certainly do, my husband. Today is the most marvelous day I'd ever had in my life. First I get scared we might end up in jail and then we fly off into the mountains for a wonderful meal. Then we fly home. I will never stop wondering what the next thing Bill will prove to me he can do.'

* * *

That night, after their little nightcap, they readied themselves for bed. Bill caught Molly's profile as she turned towards the full-length mirror on the closet door. Yes, she was definitely beginning to show. He wondered if she was conscious of it yet. She caught him looking.

"What?" She said suspiciously.

"Nothing. I was just thinking how beautiful you were tonight."

She dimpled. "Thank you, my love. You just wait until I look like a fat old cow."

"Never happen. You'll always look great to me." He walked over and kissed her as she got into bed.

Bill took off his clothes, washed up a little, and put on his night shorts. Molly whistled at him when he crossed the room and turned off the light. "Hi there, Sailor. Looking for a good time?"

"I sure am! And I bet I find it too!" He quickly pulled up her nightgown and blew a raspberry on her stomach. She screeched in mirth and tried to twist away. He bent down and did it again.

Wanderlust!

"Sorry about that." He said, insincerely. "I'll take that back." And so he kissed her again on her tummy. This always gives her the shivers and she didn't disappoint him. Her arms flew upwards and pulled at his neck.

"Mmmmm. Don't stop now on my account." She murmured into his neck.

And, he didn't.

Chapter 39: Wanderlust - Chapter 39

[January 21, 1964]

[Quarters, Malmstrom AFB, Great Falls, Montana - morning]

The next morning Molly and Bill were sitting at the breakfast table. His dad had already taken off for work, and his mom was still upstairs in the bedroom. Molly lingered over her cup of tea and his coffee was cooling.

Molly reached over and took Bill's hand in hers. "Bill? Have you thought about our future? I don't mean short term, but further out in years. I guess I threw a kink in your college plans, and I didn't mean to, so if you want you could go back. I could help a little; I have some money set aside."

He put his free hand on top of hers. "Molly, the day I met you was the first day of the rest of my life. My parents have already told me that they think I've got everything I need and that college would be nice, but not necessary. I know that I have the skills to get along pretty much anywhere. Speaking German helps greatly as a second language and, if I get some help from you, I can work on my French."

"You already understand more than you speak, don't you?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But as far as my plans go, I would like your help making a decision for me. You're a major part of my life now so you have a say in what I do. I'd like to go back up to Montreal and work for your father. He has a good business, and I know I can do a good job for him. He doesn't require a college degree and I could even work in some classes up there. I hear Montreal has some fine universities."

* * *

Molly's eyes began to fill with tears. 'He is serious about this. I never thought he would alter his plans for more schooling. Oh, what to say? How can I let him do this for me? I must make sure.'

* * *

She looked up sharply at him, searching his face. "You'd d-do that for me?"

"In a heartbeat. I meant it when I said I'd support you and, now that the baby is coming I mean to keep that vow even more. College is nice, but it drains a wallet fairly fast. What we need now is stability. The only way I can see that happening right away is for me to get a job. Your dad's offer sounds like a great opportunity to do just that."

"Oh, Bill!" Molly gasped. "But you've always wanted to finish school. What about that?"

"It'll get done, just not right now. You're more important to me than any schooling I may never need. I've got to provide for you and the little one."

Bill's mother came into the kitchen. "About that. Have you told your parents yet, Molly?"

Molly looked a bit guilty. "Well, no, I haven't."

"Well, you'd better tell them hadn't you? I'll bet that'll perk up Alain's mood." She sobered a little. "But, what did I hear about school? What about that?"

Wanderlust!

Bill thought it was high time to break the news completely here. "I - we - have decided to move back up to Montreal and I'm going to work for her dad. He asked me once while we were up there and I told him I'd make a decision soon. I've put it off for a while, but now, with the baby coming, I think this is the right move. What do you think?"

His mother frowned. "That's not for me to say one way or the other, Bill. I think your father will agree with me that it's up to you now. You're married and will soon have a family of your own. You make the decisions yourself now. Frankly, though, I think you're right. Your dad will be home for lunch in a bit. You can tell him then."

Bill stood up and hugged her shoulders. "Thanks, Mom. You're the greatest." He meant it too.

Beth went over to the counter and poured some hot water into her mug. "I never really thought about it but I'm going to be a grandmother! How about that!" She mused, almost to herself. She turned back to the two of them. "Your brother and sister are going to be sad that you're leaving though. They so much wanted to be there when he, or she, was born." She looked thoughtful and then took Molly's hand. "Come on, Molly. You and I are going to do some baby shopping. We don't have much time I bet."

"Well," I said. "We won't be leaving tomorrow. We actually hadn't gotten to the point of picking a date to travel but it should be before Molly is unable to fly without a doctor's permission shouldn't it?"

"You're right. How far along did the OB doctor say you were?"

Molly concentrated, running dates through her mind. "About six weeks he thought. Maybe a little more."

"Well, it certainly couldn't be much more than that could it?" She said with a chuckle.

"No, I suppose not." Molly said with a grin.

"What's so funny?" Phillip said, snagging a piece of toast of his mother's plate.

Molly spoke up. "Bill and I have decided to go back to Montreal to live. He's going to work for my father."

Phil nodded soberly. "I wondered if you might. Still, I would have liked to been there when the kid of yours is born."

"Maybe you can, Phil. The doctor predicts mid-September and that's before the fall session starts."

He looked thoughtful. "Yeah, maybe."

Phil stood and pumped Bill's hand and kissed Molly's cheek. "Anyway, that's great news, Bill! Now maybe mom and dad will let me go on longer trips unaccompanied. Heck, I might even meet someone on a train as great as Molly here. Wouldn't that be something?" He chuckled.

"There are plenty of nice girls up in Montreal, Phil." Said Molly. "Come on up and we'll introduce them to you. In fact, we're going to have to have someone bring up our bus to us. No reason why it can't be you."

"Her sister, Denise, is nothing to sneeze at either - for one." Added Bill with a wink.

Molly punched him on the arm playfully. "Hey! Don't go making matches with her. She can fend for herself."

Wanderlust!

Bill backed off. "Okay! Okay. Just kidding." He rolled his eyes, which Phil caught and snickered.

"When are you two leaving?" Paula, who was the last to arrive in the kitchen, asked. "I hope it isn't too soon. I just got used to having a sister and now she's leaving. Bummer!"

Molly put her arms around Paula. "Don't worry. You can always come up to visit us. Summer is a great time to come. We have lots of parks, lakes, and places to take pictures. Come on up with Phil if you want."

"Well, okay, then. Just so we get to see more of each other while you're here."

"We will." Bill told her.

[January 26 - 31, 1964]

[Great Falls, Montana]

The next week went by pretty fast. Molly saw the gynecologist again and he confirmed that the third week of September would be the target date. He advised that she do most of her traveling fairly soon and just relax for the last few months. Nothing strenuous at all.

A lot of time was spent gathering up maternity clothing that could be used immediately. The larger sizes were to be transported up in the bus sometime during the summer. Molly was taken on whirlwind visits to friends of both Paula and Phillip. She was always introduced as 'their sister'.

Bill took Molly up for another short flight but this time they went towards the east and made a stop in Lewiston. On the way over and on the way back, Bill let Molly actually fly the plane. She was startled to learn that if she got confused all she had to do was let go of the yoke and take her feet off the pedals. The plane would level off and fly itself. He even coached her in radio procedure. The ground controller at Lewiston told her she had a very nice radio voice. She got tickled when Bill referred to the flight as the flight for a 'seventy-five dollar hamburger'.

They also took time to begin making lists of baby names. It was a fairly eclectic list which contained French, English, German, and even a few Italian names. Both Paula and Phillip were pulling for a boy, but Bill's parents would like to see a girl.

"Well, it's got to be one or the other," Phillip said succinctly.

[February 2, 1964]

Bill and Molly's planned departure date was now only a few days from now. They'd packed their suitcases pretty tightly with what few items they figured they just had to have and the rest were marked for transportation up in the bus along with the rest of the maternity clothing.

Bill's whole family was planning on coming up to visit during the time Molly was going to have the baby. Nothing, Bill thought, could have kept his mother away - or his sister. His brother, being his brother, just wanted to meet some girls; which Bill promised that he'd do once he got up there.

[February 4, 1964]

The night before they left, Molly and Bill stayed up with the whole family. They sat around the living room and talked about pretty much everything that had happened lately. Along with the nostalgic trip, the group

Wanderlust!

polished off four bottles of a very decent white wine. Molly limited herself to one small glass however. She was determined to be good about drinking while pregnant. At one in the morning, the two of them toddled off to bed and slept the sleep of the terminally tired. They had started off the evening pretty fired up about the trip and what the future would bring, but the sedation of alcohol and all the talking had mellowed them out. Both of them just fell into bed, cuddled, and went to sleep.

Chapter 40: Wanderlust - Chapter 40

[February 5, 1964]

[Airborne from Great Falls, MT to Montreal, Canada]

Bill and Molly were finally away. The airport scene was teary for everyone concerned. But at the same time, there were smiles of happiness with promises of a summer trip by at least Phillip and Paula in Bill's bus. It was hard for Bill to leave, but on the other hand he was looking forward to a new and exciting phase of his life.

* * *

'I can see that Bill is sad to leave. We have talked about his college and now I agree that it is just on a temporary hold. There *are* good colleges and universities in Montreal and I am going to make sure he attends and gets his degree. Oh, I am so excited to be going back home now. Even more so now that I have a secret to share with my family.'

Molly took Bill's hand and they shuffled forward in the line up to the agent's desk at the gate. She sniffled a bit, but hid it well. It was only when she turned to see the faces of her new family that she began to weep.

* * *

"Don't cry, Honey. We'll be back to visit from time to time. In a way, they're kind of used to saying goodbye because of all the moving around they've done. Cheer up. I love you." He lifted her hand and kissed it.

"I think I know that, Bill, but it is still sad to have to leave my new family. That are so wonderful."

Their flight left right on time and, to their surprise, they had a whole row to themselves. Molly felt a little queasy and when they hit a few bumps she turned a delicate shade of green. No accidents however. Basically, they were tracing their route down to Great Falls from Montreal that they took not too long ago. It bugged Bill just a little that they were right over the wing and couldn't see much, but then they really were more interested in just talking.

"Bill, I think we should try total immersion into French. What do you think?" Asked Molly once they had reached cruising altitude.

"That's the way I learned German. From almost day one, even my parents spoke it around the house while they were learning it. I really want to make an effort here, Molly. I want your folks to be able to say they've got a good son-in-law."

She snuggled into his shoulder and kissed his neck. "They already know that, silly. When I was growing up, my dad turned away two boys he thought 'unsuitable' for me. He was right about the first one because he later got caught smoking marijuana. I'm still not sure about the second one though. He was a nice guy, but just couldn't make a decision. You, on the other hand, have no troubles in that department do you?"

"Nope. I figure I should make a decision and stick to it. It might not be the best one, but it's *my* decision."

"*TrÃ's bon. Maintenant, Ãtre calme et laisse-moi dormir.*" Molly said.

Wanderlust!

"Right!" He answered. He was sure she had just told him to shut up so he pulled a pillow out of the seat across the aisle and handed it to her. She put it behind her neck and leaned up against the skin of the plane. "*Bons rÃªves, mon amour.*" He said softly, stroking her arm.

"*De doux rÃªves* would be better. It means 'sweet dreams'. 'Good dreams' is ok, but I like the other because it sounds nicer."

He filed that information away. Bill thanked whatever it was that allowed languages to come easy to him or he'd never 'get' French. A major part of the spoken language didn't resemble the written language at all. Lots of silent and accented letters.

Bill and Molly both slept until he sensed they were descending. He gathered up all the reading material they'd stuffed into the seatback pockets and made sure all their carry-on stuff was ready. Thirty minutes later, they were on final for Montreal International. It was a wintry day, no snow, but overcast skies. Blustery winds buffeted the aircraft. Bill sensed a crosswind because he felt the tail slipping to the right a little.

Then, they were on the ground and taxiing to the gate. Being an international flight, they had to go through customs. It seemed strange but Molly and Bill had to split up as she was using her Canadian passport (suitably amended to reflect her new name) and he was, of course, using his US passport. Neither one of them had any problems as they had nothing to declare so they exited the holding area at pretty much the same time.

* * *

"I wonder where my parents are. Maybe they got held up somewhere. Until we get our bags, it doesn't matter anyway. Oh! Wait! There they are!"

* * *

While they were waiting for the baggage carousel to start up, Molly's parents, Alain and Suzette, came up behind them. Amid much hugging and kissing everyone settled down for the wait. Bill laughed to himself that he was definitely going to have to get used to being hugged and kissed in the manner of the French males. He didn't find it distasteful, only a little different. It certainly wasn't anything he couldn't handle.

Alain and Bill were in the lead headed down the hallway when Suzette squealed delightedly. In a rapid rush of French, which Bill had no chance of deciphering, she apparently told Alain of their upcoming blessed event. Alain broke into a jaw-cracking grin, stopped, and hugged the would-be parents anew, murmuring how happy he was to hear this news.

Suzette insisted that Molly take the front seat of their station wagon - accepting no excuses from her 'in her condition'. Molly replied that she was hardly showing, much less about to give birth on the way home. This caused a bit of levity. As they all headed home, and in some ways Bill did think of Molly's parent's house as 'home', Alain talked of everything but what Bill secretly thought he really wanted to talk about.

The gang arrived, amid much tooting of the horn. This brought out Denise who, when advised of her new status as almost aunt, jumped up and down squealing and helping her sister out of the car. Bill could see that Molly wouldn't lack for any assistance around the house at all.

[February 5, 1964 - evening]

Later, just before dinner, Alain and Bill were alone in his home office. He poured a small brandy for each of them and they settled down in the overstuffed chairs. It was time to talk seriously.

Wanderlust!

"So, my son, can I assume you have come to a conclusion about my job offer?"

"Yes, Sir." Alain made a halting motion with his hand.

"Please, call me either Alain or father." He said with a grin. "I would much appreciate it, never having heard it from a son."

Bill opted for the latter as it seemed to mean a lot to him. "Yes â Father. If you will have me, I would like very much to accept a position in your firm."

He beamed with delight and tossed off his brandy. "Excellent! I have investigated into employment by a non-Canadian and found that work permits are easily obtained. They are only for six-month intervals, but may be renewed even by telephone."

Bill decided to drop the big bomb right away. "Father, I fully intend to become a Canadian citizen in due course. I owe that to both Molly and to you for giving me this opportunity. I've thought long and hard about it and decided that you would be the first to know about it. Even Molly doesn't know I've made up my mind. We've talked about it, but I never made a commitment."

Alain's eyes softened and he looked at Bill thoughtfully for quite some time. "That is not necessary, Bill. Work permits can go on almost forever."

"Be that as it may, Alain, I do intend to become a citizen. I told my dad about it and he is disappointed, but he's resigned to it and has no objection at all. He knows it is my decision to make and fully understands."

"Wonderful then! You are what, twenty-three now?" Bill nodded. "Then, you can use the work permits until you are over twenty-five. This way, you will not be called up into the Canadian armed forces. How does this work with the American authorities?"

"Well, when I was in school - college - I was deferred because of my grades, which were very good. Once I got married, my status changed again. Now, with a child on the way, I will be permanently deferred from serving. In any case, the draft age in the US is currently twenty-three so there is no conflict at all."

"Twenty-three? I had thought it was lower than that."

"It is, actually. When you turn eighteen you have to sign up for the draft, but they aren't calling up anyone under the age of twenty-three right now. With Vietnam now picking up speed that may change."

"*Bon!* Refill?" He gestured at Bill's empty snifter.

"Perhaps just one more before dinner?"

Alain poured them both one, winking at Bill as he topped off his glass. "Suzette says I am to have just one, but this is simply a continuation of the first, no?"

"Yes. I quite agree." Bill winked back.

Alain continued. "I have given some thought to the position I will initially place you. As you know, my company, *AGG importations*, does most of its business with the many Europeans who live here in the Montreal area. I have a senior buyer, Stefan Grolsch, who was out of town the last time. He is now back and is waiting to meet you. I will initially place you under his tutelage and expect that you will be making trips with

Wanderlust!

him almost immediately. Of course, when Molly is nearing birth, you will be staying home." He smiled at Bill. "I wouldn't deny you the pleasure of that for anything. What do you say?"

Bill took a moment, sipped some brandy, and sat back in the chair. This sounded like a great job for him. "I am overwhelmed, Alain. It sounds almost too good to be true. I would love to work for Herr Grolsch and learn all that I can about the import business. Thank you." He held out his hand and they solemnly shook on it. "I won't let you down, father."

"Wonderful!" Alain repeated. "Stefan has wanted an assistant for a year or so as he really wants to open his own small store. When I think you are ready, you can move into his position and I will sell Stefan one of my groceries. *Bon! TrÃ's bien!*"

"*Oui, PÃ're. Je vais faire de Mon mieux.*" He grinned from ear to ear at that and clapped Bill on the shoulder.

"Another month and you will be speaking French like a native. Now, it is time for dinner and for you to tell everyone the good news."

It was Bill's turn to smile.

[February 5, 1964 - Dinnertime]

At dinner, Bill broke the news to the rest of the family. There was silence for a brief period and then everyone started talking at once.

* * *

'So that is what Bill and my father were doing in his study. *Mon Dieu*, he would do that for me? But wait; what about his family and everything else? I know we have talked about it, but, goodness, hearing it out loud now has taken my breath away!'

* * *

Molly leaned towards him and whispered. "But, Bill; what about your citizenship? What about college? I am thrilled, of course, but I am also worried."

He took her hand and squeezed it. "Not to worry, Molly. Things will work out just fine." Then he smiled at her.

The others congratulated Bill and then both Suzette and Denise kissed his cheek. Dinner was much more animated after his announcement.

Everyone cleaned off the dishes and stacked them in the sink. Molly and Bill volunteered to wash and dry. While they did, Bill helped dispel Molly's concerns about their future. In the end, she subsided and they finished the dishes and went upstairs.

While Molly was in the bathroom tub, Bill grabbed his book and slumped down in the bed with his back against a couple of pillows to read. He hadn't gone more than one chapter when Molly came into the bedroom. She had a small frown on her face and was poking at her stomach.

"Oh, pooh! I think he will be a big baby. I don't want to look ugly for you, my love."

Wanderlust!

Bill took her hand and pulled her to the side of the bed and kissed her palm. "You'll never look ugly to me, Molly. Right now, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else in the world except right here in this room. You're beautiful, and get more so every day." He cupped his hands around her very slightly swollen belly and put his forehead against the warm skin. "Hello in there!" He intoned in a deep voice. "Your mother is a beautiful woman and you should be proud to be carried by her. Remember that!"

Molly giggled. Bill rotated his face upward and kissed her navel; adding a touch of his tongue inside it. She jumped away.

"Oooh! That made my whole stomach quiver." She said, whacking him on the top of his head playfully.

"Well, good. I know what will really relax youâ!" He said suggestively, sliding his hands downwards along her hips and pulling her towards him.

Molly allowed him one slow kiss at the base of her stomach and then pulled away with a seductive smile. "Later." She crossed the room, picked up her nightgown, and held it over her head. Bill noticed immediately that her breasts seemed 'fuller' than usual also. He wasn't about to mention that to her though. She let the gown drop over her shoulders and smoothed it downwards over her body. 'Damn,' Bill thought. 'She really looks great to me.' Under the covers, he was beginning to react so he lifted his book again - reluctantly.

"Same book as before?" Molly asked.

Bill held it up to show her the cover. "Yup. *C'est la science-fiction, naturellement.*" Bill said hesitantly. "Did I get it right?"

"*Vous avez certainement, comme pour lire ceci, pas vous?*" She chided. "You certainly like to read this, don't you?" She repeated, in English.

"I got it the first time," Bill said quickly, smiling at her.

"Well, you go ahead and read. I have these to look at." Molly said, giving him a mischievous smile and dropping several glossy magazines on the bed next to him. He saw that they were all in French and seemed to be fashion magazines. One of them, however, featured a very pregnant woman on the front. She was apparently boning up on fashions for later.

They both leaned back against the headboard doing our thing. Dinner was softly rumbling inside Bill however. He knew he was about to explode in a not very polite cloud of smelly gas so he hopped up and dashed across the room. He almost made it. Bwoot!

"Oh my!" was all Molly said as Bill closed the door to the bathroom.

Later, feeling much better, he resumed his position on the bed. Molly was engrossed in the maternity magazine but held out a page to Bill as he settled down. "Doesn't this look pretty?" She asked.

He was indeed impressed by the dress she was showing him. It was a full bosom done up in blue lacy stuff and hung down from what he had heard called an 'empire waist'; one very high on the upper hips, practically underneath the breasts. The bulge of the baby was concealed somewhat in the folds of blue cloth. "Very nice. You'd look great in it with your blonde hair and all that blue."

She wrinkled her nose at him. "I'd probably look like a fat cow."

Wanderlust!

"Nonsense. I would take you anywhere dressed in that - fancy ball, good restaurant - anywhere."

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Thank you, my love. I needed that."

"I'll keep doing it until we are great-grandparents."

Bill set his book on the table and flipped his light off. "You won't bother me if you want to read some more. I'm sleepy after the flight and that big dinner. Good night, Honey." He kissed her gently.

* * *

'Let me just see how sleepy he really is. I have been getting more in the mood since he buzzed me on the stomach. It is time for a payday - is that right? No. Time for a payback. Yes, that is right.'

* * *

Molly responded in kind but let her hand fall to the covers over his legs. She rubbed gently. "How very sleepy you must be. Oh. Wait. What is this?" She'd found something of great interest and began massaging it slowly. "Perhaps not quite so sleepy, *n'est-ce pas?*" She giggled. "*Cela semble Ã¢tre Ã¢veillÃ¢.*" She said softly, almost to herself.

"I agree, and actions speak for themselves. What shall we do about this?" Bill said; his voice low and husky.

Molly extended her legs across the bed and laid her head on Bill's stomach looking up at him. Her fingers began toying with the sparse hairs on his chest; twining them around and tugging gently. Her big, blue eyes stared directly into his.

"*Je t'aime plus que la vie elle-mÃ¢me.*" Bill said very softly.

"*Et, Je t'aime.*" Molly answered just as softly. "*J'ai besoin de s'occuper de vous plus souvent qu'il paraÃ¢t.*"

"Thank you, my love. You may attend to me at any time you wish. You bring out the best in me."

She dimpled when she smiled at him. "You know, the doctor told me we could make love right up to the ninth month. I think that may be a bit awkward, no?"

"Yes. I think so also." He lay back and flung his arm over his forehead. "Alas, I will be devastated not to make love for months. Oh, the agony!"

Molly grabbed a few hairs on this chest and yanked.

"Ow! You are starting torture already?"

"Oh, be serious, my darling, and make love to me."

Bill got serious and did just that.

Chapter 41: Wanderlust - Chapter 41

[February 14, 1964]

[Offices of AGG Imports, Montreal, Canada - 8 AM]

It had been an exciting week for Bill. The first one spent in his new job. Alain had introduced him all around - especially to Stefan Grolsch. Stefan, or Herr Grolsch, as Bill preferred to address him during business hours, explained briefly what his job was to be and how he might go about it. It was extremely informative and Bill learned a lot from the very first day.

The two of them went around to every one of Alain's shops and determined what goods it would be necessary to order during the next trip to the European continent. Stefan explained that he always traveled from Montreal to Paris initially. This was for two reasons: the first being that Air France was a delightful airline to travel on, and, second, his base of operations was a very nice hotel there. He did his traveling to and from that hotel into Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and even England.

Bill had established his credentials as a German speaker the very first day. Herr Grolsch began their initial conversation in that language. After an hour of general conversation - which contains a number of technical terms - Stefan reverted back to English, stating that he was satisfied Bill could handle himself well in the language. Bill, on the other hand, had developed a cold sweat during that hour from sheer nervousness.

"You will do just fine, Bill. You have a great command of the language. I am intrigued however, do you think in German?"

Bill smiled. "Yes, Herr Grolsch, I do. I find it is much easier to do it that way."

"Good. Good," he mused. "A buyer must be decisive and even the smallest lapse in conversations will be seen as uncertainties. You will do well." He repeated.

The rest of the week was spent driving around Montreal to the stores, chatting with purchasing agents in those stores, and generally learning the business. Bill had a feeling each evening that he was being overwhelmed by it all. Molly soothed his fears that he wouldn't be good enough. She was very good at that.

[February 21, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada]

Today is the day that Bill and Molly took possession of their new apartment. They had been looking for a while, but fell in love immediately with this one. It was on the second floor, but the building had an elevator in good repair. One side of the ground floor was given over to a small leather goods shop and the superintendent of the building lived in the other side.

Their apartment consisted of a relatively roomy living room, a kitchen reached by a short hallway, and two smaller bedrooms off that same hallway. The only bathroom was between the bedrooms, but since there were only two of them that didn't matter. When the baby was born, they could use the spare bedroom for it after an initial period in a crib in their own room.

Molly's injuries had now faded to dull bruises and would, in a short while, disappear entirely. Molly objected, but not much, to Bill when he lifted her into his arms and carried her over the threshold the first time.

Wanderlust!

"Our very own place," she said into his shoulder. "One from which we will carry on our lives. It is good that we found one close to the office, no?"

"Yup. I can walk all the way. It's only about six blocks in all." He wiggled his eyebrows. "I can even come home for a nooner."

* * *

'Nooner? What is this nooner? Oh. Wait. I bet I know. He will come home for lunch and we willâ ' Molly thought. 'Actually, that may help to soothe the savage beast in him from time to time. It certainly would help me, that's for certain. I'll play innocent and see what he says. It might be fun.'

* * *

"What is the 'nooner' of which you speak? I do not understand."

"Well, it's a â 'um â ' when I can get away from the office for lunch, I can, ah, come home, and we can â 'um â ' have some fun?"

"You're terrible, Bill! What will the neighbors say?"

"I don't know. Do we even know who they are?"

"I have no idea. We just got here today. Maybe we will see them tonight."

"Maybe. We should probably unpack."

Molly agreed and they both set about opening cardboard boxes and putting all the stuff they'd brought over the last few days away. As each box was emptied, Bill flattened it and put it on the pile next to the front door. Their apartment was beginning to look like a home.

By evening, they were exhausted. By Molly's count, seven more boxes needed to be opened but they were just too tired to do this. Bill waved a bottle of sparkling water at her from the kitchen.

"How about a nice fruit juice fizz, Honey? You'll feel lots better."

"Sure," she said, putting down a load of blankets and coming into the kitchen. "I quit - for now. We can finish this tomorrow can't we?"

He put his arms around her. "Sure, Honey. You really shouldn't have been working so hard anyway. All that bending and squatting isn't good for you."

"Oh, pooh. The doctor says I can exercise every day if I want. Besides, I'm barely showing even now."

"I know, I know. But, just the same I want you to sit down and let me rub your shoulders. Come on. Right down here." He dragged a chair out and eased her down into it. He started rubbing her shoulders and neck.

"Mmmm. That feels wonderful."

* * *

Wanderlust!

'It certainly does. Every time he touches me I tingle all over. I hope it never stops. I get all mushy inside even when he come into a room, but his touch just melts me like butter in a pan. Hey - that would be good for tonight. I'll fix some *Suzette cr pe*. He has been working much harder than I; especially my old bed. What a monster that was to bring up into the apartment. It will be nice to sleep in it though. So very familiar to me. With plenty of room for when I get bigger. Ahhhh. My neck just popped!'

* * *

They did indeed have delectable French pancakes for dinner. Along with fresh rolls from a bakery that Molly discovered just half a block away. Washed down with more fruit juice fizz, it was a meal fit for the Gods.

The next day, Bill walked to work whistling and smiling. He greeted everyone he saw with a head nod, a hearty *Bonjour*, or both. As far as he was concerned, all was right with the world.

[April 4, 1964]

[Hotel de Maubeuge Gare du Nord, Paris, France - morning]

Bill and Herr Grolsch had checked in to the hotel about an hour earlier and, after a short snack in the small grill, began mapping out their travel strategy. This trip, they had to visit N rnberg, Stuttgart, Koblenz, and D sseldorf. Bill was most interested in D sseldorf because they were to see about a purchase of various mustards. He loved hot foods.

"So, Bill. What are you thoughts on our movements? In which order shall we visit these cities?"

Their friendship had progressed to the point that Stefan considered Bill to be merely a colleague instead of a trainee. This arrangement made conversations much simpler.

"Well, Stefan, I think that perhaps going due east and stopping at Stuttgart, followed by Nuremburg. Then back northwest to hit Koblenz and leave D sseldorf to the last. On the way back from there, we can make a stop, if you wish, in Brussels to see about those chocolates that store two has on their purchase list."

Stefan thought a moment, looking down at his travel map. "Yes. I can see that would be best. You have a good eye for efficiency, Bill. I like that."

"Thank you. Probably my military upbringing."

"That's right! I forgot that. Good planning makes for successful campaigns. We will do it that way. If you will excuse me, I will go down to the desk and make our arrangements. I was pleased, you know, to find out you liked to travel by train also." He smiled. He knew Bill and Molly's history." He stood and went to the door. "I will be back shortly."

Their trip took a total of nine days and it was accomplished in the same order Bill outlined. Stephan admitted to Bill later that he had purposely left off the stop in the Belgian capitol just to see if he would pick it off the proposed purchase list. Bill had, and for that he felt very good. He was beginning to think like a purchasing agent - and loved it.

Once the contracts had been let, and they enjoyed the hospitality of their hosts, Bill and Stephan moved on to the next city. Bill knew he was going to have to do some strenuous exercise to keep weight from building on his frame. The food was too good, and in great quantities; much more than when he and Molly were traveling in Europe. He could afford more now.

Wanderlust!

They arrived back in Montreal in the evening of April 13. Molly met them both and drove Stefan to his house and then headed home to their snug apartment. They had found a garage in the next block with slots for rent that weren't too expensive. The bus, when it got here, would have to be backed in, however, because their assigned spot was against a concrete wall in an end stall and the sliding door opened in that direction. Their borrowed car, at the moment, was sufficient for the few times they needed it.

Bill had his pictures developed and they spent a whole afternoon the following Saturday putting them into an album. Molly was determined to have something to show their child when he, or she, grew up. A permanent record of the travels of his, or her, father.

[May 10, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada]

"I have something for you, my love." Bill said as he came through the front door.

Molly came in from the kitchen brushing flour from her apron. "What?"

"Tahh dahh!" He proclaimed, bringing a huge bundle of fresh flowers from behind his back. "For you, Molly. Happy Mother's Day!"

* * *

'Oh, how wonderful! And they smell so fragrant. I love them. They will go nicely in that big bowl on the coffee table in the living room. Butâ ' "

* * *

"What is this Mother's Day?" She chuckled. "I am not yet a mother."

"You are too! Just because she hasn't been born yet is no excuse." He closed to Molly and put his hands on her growing belly. "This - this makes you a mother with all the privileges that entails; which, by the way, includes a nice dinner at Albert's."

"Albert's! My goodness. That's a bit expensive isn't it?"

"Could be, but you are now looking at the Head Buyer for AGG Imports."

Molly squealed and threw her arms around Bill's neck. She rained kisses on his face, neck, and lips - mostly the lips. "Oh, I am so proud of you. But what of Stephan?"

"Stephan signed the paperwork today to take control of Store Three. He basically owns the store now but is dependent on AGG Imports for most of his stock. He already gave us a big order this afternoon. It means a quick trip to Seville, Spain for me though. Just five days if I am lucky. Stephan wants to carry Spanish-grade cutlery and you can't get any better than what you find in Seville."

"Then you must go and do your very best for Stephan. When will you leave?"

"Next week probably. I have to set up the itinerary first. From here to Madrid and then a small puddle-jumper to Seville."

Wanderlust!

"Puddle jumper? What is this?"

"A small airplane. What we call a commuter airplane. Small, usually twin engine turboprop. It can go into smaller airports than big jets can. But, no matter. That is in the future. What are you building in the kitchen?"

"Ah. I am trying my hand at baking bread. I've been talking to the *Boulangier* and he gave me a recipe for the most delectable bread. Wait until you taste it. I hope it comes out all right."

Molly turned and went into the kitchen to rattle around in a cupboard until she found a large bowl. Next, she snipped the stems of the flowers and arranged them in the bowl. Satisfied, she picked the bowl up and carried it to the living room and set it on the coffee table.

"There. My, they really are pretty. You can smell them already."

Bill came up behind her, put his arms around her middle, and patted her tummy. "I'm happy you like them."

Molly twisted around in his grasp and kissed him. "They're wonderful."

Dinner that night was excellent, filling, and a little expensive, but they could now afford it. What followed afterwards was sheer poetry.

Chapter 42: Wanderlust - Chapter 42

[June 15, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood, Montreal, Canada]

"You have a really great place here, Bill. I hope I can do as well as you have. You're a bigshot executive now in the company, jetting off all the time to adventures. Boy, do I envy you." Bill's brother, Phillip, said.

"You never know, Phillip. Something as great as this can happen to you too. You just got here, but already Molly's sister is dying to meet you." Bill leaned in close to his brother. "Just watch out, she's a firecracker." He said in a stage whisper.

"I heard that!" Said Molly from the dining room where she was setting the table for dinner. "She's just a healthy young girl. Just like I was at that age until you tamed me."

Bill laughed. "I doubt that you'll ever be tamed, Molly. Besides, I like you wild."

"Well, I will get wild if you two don't put away some of that stuff your brother brought up in our bus."

"*Ja, meine Liebe. Ich gehorche!* Come on, Bro, we'd better stow this stuff."

They spent the next fifteen minutes pushing clothing boxes into the closets of both bedrooms. Bill knew he'd be pulling them out and filling dresser drawers soon enough.

Bill's sister, Paula, was scheduled to come up with Phillip but she begged off at the last moment. She was pretty quiet as to the reason, but Phillip thought it might have something to do with her current boyfriend.

"Really?" Said Bill. "I thought that was over a while back."

"No. This is a new one. You haven't met him. Frankly, I don't like him. He seems too slick to me," said Phillip in air quotes. He's hiding something."

"Well, I hope she's careful then. I'd hate to have to go down there and bust a head." Bill said with a laugh.

"You'd be behind me, then." Chuckled Phillip. "And I'd be the one with the baseball bat."

"Can't be that bad - is it?"

"I don't know for sure. He's always touching her and I don't like the way he does it. Too much possessiveness."

"Ah. Out to prove something maybe?"

"Whatever."

Molly announced that dinner was ready. Phillip and Bill headed for the dining room. Their supper was delicious. After dinner, the three of them sat in the living room and Phillip handed them a packet of pictures.

"These were shot since you left town."

Wanderlust!

Bill leafed through them one at a time, handing them to Molly afterwards. He stopped, staring at one of them.

"What?" Said Molly, craning her neck to look.

Bill silently handed her the picture. It was a shot of Paula wearing the very briefest of bikinis, standing next to a rather large guy with a full beard.

"Oooh, I don't like him very much," said Molly. "Look at the way he has his hand on her."

"See! See what I mean, Bill. Even Molly doesn't like him. It's not just me; she couldn't have heard me before."

"I'd have to agree, Phil. I sense something not right." He tucked the picture back into the envelope. "Definitely not right."

[July 5, 1964]

[Laval district, Montreal, Canada]

The surprise party on Bill's birthday wasn't really a surprise to him, but he played it correctly. It was held up at Molly's parent's house in the back yard under their small screened patio. In attendance were his co-workers, friends, and neighbors of Suzette and Alain. Most of the items he received were completely practical and in line with his travels around Europe. Molly gave him a multi-voltage electric razor for use on his many trips. Another great gift, from his in-laws, was a pre-paid course of instruction for obtaining a Canadian pilot's license. Bill was stunned.

"We both hoped this would please you, son." Said Suzette. "Molly told us about the first time you took her flying, and how much she enjoyed it. She also felt sad that your license wasn't valid here in Canada."

Alain took over. "This course will convert your American license to a Canadian license and allow you to fly again."

For a moment, Bill didn't say anything. He was overcome with emotion. It was, by far, the most unexpected gift he'd received from anyone.

"Thank you both so much for this," he said; his voice husky.

* * *

'Oh my. Look at him. This is the first time I have ever seen him, I think, with nothing to say. He loves flying so much. I did the right thing telling mother and father about it. He is already planning when to start his instruction. I can tell.'

* * *

[July 23, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood, Montreal, Canada]

A letter from Phillip:

Dear Bill,

Wanderlust!

I may be in a bit of trouble with the law. My lawyer tells me that he can probably get me out of it though.

Last week, I came home a little early from a date and while I was outside I heard Paula screaming. I ran to the front door, but it was locked. One good kick fixed that (my keys were still in the car). When I rounded the corner into the living room I saw Paula on the couch and Alan (the asshole) standing over her with a doubled-up fist. She was trying to crawl away from him and he was just about to hit her again. I grabbed the fire iron and whacked him just as hard as I could.

Paula fell off the couch and began crawling over to me. Her face was bloody but that was from her nose. This guy had just broken it. I'm afraid I really lost it then because I realized Paula's clothes were torn practically off her. This asshole was in the process of raping her. No doubt about that because his pants were down to his ankles and he had an erection - such as it was.

Just on general principles, I swung and hit the asshole again. Turned out, I broke his wrist and two ribs. By now, Jennifer, from next door had heard the ruckus and came in through the smashed front door. She took one look at Paula and helped her from the room. I called after her to phone the MP's. She did, and they arrived within five minutes - two trucks and a command car.

They took charge of the piece of shit I'd battered and bagged the poker. I wasn't charged but I did get read my rights and had to go to headquarters. The asshole is now in jail on attempted rape charges. I'm not sure exactly where I am legally, but nobody seems much interested in punishing me. The asshole is a civilian so the MP's handed him over to the city cops. He's in jail right now.

Paula is fine. Don't worry about her. She managed to keep herself away from the guy long enough to yell for help. Luckily I was coming home. I shudder to think of what could have happened if I hadn't. Her nose was broken, but the base doctors cleaned it up and put a metal brace on it. She has two spectacular black eyes right now.

What worries me is her attitude. She's very quiet now and hardly talks. Mom is doing her best and so is dad, but she seems so distant. Her friends have tried to cheer her up but so far that isn't helping. I doubt you being here would help either, but I will pass on your concern. This may just take time.

Your Brother,

Phillip

Bill read and reread the letter several times. His anger boiled up to the surface and overflowed. He *knew* there was something wrong with that guy, and now his own sister was traumatized by him.

"Molly!" He called. "Come here a moment."

"What is it, Honey?" She said, running into the room.

Silently, he handed her the letter. She started to read and then sat down heavily on the couch. "Oh, Bill! How awful. You need to call. Right now. I don't care about the expense. Call right now!"

He picked up the phone and got the long distance operator and gave her the number for his father's quarters. After three rings, Beth, his mother, answered. "Hello?"

"Mom! It's Bill. How's Paula? Is she okay? I just got Phillip's letter."

Wanderlust!

"Oh, damn. He shouldn't have said anything right now while his case is still up in the air. So far, the prosecutor has declined to do anything. They are saying now that it was justifiable. I certainly think so. I'd have killed the bastard."

"Mom! Wow! You must really be pissed off. But Phillip can take care of himself. How is Paula? Is she any better?"

"Yes and no. She's come out of it partly, but she no longer goes out at night even with her girl friends. I know she'll get better, but it is going to take a long time. The base psychological department is working with her as well as a battered women's support group. She's progressing, but it was so damn traumatic for her. She and Phillip are much closer now that they were before. He may even be a bit over protective of her. Time will tell."

"Do I need to come down there? I can take some time off if I have to."

"No. No, I don't think so. Having you here would be nice, but you'll be needed up there pretty soon now. Seven weeks left, right? Getting nervous yet?"

"Mom, you have no idea," Bill chuckled. "Molly's restless at night now and I try to be careful, but sometimes it gets really hard to not snap at her." He paused a moment. "Well, maybe you do have an idea."

"I can remember back that far, you know. Although it was before the Earth's crust cooled." Said Beth with a laugh. Your dad slept on the couch a couple of times before it was all over. Anyway. As far as Paula is concerned, please don't worry about her. She'll pull out of this with lots of love and support. Whatever you do, don't let Molly get upset. I know how much she cares for Paula. Okay?"

"Sure, mom. Will do. You will let me know if anything changes, right."

"Sure will, Kiddo. Love you."

"Love you too, Mom."

Bill hung up and Molly looked up from her seat on the couch. "What's happening, Bill? Is she okay?"

"She's recovering. I can't imagine what it would be like to come in on some jerk trying to force himself on you and hitting you in the face. I'm afraid I'd just have to kill the guy. After, that is, I ripped off his reason for the attack in the first place."

Molly shuddered. "Wow. That sounds pretty final."

"It would be, believe me. He'd be talking in a high voice the rest of his life - if I didn't end it right then."

Bill crossed over to her and sat down with his arm around her. "Don't worry, Honey. Nobody is going to mess with *my* wife."

* * *

He means that too. I can hear the resolve in his voice. I don't think I've ever felt just how protective he really is towards those he loves. He and his sister were really close; I could tell that. Now, after all this, they'll be closer yet. *Merde!* How could someone do that to a woman?"

* * *

Wanderlust!

[September 8, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood, Montreal, Canada - late afternoon]

Bill had arrived home from his last trip until after the baby was born. He'd been to Portugal and the Azores. Portugal had some fine spices and wonderful cheeses and there was a local brand of wine, on the island of Pico, that was rarely exported. Bill managed to negotiate for ten cases to be sent to Montreal with a promise of more orders to follow. Alain was thrilled that his son-in-law had made such a prestigious purchase, and gave him a bonus.

Now, with Molly's due date so close, he hovered around her like a moth to a flame. She loved the attention, but sometimes felt smothered by it. More than once, she'd sent him out of their apartment to buy something - anything - just to get some time alone. Bill knew what she was doing, but he let her do it anyway. On one hand, it helped relieve his tension also.

She was due next week and the both of them were barely eating. Soon, hunger began to assert itself.

"Honey, I think it's time we went out and had a nice dinner. I know you get tired of my cooking and you can't stand on your feet for very long so how about we just go out?"

"But, I'm as big as a house, Bill. Where would we go?"

"Alberge's? Swansea's Grill? How about the dining room at our honeymoon hotel?" Bill grinned. Maybe that cute waiter, Andre, is still there." He teased.

"The Parc Suites Hotel? Oh, no! I couldn't. What would I wear?"

"Wear that nice light blue dress. The one with the front bow. I like that one."

"Really?" She patted at her hair and smiled. "I suppose a night out would be a nice change. Okay. You call for reservations."

"Okay." Bill picked up the phone and, in pretty much flawless French, set up their dinner reservation for twenty hours. He inquired about Andre and was pleasantly surprised to find he was now the Maitre'd. 'Well,' he thought. 'That should ease things a bit.' Bill didn't tell Molly about Andre.

They arrived at the hotel about ten minutes early and waited in the short line for the dining room. As they approached, Andre looked up and saw them waiting in line. He immediately smiled and snapped his fingers for the assistant to take over while he rushed over to Bill and Molly.

"*Monsieur Stiles! Quel plaisir de vous revoir! Je, Andr  , va vous servir ce soir.*" He took Molly's hand and bent over it, then shook Bill's hand enthusiastically. "You will have a wonderful dinner. I shall see to it." He announced, drawing up into a position of attention.

He escorted them like royalty to a choice table against the side under a room-length mirror. He was careful to pull the table away so that Molly could slide onto the upholstered bench seat. Once Bill was seated, he again snapped his fingers and the table was set immediately. Apparently, Andre carried a lot of authority here at the hotel now.

"If you wish, *Monsieur*, I will order the *sp  cialit   de la maison*, which, this evening, is a brisket of beef, vegetables, and a cherry *torte* for dessert." He looked at Molly with a wink. "And of course, I can provide a

Wanderlust!

small pot of rice." He hadn't forgotten their first meal here either.

Bill laughed and Molly blushed. "Andre, that sounds marvelous. Please proceed."

Their meal turned out to take almost ninety minutes and by the time the torte was served they were both stuffed to the gills. During the meal, Andre was hardly more than three steps away but very unobtrusive; ready to refill a water glass or whisk away an empty plate. Molly discovered that her appetite had returned and ate well.

"My goodness, Bill. I can not eat another bite. I am completely stuffed. I won't eat for two days now."

"That was my plan. You've been cooped up in the apartment for far too long. You needed to get out some. Besides, it gave Andre a chance to really shine. We need to come back here more often."

"I agree. You will give him a good tip?"

"Absolutely."

When the check arrived, Andre has written across it: "*PayÃ© en entier. Mon traitez.*" Bill tried his best to protest, but Andre would have none of it. "Consider this a gift for *madame* and her young one." He said, bowing over her hand again. Please."

Bill relented, but was determined to leave a hefty tip; which he did but in the European manner - partially hidden under a plate.

On their way out, another couple who had been sitting at a table just over from them approached.

The man spoke. "Excuse me. My name is Jackson and we, my wife and I, were curious about the service you got in there. Do you own a part of this hotel or something?" He asked.

Bill smiled at them. "No, hardly. When we got married, this is the hotel we spent our honeymoon in. Andre, the Maitre'd, was just a waiter back then. We had had an embarrassing moment in the reception area and Andre heard about it."

"Oh, I love embarrassing stories," said Johnson's wife. "Unless they're too painful to recall."

"Not really," said Molly. "By the way, my name is Molly and this is my husband, Bill."

"Oh, sorry. Dan, Dan Johnson. My wife, Carol." They all shook hands.

"Look, said Dan. "Why don't we have an after-dinner drink in the lounge?"

Bill looked at Molly, who nodded. "Good idea, but no booze for Molly here."

"Wouldn't think of it," said Don. "Very close?" He asked Molly.

"Probably a week or a little more."

"That's close," said Carol.

Wanderlust!

They adjourned to the lounge and after the drinks came Bill launched into the story. By the time he was finished, they were all in stitches. "Oh, I can relate to that," laughed Carol. "When we got to our hotel room, Don popped the champagne cork and blew out a window. It cost us two hundred dollars to repair. We hate champagne now."

That started another round of laughter. Finally, Bill had to call a halt so he could get Molly home. Her eyes were drooping. As much as he would have liked to stay, it was time to leave. They exchanged address with the Johnson's and then left for their apartment.

Still stuffed from dinner, Bill and Molly simply got ready for bed and fell asleep.

[September 16, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood, Montreal, Canada - o'dark hundred]

* * *

'Ow! That hurt. Stop moving around in there. I'm trying to get some sleep. Ow! Stop it! Maybe if I get up and go to the bathroom I will feel better.'

* * *

"Bill! Help!"

Molly's cry brought Bill out of bed horizontally. He crashed to the floor and fought his way to his feet. Rushing to the bathroom, he entered to find Molly kneeling on the floor, bent over groaning and holding her stomach. It was time.

He had mentally practiced this over and over, but now that the time had arrived all thought left him. Molly gave a low whimpering groan and doubled over again. This prodded Bill into action.

"Molly, Honey. How much pain and where, exactly, is it?"

"Right here," she wailed, rubbing her stomach. "Everywhere."

"I think we need to call the ambulance. Right now!" He helped lift her so that she could sit on the lid of the closed stool. Grabbing a towel, he wiped a small amount of fluid from her legs and then straightened her nightgown. "Wait right here. Do not move!" He commanded. "I'll be right back."

He dashed into the living room and dialed the number from memory. When he explained what was about to happen, the operator said that the ambulance would be there in ten minutes or less. Fortunately, the hospital was only about seven blocks away and it was very early in the morning - or late at night - whichever.

Bill rushed back to the bathroom carrying Molly's robe and slippers. Carefully, he wrapped her up and fitted her slippers to her feet. "You wait right here. The ambulance is on its way right now."

"Oh, I hope they hurry. I am cramping really hard."

Bill rubbed her back and shoulders as she bent over slightly and moaned. In the distance he heard a siren getting nearer. He held her gently until there was the sound of the elevator bell ringing. When the door buzzer went off, Bill went to open the door.

Wanderlust!

Two technicians entered rolling a gurney between them. "Where is the patient?" The first one asked.

"In the bathroom. She's in pain, but I don't think the severe contractions have started yet. If they have, they are at least twenty to twenty-five minutes apart."

"Good. We'll take it from here."

Bill watched them prepare the gurney and then led them to the bathroom. Molly, looking very scared and vulnerable, lifted her head at their approach. They began talking to her in French - as they'd been talking to Bill, who just now realized that fact - and ascertained basically what Bill had already told them. They supported her while she walked painfully over to the gurney and sank down on it. They lifted her legs and began wrapping her in blankets.

"Is there anything I can help with?" Bill asked apprehensively. "Get the elevator ready, perhaps?"

"Yes, thank you. We will be ready very soon." The head technician said.

Bill hurriedly pulled his clothes on and rushed into the hall. The door of the apartment across the hall opened and Sarah Neeson, their neighbor, spoke. "Is this it? Do you need any help?" She asked.

"No, thanks, Sarah. The medics have it in hand now. I can take care of this. You go back to bed. I'll let you know later what happens." He smiled at her. "Thanks again."

"*Bonne chance.*" She said and closed the door.

Bill propped the elevator door open and waited until the technicians had maneuvered Molly through his front door. While they arranged her in the elevator, he made sure he had his keys and then locked it. He rode down with them holding Molly's hand. When they had her safely in the back of the ambulance, he told them he'd be at the receiving dock right after them.

He raced to the parking garage, got the bus started, and headed for the hospital. When he got there, he parked in the Emergency lot and went inside. He was inundated by paperwork - in French - but manfully ploughed through it hoping he'd filled in all the boxes correctly. He had an irrational thought: 'if I don't fill this in right, will they put the baby back?' Smiling at his own joke, he finished the documentation.

A solemn male nurse led him into the hospital and down to the delivery area. The nurse told Bill that his wife was the only one in there at the moment and pushed the door open. There were several people going into and out of a room down a short hall. He could hear Molly's single short shout and then more silence. With a little trepidation, Bill steeled himself and turned the corner.

"Bill!" Molly gasped. "Oh. It hurts. AH!" She panted for several seconds and then seemed to relax.

A female nurse looked at the wall clock. "Twelve minutes and thirty seconds. Are you Mister Stiles?" She asked.

Bill nodded and moved over to the chair indicated. Molly reached out and grabbed his hand. "Oh, *mon Dieu*, I need you now, my love. Help me."

He kissed her fingers. "I'm here now. This is it."

Wanderlust!

The next two hours were both frightening and exhilarating. Molly's contractions shortened to around six minutes apart and the nurse noted that her dilations were progressing properly. Events for Molly became a whirl of painful gasping for breath followed by tense relaxation against the pillows. She was covered with a sheen of perspiration now; her hair matted. To Bill she was the most beautiful she'd ever looked. She squeezed his hand - hard - and another contraction started up.

* * *

'Mon Dieu, will this pain never stop! Soon. Soon. AH! Yet another contraction. Why isn't anyone doing anything? There! I can feel the baby moving inside me. It is moving down!

* * *

"AH!"

One of the nurse's wheeled on Bill. "You! Go to the waiting room. We need the space for the doctor and the instruments. We will report very soon. She is almost ready now."

Bill got; reluctantly, but he got.

Two hours later, he was still waiting. He'd never smoked in his life, but for some weird reason he desired a cigarette. Everyone at his office smoked it seemed and he was pretty much used to the smoke in the air. The smell of the hospital was alien to him. Every time the door opened, he jumped to his feet. The person just shook her head and closed the door.

He was a nervous wreck now. He'd spent all his spare change on the coffee machine and was really jumpy. He had to force himself to relax. Sitting and doing deep breathing exercises seemed to help. His heart rate fell as the tension left him. Emotionally he was completely wrung out.

Bam! The door popped open yet again. This time, there was a nurse standing there waving him towards her. The high-pitched wail of a baby sang across the room. Bill made it in five strides - big strides. "Mister Stiles? Your wife and daughter are doing fine! Come this way, please."

"Dâ daughter? I have a daughter? Oh my God. I have a daughter!" He began to weep, following the dim form of the nurse in front of him. She took Bill into another room where Molly was lying flat on a raised bed. There was no bump under the cover. "Molly! We have a daughter!"

"Yes, my love. So I heard. I was there, remember?" She smiled wanly. "Hold my hand."

Bill sat heavily on the chair next to the bed and stroked Molly's cheek with his fingers, brushing back the hair that had fallen over her ear. "I love you," he repeated several times.

"I already know that, my husband, but I can listen to you say that forever. The doctor was just here and said she would bring Monique here shortly to meet her father."

Bill lowered his forehead to Molly's arm and wept with joy. "Molly. We are a family now. We have a daughter!" He repeated.

"And here she is," said the nurse entering the room with a tiny wrapped bundle in her arms. She bent and handed it to Molly, who snuggled the bundle to her chest and opened the flap. Bill saw the tiny face of his daughter for the first time and began to weep again.

Wanderlust!

"Well hello there Monique Bethany Stiles. Welcome to our family." He said softly, almost in prayer.

* * *

'That is the first time I have ever seen Bill cry. I know they are tears of joy, and I love him for it. Just look at the love in his face for our daughter. Now we are three.'

* * *

[September 19, 1964]

[412 Place Sherwood, Montreal, Canada - midmorning]

Molly had come home from the hospital yesterday in the afternoon. Her family, three of them who lived here in town, arrived two hours later. Alain was overcome with emotion, just as Bill was, when he held his newest granddaughter. She was then passed to her grandmother, who cooed nonsense syllables to Monique. Denise, barely able to contain herself, gabbled with Molly while she waited her turn.

"Hi there, my little niece. I am Aunt Denise and I will always be here for you." She brushed Monique's fingers with her lips. "You are so soft and wonderful. My sister and brother made a fine baby. Maybe one day I will meet a fine man who will love me as much as these two love you and each other." She kissed the tiny cheek and Monique opened her eyes and tried to track the face hovering over her. "Oh, they are so blue!" She cried.

"Just like her mother's," Bill said softly. "I hope she has yellow hair also. See how fine it is now."

"But that may change, Bill." Said Suzette. "I hope not, but it may change. She is a fine baby. I love the name also. Is Bethany for your mother?"

"Yes. Molly insisted that she be named for both families. I know that your grandmother was named Monique. The two names just seemed to go together."

"I agree," said Alain.

"And so do I," said Denise. "It is a very pretty name. Just wait until I get to class on Monday and tell everyone about my new niece. I wonder how Gerard will feel about it."

"Gerard," said Molly. "Who is Gerard?"

"His name is Gerard Pinochet and he is a student with me at the university. We have been dating quite a bit and I think he may be the one."

"Much to my brother's dismay," Bill chortled. "But, he may have something going himself soon."

The Garnet's spent the rest of the day with the Stiles' and then, after a small dinner, they left for their house. Bill's parents called that evening and asked about Molly's health. Molly herself picked up the phone and they chatted for almost ten minutes. Bill took over and told Phillip about Denise's boyfriend. His brother took the news philosophically and then described his new girlfriend as 'maybe the one'. Bill was happy for him. At the end of the call, Molly, Bill, and Monique went to bed.

Chapter 43: Wanderlust - Chapter 43

[December 25, 1964]

[Laval District, Montreal, Canada - morning]

Molly woke first, tuned to the sounds of Monique's gurgling conversation with herself. She was three months old now and beginning to show a little of her personality. For instance, she didn't really cry a lot except when she was hungry or had a gas bubble. At this very moment, Molly was content to just listen to her daughter carry on. Presently, she rolled up against Bill and kissed the tip of his ear.

"Mmmm? Wazzat?" He mumbled. "Oh. Morning, Honey. Monique quiet?"

"A little. She's telling herself something, but I don't speak baby." Molly chuckled softly, her warm breath tickling her husband's ear. "I think she's working up to telling us she needs breakfast."

"Want me to feed her today?"

"No, I'll do it. Too much formula might make her have a sour stomach. You know what that produces, don't you?"

"Oh, yeah. That I do. I'll just get up and shower then. You provide breakfast and I'll cook some for us. Deal?"

"Deal." Molly patted Bill's butt and pushed him out of bed.

"Remember, we're due at Mama's house at two," she called towards his retreating back.

"I remember."

Christmas day at the Garnet's household was very pleasant. Their living room smelled lightly of pine because they always had a real tree and not one of those junky new plastic trees. Lily had arrived with her two children and they were greedily eyeing the tags on the gifts piled under the tree.

"You two just wait until we all get settled," called Suzette. "Your grandfather isn't here yet."

"Aw, *Grand-mÃ`re*, we want to get started. Can we just open one?"

"No. Not until your grandfather gets here." Said Lily.

They muttered and grumbled, but subsided.

Eventually, Alain entered the room and took his customary place in the large padded chair and put his feet up. The kids took that as a sign and began tearing into their first packages, tossing paper all over. The adults looked on in amusement.

Bill handed Suzette a wrapped package. "Here, Mama. This is for you."

She untied the ribbon and lifted the lid on the box to bring forth a new pepper grinder to replace the one that had broken a month ago. "Oh. Thank you both for this. I was really lost without my old grinder."

Wanderlust!

Alain was handed two gifts by Lili's children. They turned out to be a pair of fur-lined slippers - left from Æ mile and right from Martine. They were tickled when he immediately put them on and pronounced them "very warm".

The remainder of gifts were passed out with the assistance of Æ mile and Martine. Bill gave Molly two records of her favorite singer. She immediately put them on the stereo as background. The tag on Molly's present for Bill was signed by both her and Monique. "She had some help from me," Molly said with a chuckle. He unwrapped that rather large package to find a replacement attach-© case. His old one was getting rather threadbare from all the traveling he'd performed.

"Thank you both, Honey." He kissed her and then gently kissed Monique's forehead taking care not to wake her as she slept in her bassinet.

The rest of the day was spent lounging around the house, snacking on various goodies that Suzette and Denise had prepared. It seemed strange to Bill that Denise wasn't here today, but she had opted to be with Gerard's family this year. He and Molly thought that maybe she just might have found the right person.

[April 10, 1965]

[Montreau Chapel, Montreal, Canada - 1400 hours]

Denise never looked lovelier than she did standing next to her tall, soon-to-be husband, Gerard. They had been seeing each other exclusively now for many months and he finally asked Alain for her hand. Permission was given and now they stood together at the front of the church about to be married.

Molly was sniffing into a tissue, her mother likewise. Alain and Bill struggled manfully, but were failing. Alain gave in first and wiped a tear from his eye. "My family grows up," he said softly.

"That they do, Papa. That they do."

"I just wish they weren't moving so far away. Vancouver is much too far for us to go in one day. But, Gerard has such a wonderful job opportunity there. I hope they send many pictures."

It was over and the guests watched the ritual kiss and then applauded as they were introduced as husband and wife. Soon, they were leaving the chapel and getting into a limousine for their trip to the reception.

Bill and Molly left the reception a little earlier than the others because they had to get back to relieve the babysitter. Conditions at their apartment were calm as Monique was asleep. She hadn't had her evening feeding yet, so that would be demanded at any time. Bill paid the sitter while Molly got into her evening clothes and sat in her comfortable chair to await Monique.

Shortly, a cry rose from her crib and Bill picked her up and carried her to Molly. "I sure wish you'd let me take a picture of you feeding her. I think it's such a good picture."

"Perhaps, but it may come back to haunt her. You know we put all those pictures in the album."

"I know. Just teasing. I'll fix us a small drink. Brandy?"

"A very small one - with ice, please."

"Coming right up." Bill turned to make the drinks.

Wanderlust!

They chatted while Molly fed Monique, who fell asleep in mid-gulp. Molly wiped her face and tucked the blanket around her. Using Bill's outstretched hand she rose and put Monique in her crib. "I am really tired for some reason. How about we just go to bed and read a bit?"

"Sounds fine to me. I have a new book to start."

They embraced, kissed, and then went to bed.

[September 16, 1968]

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada]

Bill almost didn't get home from Germany for Monique's third birthday. He'd had to go through London and fog had settled down over the whole southern portion of England. By the time he finally landed in Montreal it was technically the sixteenth already; although just after midnight. He'd called Molly and told her not to pick him up but that he would just take a taxi.

Quietly, at one-thirty in the morning, Bill finally crept into their apartment. Wearily, he set his bags down and made a small drink. He sat on the couch and found he was able to relax once again after being tortured in a tiny coach seat for hours and hours. He put his head back and closed his eyes.

Molly woke him with a tender kiss on his forehead. His eyes opened. "Hi, Honey. Did I wake you?"

"No, not really. I wasn't really asleep yet. I was reading until about an hour ago. Monique was fussy and only calmed down two hours ago after I told her she'd have to be good for her party. She's such a wonderful child. Takes after her father."

Bill kissed her. "And a little of her mother also. How many kids are coming to the party?"

"Six. At least that's the latest tally. We invited eight. I think Sofia is a little sick and her mother thought it best not to let her come."

"Oh, sorry to hear that. Should we send a card?"

"We already have," she smiled. "I can sign your name just fine."

Bill patted her arm. "I just bet you can."

Molly relaxed in the crook of Bill's arm. "Seems a shame that this is almost your last trip. You do love them so."

"Yes, but being kicked upstairs offers a lot more pay. I will miss them though. Maybe we can take one by ourselves - with Monique, that is. Make it a vacation instead of a buying trip."

"I suppose we could. Paris perhaps? I'd love to go back there and finish our little adventure."

Bill smiled. "Yeah, so would I. The Hotel Muguet, wasn't it?"

"That's the one. I love that place. I felt so decadent, but at the same time thrilled to be with you. We had a great time." She turned to Bill and kissed him with fervor. "Oh, I love you so."

Wanderlust!

Later that day, they held Monique's birthday party and a great time was had by all. She managed to smear cake and icing all over her face, the table, her arms, and her mother before she gave up. She received a pull toy from Mark, whom she called her 'boyfriend', several nice dresses, and a big fuzzy rabbit whom she christened 'Daddy'. What prompted that name Bill had no idea.

"Maybe it's your ears," teased Molly.

"Oooh; that hurt." Bill grimaced.

Molly chuckled.

[September 16, 1980]

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada - morning]

Monique bounced into the kitchen dressed in her normal uniform of blue jeans and a woolen pullover top. Her hair was tied back into a pony tail under a wide blue satin band.

"Good morning, birthday girl." Molly said. "Sleep well?"

"Only a little sleep. I am too hyper thinking about my party tonight. It's going to be a gass."

"A what?"

"A gass. A totally cool evening."

"Oh, Monique. I do wish you would stop with that kind of talk. I know you can speak properly. I notice you don't use it around you father."

"I know. I'm just having some fun, Mama. Will Daddy remember to bring the cake home from the *Boulangerie*?" She asked.

"He'd better, or I'll never hear the end of it will I?"

"Nope." Monique tossed over her shoulder as she grabbed a roll and left the kitchen. "I'll never be sixteen again so this just has to be done right." Her voice trailed down the hall.

"You had better get ready for school, young lady. You have to be off in ten minutes."

"Yeah, Mama. I'll be ready." Monique called from her room.

* * *

'Mon Dieu, that girl get more Americanized every day.' Molly chuckled to herself. 'It's all her father's fault; and my sister and her college chums when they visit. Perhaps, some of it is my fault also - all those television shows from down south. I wonder what she sees in that awful Saturday Night Live stuff.'

* * *

Daddy Bill didn't forget the cake but he almost did. He remembered it just as he passed the bakery and had to go around the block again so he could stop. The baker, whom he'd known for many years appeared and

Wanderlust!

personally made sure it was safe in Bill's aging bus.

"The rest is up to you, my friend. Give my best to your lovely daughter."

"I will Gaston. *Au revoir*."

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" Gaston was definitely multi-lingual; he had to be in this neighborhood.

Bill parked the bus and carefully carried the cake up to their apartment. He tapped on the door with the toe of his shoe and Molly opened the door.

"Ah, there you are. You're late!"

"Just a little. It's hard to get out of Gaston's shop without chatting for a while. That man can talk birds out of trees."

"That he can. Monique! Your cake is here!"

Monique bounced out of her room and skidded to a stop against her father's chest. She kissed his cheek and gave him a hug. "Thank you, Papa. I was afraid you'd forgotten it."

"Of course I wouldn't forget. I left too early this morning so now I will wish you a very happy sixteenth birthday, Honey." He kissed her forehead.

She looked around for her mother. "Mama thinks that maybe I am too young to have my party without you two around. There will not be any boys here, just girls. We will not get into any trouble at all. Please talk to her."

Bill patted her hand. "I'll see what I can do."

Monique cracked a big smile and bounced back towards her room. "Thank you, Papa," faded in her wake.

Bill and Molly's evening was spent at a very nice restaurant they favored. Molly was a bit nervous and wanted to call home 'just to make sure', but Bill stopped her. "If we haven't taught her right from wrong by now, it's too late. She'll be fine. Enjoy your wine."

"You're right, of course, my love. It's just that this is the first time she's entertained without one of us being home. I hope she doesn't anger any neighbors."

"Oh, I don't think so. Her music may get a little loud, but remember that we already alerted everyone around our apartment. They'll keep a lid on it."

"Okay. I'll stop worrying." She sipped her wine. "Happy?"

"Ecstatic! Hard to believe we have a sixteen year old daughter, isn't it?"

"Definitely."

"And yet, look how young you are still."

"That kind of talk, *Monsieur* Stiles, will get you all kinds of privileges. It may even get you laid."

Wanderlust!

"Land sakes, Missus Stiles, how you talk." Bill said, fanning his face with his fingers.

They both cracked up.

Later, as they approached the apartment house, Molly remarked that at least the roof was still on. Bill looked up and agreed. They met one of their neighbors coming down the stairs with her refuse bag.

"Hello, Sonja. Did Monique's party disturb you?"

"Oh, no! It was quite wonderful to hear a houseful of girls for a change. Things have been rather quiet since the Luftbergers left." She chuckled.

Bill remembered the Luftbergers who used to live one floor up from them. At times it sounded as if they were teaching elephants to tap dance. Their floors had no rugs on them at all and the bare wood picked up the sound of every toy, plate, glass, dish, or other object their four kids dropped.

"You have a good evening, Sonja," said Bill, tossing her a brief salute.

"*Bonsoir.*"

"*Bonsoir.*"

Molly and Bill entered the apartment and looked around. Monique was curled up in a chair next to the stereo listening to one of her new albums that Bill had given her for her birthday. She was asleep.

Molly touched her daughter's shoulder gently. "Monique, Honey. It's time for bed."

She woke slowly and stretched. "Oh. I guess I drifted off." She hopped to her feet and hugged both her parents. "Thank you for letting me have my party. It was swell. They all loved the cake and punch."

Molly patted Monique on the cheek. "We're happy you are happy, *Mon petit Chou*. Now, off to bed with you."

"Goodnight Mama. Good night Papa."

"Sweet dreams," Bill called after her.

Molly turned to Bill and moved in very close. He could smell her hair. "Now, Sir. You give me ten minutes for a short bath and we'll see about that other matter."

"Ah! Your command is my wish, my love. It shall be done!" Bill said, thrusting a finger in the air.

Chapter 44: Wanderlust - Chapter 44

[January 7, 1981]

[Offices of AGG Imports, Montreal, Canada - 1400]

Bill's office intercom sounded a tone. When he glanced at the panel, he saw it was his father-in-law, Alain; the boss. "Yes, Papa?"

"Could you come in here for a moment, Bill? I would like to discuss something with you."

"Certainly." He rose, adjusted his cuffs, and walked across the hall to Alain's office and tapped on the door.

"Come in, come in."

Bill entered and was surprised to see quite a few of the office staff grouped around the walls; some standing, some sitting in chairs. All were looking on expectantly. "Yes?" He looked around quickly. "What is going on?"

Alain stood and rested his fingers on the desk before him. "Bill, you remember that before you married the boss's daughter there were chuckles from the group. I told you that I had high hopes you would decide to join our happy little family. Since that time, you have far exceeded my expectations both in sales for this company and personally. You have a fine daughter in Monique and she, in turn, has given me boundless joy as a granddaughter. For that, I thank you."

Bill started to say something, but Alain held up his hand. "You have become a Canadian citizen, which I know must have been a difficult choice. Now, it is time for me to make a difficult choice." He paused, head down, for a moment then raised it again. "As of this moment, I am naming you my successor and all that this entails. You will assume the title of General Manager of AGG Imports."

The attendees around the room took a breath in common; more of a gasp, really. He continued.

"At the end of the week I will vacate this office and you may move in when you wish. I will stop by from time to time just to keep my hand in, but for now I want everyone to know that you are the boss." He looked around expectantly. "I trust there are no objections?" He said with a smile.

Everyone clapped and moved forward to give Bill their congratulations. With tears in her eyes, Josette, Alain's long-standing secretary, kissed Bill's cheek. Someone ducked into the hall and rolled in a tray with three bottles of champagne on it and many glasses. Corks were popped and the wine poured. When everyone had a glass in hand, Alain toasted Bill and his new position.

Bill offered a return toast. "Alain - Papa - I think you from the bottom of my heart. I will do my very best to make this company grow as much as it has under your fine hand. *Salut!*"

Everyone echoed the toast and they drank.

Bill drained his glass and then spoke. "I thank everyone for their support. I know it will be very hard to replace our former boss. Everyone laughed. "But perhaps, in time, I can. For now, if there aren't too many pressing details to attend to I'd like everyone to take the rest of the day off. With pay, of course."

Wanderlust!

Light cheering from the crowd as they headed for their offices to clean up those pressing details.

Alain came over and laid his arm around Bill's shoulders. "You'll do fine, my boy. Just fine. Now, go home and tell Molly the good news."

"*Oui, Monsieur. J'ai Ã©couter et obÃ©ir!*" Alain patted his shoulder and went back to his desk - soon to be Bill's desk.

[February 12, 1981]

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada - 2312]

The phone rang loudly in the quiet apartment. Bill and Molly were in bed, but not yet asleep as they had waited for Monique to come home from a movie with friends. Bill got up and answered. It was Suzette and she sounded very distressed.

"Bill!" She said into the phone excitedly in French. "You must meet me at the hospital! It is Alain. He has had another stroke. They took him there just five minutes ago. Hurry!"

"Mama, slow down. Which hospital?"

"The one of Monique's birth. The very same. Please hurry."

"We will, Mama. We will."

"We will what?" Asked Molly, calling from the bedroom.

Bill rushed back. "You father has had another stroke. I'll get dressed and get the car, you wake Monique."

"At once!" Molly leapt out of bed and rushed into Monique's bedroom. Bill pulled on clothing and donned his warm coat. "Make sure you all wear warm coats. It is very cold outside." He called on his way out the door.

When Bill pulled to a stop, the girls rushed out and got in with him. The heater was going full blast but hadn't warmed up quite yet. Luckily, traffic was at a minimum and they made the trip to the hospital very quickly. Parking the car, Bill and the girls ran into the waiting room and crowded up to the desk.

They found that Alain had already been taken to Intensive Care and had doctor's working on him. Suzette, who had been waiting for Bill and his family, rushed over and hugged the three of them. "Oh, *Mon Dieu*, they tell me he has had a bad stroke. They will not me see him!" She wailed.

Bill took her face in his hands. "Mama, you need to be strong right now. They need all the room they can get around him. They will do their very best. You know they will. Please. Let's go over there and sit down to wait. They will tell us."

* * *

'Even now Bill takes charge.' Molly thought. 'He always knows what to do in any situation. This; this is the reason my father turned the company over to him. I wonder if my father knew something like this was to happen.'

* * *

Wanderlust!

Alain did seem to get a little better, but they held him in the hospital under close supervision. His right side was almost paralyzed and his speech was very slow and slurred. He could not walk without assistance and when members of his family came to visit they always eased him into a wheelchair and pushed him about the hospital. His favorite room was the glassed-in atrium on the roof where he could look out at the river traffic.

Monique knitted him a shoulder cover which he loved and wore it constantly. Suzette spent whole days sitting by his side reading, talking, or just holding his hand as he slept. She began to look wan and didn't eat well. Monique fixed her a small bed in her room so she wouldn't have so far to travel to visit her husband.

Bill could tell the old man treasured their visits - even Lili came over from Ottawa several times. Her children, now grown, came also. Whenever she could, Monique would spend time with her grandfather up on the roof reading to him.

Alain seemed to be recovering but then one afternoon ten days later, he looked up at Suzette, murmured an indistinct "*Je t'aime*", and closed his eyes. Before the running doctor's could get to the room, Alain had taken his last breath.

Suzette cried out and then collapsed back in the chair she was sitting in and began sobbing gently. Molly and Bill, who had been coming down the hall to visit, were halted by the doctors as they rushed into the room. One of them stood at the door and relayed what was happening inside back to them. It was of no use. Alain could not be resuscitated. It was just before noon.

The funeral was held three days later, on a Sunday afternoon. The small chapel was filled with people and flowers. The service was short, but very poignant. His immediate family, which had grown over time, were seated at one side. Choking back emotion, Bill gave a small eulogy. Monique rose and laid the shoulder scarf on the casket amid copious tears, not really wanting to leave her *Grand-père* for good. Molly went to her and held her in her arms as they walked back to their seats.

The minister gave a final blessing and it was over. Everyone who worked for him had showed up and passed by Suzette and her family to give their condolences. The newspaper reported that the train of cars to the cemetery was over forty vehicles long.

[February 23, 1981]

[*Avocat À la Cour* LaForge, Laval District, Montreal, Canada - 1000]

Alain's will was read following legal preliminaries in the Barrister's office. Bill was amazed to learn that Alain had left the entire business of AGG Imports to his son, none other than himself. Suzette smiled wanly over at him as various emotions flew through his mind. Molly took his hand and squeezed it - hard - to get his attention. The Barrister continued to detail Alain's personal and public holdings.

Both Bill and Molly were shocked to find that the apartment building they lived in had been quietly bought by Alain and his company. AGG Imports, with Bill at the helm, now owned the building in which the three of them lived. Molly cried quietly into a tissue as the Barrister continued.

Alain's immediate family had been taken care of, so now it was time for the rest of the clan. Lili's children were given sums of money with the hope that they would apply it to their college educations. The same went for Monique who cried to herself between Bill and Molly. The house in which Alain and Suzette had lived for so many years was already paid off so the title was simply changed to reflect Suzette's ownership.

[April 20, 1981]

Wanderlust!

[412 Place Sherwood #5, Montreal, Canada]

Molly was still feeling the effects of her father passing away, but was slowly getting better. The immediate pain had faded and now all that was left was a feeling of loss. She would seem happy until something reminded her of Alain and then she would weep quietly to herself. Bill tried to think of a way to help her.

Today, when he returned from the office, he was all smiles. He'd been contacted by a very large French firm that wished to open a market in North America. Their Paris supply department had suggested AGG Imports so they had called. The firm manufactured or handled hundreds of consumables in France and surrounding countries and was a perfect supplier for Bill's company outlets. They had called and wanted to hold a high-level conference. Bill agreed to attend the meeting in three days in Paris.

"Molly!" He called as he came through the door. "You're not going to believe the day I've had. Just wait until you hear."

Molly came in from the kitchen. "What? A tough day?"

"No. Quite the opposite." He told her about the conference call and what had resulted from it. Bill's infectious attitude swept over Molly and as soon as he told her she was invited also, she was mentally planning what she would pack.

Monique came out of her room and they both scurried about laying clothes on the spare bed for later transfer to her luggage. Bill came in and watched them.

"Remember our first trip to Paris, Honey? I can't believe we carried as little as we did and managed to look presentable. All we had between us was that beat up backpack of mine and your old hardboard suitcase."

Molly stopped and cupped her hand under Bill's chin. "Yes, I remember. I think we did pretty well considering. I have a hard time believing I was ever that young."

Bill kissed her. "You'll always be that timid girl to me."

"You want me to leave for a moment?" Asked Monique with a grin.

"No, Honey. Just reminiscing. Those certainly were interesting times." Said Molly with a sigh. "Will we need to make hotel reservations?"

"Nope. I've already instructed our travel department to make them for us. Unfortunately, the Hotel Muguet is not there any more, or it is under new management, because we can't get a phone number for it. I'm sure they will find us a good place. I told them it had to have a good dining room because we would be dining in a lot." He wiggled his eyebrows and Molly punched him playfully on the arm.

"Oh, go on now. Start supper or something."

[April 24, 1981]

[Hotel Ares Eiffel - Paris, France - late afternoon]

Molly and Bill arrived very tired. The booking desk staff were very friendly and confirmed that there would be a car from Franco-Fabrique in the morning at ten. A smartly dressed page took their bags and directed them to their room on the top floor.

Wanderlust!

Intrigued by the name, Molly was unprepared for the view out their window. They were quite a bit closer to the Eiffel Tower than they had been before and to see it at almost arm's length was thrilling. After tipping the page, Bill came up behind her, tucked his arms around her waist, and nuzzled her ear.

"I told them to make sure we had a view, but this is overwhelming. I wonder if they still light it up at night."

Molly turned to look up at him. "I should imagine so." She turned fully and they hugged. "Look how far we have come since we first met. It just doesn't seem possible. Not at all."

"I surely doesn't. Are you hungry at all?"

"Famished. That snack on the plane was not very good. I hardly ate at all."

"I agree. How about we see if the room service works."

"Room service! Won't that be expensive?"

"Poof!" Bill said explosively, lifting his fingers into the air in the French manner. "It is not to worry. We are on an expense account. After all, I am the boss."

Molly giggled and kissed him again. "I love you, you maniac."

Unfettered by any weekend commitments, Molly and Bill spent a lot of time traveling the Metro. They popped up out of the ground like gophers, walked, took many pictures, and then went back down underground. They visited areas that they had seen on their last trip. Sadly, the Hotel Muguet had, in fact, been turned into a large apartment house. They asked about, but nobody seemed to know where a couple of their bistros went.

Saturday evening found them attending the evening show at Moulin Rouge. It was horribly expensive, crowded, and smoky, but the entertainment was very good. Bill remarked that if the girls had worn those costumes back during their first visit to Paris, they'd have been arrested. Molly concurred.

Chestnut vendors were still present in Luxembourg Park so they bought a packet each and sat on a bench eating them. They had decided to converse totally in French, which Bill was now adept in, so they fit right in with everyone else.

On Sunday they made a nostalgic visit to Gare du Nord and sat in the great concourse and listened to the chatter of hundreds of travelers. Molly grew wistful at the sight of a very young couple obviously on their honeymoon - or very shortly after it - as they walked with their arms around each other and kissing at almost every step. Bill reached for Molly's hand and held it; squeezed it.

Then, the weekend was over. They went to bed that night fairly early and made slow, deliberate, and wonderful love.

[April 27, 1981]

[Headquarters Franco Fabrique, Paris, France - 0900]

Bill strode into the conference room precisely at the appointed time. He was met by a man, Lawrence Marke, and a woman named Juno Trillier. He had talked with Juno on the telephone and it was pleasant to fit a face to the voice. She was in her fifties, well dressed, and all smiles. *Monsieur* Marke ("call me 'Larry'") was

Wanderlust!

somewhat younger with a full beard and small, rimless glasses. He seemed very nervous.

The meeting originally started out in English, but once it was ascertained that Bill spoke excellent French, they continued in that language. This first day was to be used to establish just what it was that AGG Imports could assimilate into their inventory. F.F. had an amazing amount of goods that they handled and Bill was very impressed with their expertise. In a way, they were simply a much larger version of AGG Imports. He tactfully refrained from making that comparison out loud.

Bill was taken on an auto tour of three large warehouses to view how their automated systems dealt with the large amount of goods. This also impressed him as his firm was still doing it with man power and smaller trucks. At the size of his firm, it wouldn't have paid to automate things. As he made the rounds, he added items to a notebook he kept in his suitcoat pocket. He would arrive at the hotel that afternoon with four pages filled with neat handwriting.

That evening, Molly and Bill went out for dinner and just walked until they found an agreeable little restaurant called *La Blanche Hermine* (The White Ermine). The food was terrific, and the clientele very vocal. Soon both Bill and Molly were joining in their sing-alongs accompanied by an accordion and a violin. Bill was amazed at how well those two instruments sounded together considering their disparate musical origins. They didn't leave until after midnight. They caught a ride with a taxi owner on his way home. It was a wild ride, but entirely too much fun to ignore. They tumbled into bed after making sure of a wakeup call at eight-thirty.

The next day Bill spent wholly discussing finances. They wangled a little on pricing, but eventually reached an accord on quantities of the initial shipment and how much would follow afterwards. Bill thought he'd made a pretty good deal. He'd paid a bit more than he really wanted, but he was sure his markup would give them a decent profit margin. They agreed to meet in the afternoon of the third day for formal contract signing.

Bill was offered a car back to the hotel which he took. He could have taken the Metro, but as long as they were offering, he was accepting. When he arrived at the hotel, Molly was out so he simply waited and read a newspaper. As he read, he reflected that it wasn't too long ago that he would have thrown up his hands after trying to read French. Now he was thinking in it. A true gauge of how well you've immersed yourself in any language. He still could think in German.

That thought, triggered a desire to find a German spot to eat that night. He called down to the desk and was able to locate several in the general area. He took down the phone numbers and began calling them. He found one place that had a decent time of appointment so he made the reservation. The desk assured him that it was only a short taxi ride away.

When Molly came home, she was carrying several long packages on hangers. She had been clothes shopping. Bill told her of their reservation at the grill in the *Hotel Sofitel Paris Le Faubourg*. He added that it served German food.

"I might have known," laughed Molly. "It was inevitable that you would develop a craving for German food. But, it sounds good to me so I will take a nice bath and get ready." Bill perked up. "And, no, you cannot 'help' me." She smiled at him.

He kicked the carpet with his toe and said in his best western accent: "Wal, shoot, ma'am. You never let me have no fun any more."

She moved close and kissed him gently on the lips. "This will have to do, my love," and then vanished into the bathroom.

Wanderlust!

Their meal was delicious but the taxi ride back to the hotel was, to say the least, unnerving. Bill remarked he must be related to the cab driver they'd had before. Molly chuckled as she held on to the leather strap over the door as they screeched around yet another corner. At least with this driver, they were able to converse with him; not that it mattered - he wouldn't slow down.

Finally, they roared up to the front of the hotel and screamed to a stop. Bill handed the guy some folded bills and he ripped off a patch leaving. Bill idly wondered how long his cabs lasted.

Altogether too soon, their time in Paris came to an end. They packed up, adding a new suitcase to hold Molly's purchases, and were driven to the airport. All in all, Bill thought, he'd made a pretty good deal with these people. All that remained now was to wait for the first shipment and get it out to his stores in time for the spring bargain hunters to descend.

Monique was totally in love with the blue French outfit Molly had purchased for her. She wore it two days later to a spring dance hosted by the university. It was an immediate hit with all her friends, especially when they found out it was genuine French, with a Paris label.

Chapter 45: Wanderlust - Chapter 45

[September 23, 1983]

[Gare Centrale, Montreal, Canada - 0950]

The young woman stood uncertainly on the platform waiting for the porter with her bags to catch up to her now that she had found the correct carriage. The attendant stepped down from the end vestibule, looked at her tickets, and smiled, assuring her she had arrived at the correct car.

She looked relieved and once the porter had handed her bags to the attendant she stepped aboard. This would be only her second train trip. The first, several years ago, was only to visit her Aunt in Ottawa and didn't last very long. But this one! She was going to go completely across the entire country to Vancouver and stay with her other Aunt. Aunt Denise and Uncle Gerard had invited her as a special gift on her graduation from school. She was going to spend two weeks with them.

She laid out her traveling toilet articles in the tiny WC off her compartment. Reaching up with a small brush, she touched up her dark gold locks, then added just a touch more lipstick. Blinking her blue eyes, she saw she wouldn't need more eyeliner. Glancing at her watch she noted that they were nearing their ten oh-seven departure time. Restless, she left the compartment again and stood in the passageway looking out the large picture window as the last passengers hurried to board.

She was still looking idly out the window when the train gave a lurch. She felt herself falling but was prevented from hitting the carpeting by a strong arm around her waist.

"Careful there, Miss. You could have fallen and hurt yourself." A very deep, resonant male voice said, practically in her ear. She started, and then turned to look at her savior.

"Oh! I'm sorry. I should have been ready for that. Um, you can let go of me now. I have my feet under me." She said with a smile.

"Sorry. Just making sure. My name is David. David Carnaby. You areâ!"

"Monique Stiles." They shook hands. He held hers much longer than necessary.

* * *

'He has dark eyes; very dark. And a very nice smile. He smells good too. I wonder how far he is traveling.'

* * *

"Are you traveling all the way to Vancouver?" Monique asked.

"Certainly am. I live in Montreal, but the family is in Vancouver. Just a short visit I'm afraid. You?"

"Visiting my Aunt and Uncle. My parents gave me this trip as a graduation present. I've never really been on a train before."

"I take them at least twice a year to visit the family." He pointed to the next compartment. "I'm right over there. Let me know if I can help with anything. Just remember that while you're walking be ready to grab

Wanderlust!

something if the car jumps around a bit. Will I see you later perhaps, Monique Stiles?"

"Perhaps. It is a long way to Vancouver, isn't it?"

Monique closed the door to her compartment and leaned back against it. She sighed once, then once more with a small smile on her lips.

* * *

I know the story by heart now. I've heard it so many times as a bedtime story from my mother. I wonder if the sink is fastened downâ ' "

* * *

La Fin

Wanderlust!

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